



Bob Dylan’s song “Times are a Changing” keeps running in my ears. Maybe it’s because we have been sheltering in place for two months, keeping our teams engaged, and preparing to open our doors for business - yes, these times are a changing. I don’t think we will ever get “back to normal” - so let’s proactively prepare for a series of “new normals” as we open up the country in waves.

In the meantime, please stay safe,
Kristin

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41 WAYS TO ENGAGE YOUR TEAM DURING A VIRTUAL MEETING

Virtual meetings are all the rage during this COVID-crisis. Yet many of them are one-way communications with little interaction from the team. As leaders, we often rely on one or two techniques to keep the virtual team engaged, however, there are myriad ways to keep the conversation moving. Here is a list of ways that you can engage your team during a virtual meeting:

Send the signal that this is going to be an engaging meeting:

- 1) As team members come in, start talking! Ask them how their day is going, what they did over the weekend. When a meeting starts out with awkward silence, it stays pretty silent!
- 2) Start with an icebreaker – a quick, light question or activity that engages everyone.

At any time during the meeting, you can:

- 3) Take a formal [poll](#) (using the polling feature in the system) to baseline key information
- 4) Take an informal poll using a literal raising of hands (if you can see everyone)
- 5) Take an informal poll by using the “raise hand” feature in the system
- 6) Take a poll using [external software/app](#) and display the information in a [word cloud](#)
- 7) Ask a provocative question
- 8) Ask a polarizing question
- 9) Ask them to comment using one breath!
- 10) Ask them to comment in the chat box
- 11) Ask them to comment on what they see in the chat box
- 12) Ask them to share the themes they have heard during the discussion

- 13) Share a funny and engaging picture
- 14) Share two funny and engaging pictures that compare and contrast
- 15) Share a funny and engaging [video](#)
- 16) Share a funny and engaging cartoon
- 17) Call on a person to answer a question
- 18) Call on a person to comment on what has been said
- 19) Call a “[Lightning Round](#)” where each person has to quickly and concisely comment
- 20) Call a “[Rapid Fire Round](#)” where each person has to add to create a list
- 21) Call a “Check-In” to gauge how everyone is feeling/doing on the topic
- 22) Call on a person and ask them to “lob” the question to the next person
- 23) Play a game such as Bingo, [Would You Rather](#), etc.
- 24) Pose a statement and ask if it is true or false (fact or fiction)
- 25) Pose a statement and ask if they [agree/disagree](#)
- 26) Clap (or do something) if someone says a designated word
- 27) If you have more than five people, send to a [breakout room](#) to discuss
- 28) Prioritize a list using a poll
- 29) Prioritize a list using annotations
- 30) Crowd source a list using external software/app
- 31) Inject a bit of fun and humor to the mix
- 32) Share the leadership role
- 33) Assign each person a topic/responsibility on the agenda
- 34) Assign someone to be the timekeeper
- 35) Assign someone to be the “recorder” and keep track of all comments
- 36) Assign someone to be the “Yoda” – to keep the team focused and on track

At the end of the meeting:

- 37) Have each person share their key takeaways/impressions of the meeting
- 38) Have each person share their action items and due dates
- 39) Have each person “check out” on how they are doing/feeling about the meeting
- 40) Have each person share one thing they liked about the meeting
- 41) Have each person share one thing they would do differently next time!

This is just a partial list....what else do you do to engage your teams virtually?

DON'T FORGET THE VIRTUAL AUDIENCE DURING A HYBRID PANEL DISCUSSION

With all this talk about “opening up” the country, I have to believe that people will eventually start coming together – in small groups live-streamed out to the larger world. Many meeting professionals call this the “hybrid” meeting.

The “hybrid panel” has a live, face-to-face (F2F) element as well as a virtual element where the F2F panel is live-streamed to geographically dispersed locations. The audience may be able to participate remotely or watch via a replay. You may also live-stream a “[remote panelist](#)” to join the panel on the stage (which technically, isn't a hybrid panel, but is often lumped into the same category).

It's downright depressing to see a “hybrid panel” exclude (or forget about) the audience. I get it. It's easier to focus on the discussion in front of you; whereas, moderating a lively panel discussion onsite *and* online is *harder*.

As a panel moderator, you have to intentionally break the “fourth wall” to reach out to the audience on a periodic basis.

Here are some ideas to make it easier on you and to help your virtual audience feel more included:

- Have a two-way livestream. Not only can your virtual participants see the panel, but

the panel needs to see who is watching virtually (or at least a representative sample). If you have [confidence monitors](#), project the audience stream to the monitors in the front of the room. That way, you don't forget about your virtual audience!

- In your opening remarks, look directly at the camera and welcome the virtual audience and tell them how they will be encouraged to participate.
- Shift gears periodically and create specific opportunities to include the F2F and virtual audiences.
- Personalize the Q&A by not only reading the question but saying the name of the person who submitted the question. "Joe in Scottsdale, AZ has a question about XYZ. [Looking into the camera], Hi Joe! Glad you're with us today! Who wants to answer the question?" or you can suggest a panelist answer the question.

Simply because the task of moderating a hybrid panel is so difficult, I highly recommend you have a technologist to control all aspects of the digital platform and an ombudsman to work the virtual crowd. (For smaller digital events, this may be the same person). The [ombudsman](#) is ideally situated to:

- Welcome the virtual attendees into the room and encourage them to start "chatting" in the chat box. They can even strike up an audible conversation, depending on the number of people in the virtual audience.
- Stimulate discussion in the chat box by capturing key ideas or asking probing questions.
- Check the pulse of the virtual room by [taking a poll](#) (either pre-set or impromptu).
- Send the best/most asked questions asked in the virtual room to the moderator to ask the panel.
- Open up the audio/video for a virtual audience member to ask the panel a question.
- Virtually "cue" the next person that they will be unmuted and can ask the panel a question.
- Clarify a statement or anything that did not come across well from the F2F into the virtual world.
- Mine the question/chatbox for additional questions and ideas to extend the conversation beyond the life of the panel.
- If there isn't a technologist, make sure the technology is working!

Please don't forget about the virtual audience when moderating a hybrid panel discussion!

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: THANK YOU FOR BEING LATE

A while ago, someone recommended Thomas Friedman's [Thank You for Being Late](#) as a "wide-ranging study of the changing world and the opportunities to respond to potential threats by harnessing community, collaboration, and technology." I liked his book, [The World is Flat](#), so I put it in my Amazon shopping cart – a virtual bookshelf just waiting for the right moment to pluck it from "saved for later" into my hot little hands.

Enter the coronavirus, and I'm thinking this might be an interesting book to read to put this new event in perspective while providing context and flavor for how we got to this point. Keep in mind, it was written in 2016, so there is no direct discussion of the COVID, SARS, or other pathogens.

The premise of the book is that the modern world is experiencing a host of "accelerations" (computing power, economic globalization, and climate change are the primary drivers, but there are others). These things are changing at an ever-faster pace, and those things are now interacting with each other to cause further acceleration.

The first part of the book details the acceleration in technology, globalization, and climate change that has not only caused disruption (when a new method makes an old method obsolete) but also dislocation (when things change so quickly society is unable to adapt). He dissects many of the changes and trends that have occurred in the last decade or two as it has shaped our workplace, politics, ethics, geopolitics, community, and environment.

I found it interesting to read as you can feel the pace of change accelerating (exploding into a supernova of knowledge that is feeding off itself!) and can extrapolate future possibilities and opportunities!

The back half of the book isn't as cogent as the first half. BUT I did find it interesting that he says on page 342:

"We have never before stood at this moral fork in the road – where one of us could kill all of us and all of us could fix everything if we really decided to do so."

How true in this coronavirus age.

He opines that we need trust and collaboration to help meet these challenges. He then details how the needed collaborative behaviors are non-existent, having started to break down during Reagan's presidency up to the "Trump revolution" (circa 2016). Wonder what Friedman would say to our current political climate where everything is politicized?

At the end, he shares an unbridled optimistic view of the world, based on his hometown reminiscing of St. Louis Park, Minnesota where evidently they did trust and collaborate. In the age of COVID, I see outposts of this collaboration, and perhaps this will be a turning point for us all.