



With employees and team members working both in the office and remotely, it's more important now than ever to keep them connected. How will you replicate those "water cooler conversations" online? How will you lead your team to communicate and collaborate efficiently? This month's articles can help you navigate this series of "new normals."

Kristin

IN THIS MONTH'S **ISSUE**

- ◆ [Create a "Virtual Networking Café" to Facilitate Connection](#)
- ◆ [Sample Script for a Virtual Panel Discussion](#)
- ◆ [From the Bookshelf: The Motive: Why So Many Leaders Abdicate Their Most Important Responsibilities](#)
- ◆ [Contact Kristin](#)

CREATE A "VIRTUAL NETWORKING CAFÉ" TO FACILITATE CONNECTION

Yes, meetings are about informing, sharing, persuading, collaborating, planning...and connecting with each other! It's not only about the work that needs to be done, but "the who" is doing the work together. Learning together. Getting to know each other.

Depending on the size of your team, meeting, conference, or convention, you need to provide the time and space for the participants to connect – even in the **virtual environment**. Last week, we focused on the importance of [icebreakers](#) to get your meeting started and the elements of a great icebreaker for F2F *and* virtual meetings. Our focus this week is about having a "virtual networking cafe" to replicate the random meetups you would experience at long meetings and conferences.

The Virtual Networking Café. At the onset of the meeting, I like to mention the fact that we are going to have a "networking cafe" that occurs in three places:

1. The **Main Meeting Room**. Use the chatbox where you can chat with all, or privately with one person (depending on your platform functionality).
2. **Breakout rooms** where we will split people up (either randomly or by pre-selected topics) to discuss a topic in smaller groups
3. **One-on-one text messaging**. A digital roster of attendees and the best (and most immediate way to connect with them during this conference) has been provided to all of you to reach out to someone you don't know...yet, who said something interesting in the chatbox, or just looks interesting to connect with!

Virtual Networking Café Ground Rules

- We'll be opening the "doors" to the Main Session Meeting Room early so you can come

in and get comfortable. We'll have an icebreaker question, so start chatting in the chatbox!

- Please share your “lightbulb moments” where you exclaim, “Oh!” or sigh with a deep “Ahhhh,” or want to make a comment. It’s okay and encouraged to use the chatbox to create connection. Find it distracting? That’s okay, you don’t have to play.
- See something interesting in the chatbox? Go ahead and comment back to “everyone” or chat privately with that person. Or use your roster to reach out and connect real-time with that person via email or text.
- After each speaker, you’ll be sent to a breakout room to discuss what you heard – Or we’ll keep the room/chatbox open for as long as there are people chatting.
- If you don’t like your breakout room or no one shows up, come back to the main room and you can stay there and chat or be assigned to another breakout room.

Here are some other ideas to facilitate connections with your participants:

- **The Virtual Snack Box.** Before the meeting, send each attendee a package with welcome info, snacks, and a drink. The participants will open it at the first networking event!
- **Be Networky.** Create a [Facebook Live](#) Private Group or [Google Doc](#) spreadsheet where each participant is encouraged to share how they can be a resource to others. Encourage the participants to identify/reach out to each other to set up a 1 minute to a 1:30 discussion MAX (you don’t want to abuse the relationship!)
- **Buddy Up.** Match each new participant with a veteran. Give each others’ names and contact information. Encourage them to connect BEFORE the event starts to answer three questions for each other:
 1. What do you hope to learn/gain as a result of attending this event?
 2. What would you be doing if you weren’t attending this event?
 3. How can we help each other be successful during this event?
- **The Virtual Great Graze.** Networking often involves food, grazing from one food station to another. Why not “graze” getting to know each other? Everyone meets in the Main Meeting Room. The host gives them a question to answer (fun or topical) and then sends everyone to random breakout rooms (5-6 to a room) to chat/graze for 5-6 minutes. The host then brings them back to the Main Meeting Room (debrief is optional). I like to keep it moving so I give the main group another question, assign them randomly to a room, bring ‘em back.....Do this for 30 minutes.
- **Chat with the Speaker.** Everyone meets in the Main Meeting Room to hear the main speaker/segment. Once the speaker/Q&A/segment is done, keep the chatbox open to allow the participants to continue to discuss the topic. OR send the participants to random [breakout rooms](#) to discuss for 30 minutes.
- **Virtual Lunch Tables.** A senior member of the community is placed in a breakout room and participants are randomly assigned to chat/ask questions of the venerable veteran.
- **Birds of a Feather.** There is a saying: “Birds of a feather flock together.” People do too! Facilitate the ability of like-minded people to get together to chat. Identify some similar attributes (industry/sector, functional titles, size of company, number of employees, etc. – but beware of any conflicts of interest between the participants). Have them meet in the Main Meeting Room and then send them to pre-assigned designated breakout rooms for 30 minutes. These small groups of people will quickly become colleagues! Debrief is optional.
- **Topic Meet Up.** Similar to “Birds of a Feather,” create topics that the participants would be interested to discuss. Send to random breakout rooms (easiest) OR have them self-select ahead of time and then pre-assign them to designated breakout

rooms. (I like to use a “portal page” with a visual online gallery of the topics with hyperlinks to each room.)

- **Modified Open Space.** Similar to the Topic Meet Up, everyone meets in the Main Meeting Room where there are a specific number of potential topics that have been identified (6 is a good number!). Participants identify which topic/room they want to go to and the host moves them into that breakout room. When the room hits 8 people, the host opens up a new room for that designated topic.
- **Chat Roulette.** All participants in the Main Meeting Room are randomly assigned a breakout room of only 2-4 people for 2-4 minutes.
- **Awards.** Always fun to have some awards....same holds true in the virtual world. Electronic gift card for the person with the best Zoom virtual background? Cutest pet? Best looking shoes?

The possibilities are endless! All it takes is a bit of creativity and intentionality to create connections during your meetings!

SAMPLE SCRIPT FOR A VIRTUAL PANEL DISCUSSION

I recently moderated a one-hour virtual panel about the future of meetings using Zoom that went exactly according to plan (which is extremely rare!). In preparation, I worked with the meeting organizer to clarify the “starting conditions” and to talk through potential format ideas. Once we settled on our scheme, I sent a “run of show” to the meeting organizer for approval. Once conceptually approved, I then fleshed out more details for the host and panelists so they could understand the flow and prepare appropriately.

Hopefully, you can gain some insight into this panel flow (which has been “sanitized” for a more general application vs. sanitized for the coronavirus!):

Host: Name

Moderator: Kristin Arnold

Technician: Name

Panelists:

- Panelist A
- Panelist B
- Panelist C
- Panelist D

The Objectives

- Describe how strategic thinking will improve future outcomes.
- List ways future face-to-face meetings could be modified to adhere to potential social distancing protocols.
- List opportunities for planners and suppliers to leverage each other’s expertise for the benefit of all future face-to-face meetings.

Panel Flow:

Ten minutes to go: As participants log on, Host and Panel Moderator are chatting about the question in the chatbox: “In 20 words or less, share your assumptions (you believe it is true or certain to happen) about the [topic].” Panelists are encouraged to read these comments and be able to react.

0:00 Host – Welcome

- Why this panel? Why now?
- Quickly introduce panelists
- Introduce Kristin

0:05 Moderator – Review Agenda/Process

- Provide overview of the panel and encourage questions (and comments!) in the

chatbox. The conversation in the backchannel may be just as interesting as what is said on the panel

- Take a poll via Zoom – a question with four options
- Ask for panelist reactions/affirmations in the chatbox
- Summarize into a few key messages

0:15 SEGMENT ONE – The “What If” Game

- Moderator to identify a panelist, then provide a question that starts with “What If?” Panelist will provide a short response (no more than a paragraph) about what they “could” do, and selects another panelist to pick up the thread. The new panelist can say “and” or “or”:
 - When the panelist says “and,” they ADD to the original idea (please do not say “AND” and then repeat what has already been said. ONLY say “AND” when you have something to ADD to the original idea).
 - When the panelist says “OR,” they provide a different perspective.
 - Examples of “What If” questions are (but not limited to):
 - What if your venue can’t accommodate your meeting specs under new social distancing protocols? What could you do?
 - What if your guests are unwilling to participate in a modified meeting experience? What could you do?
 - What if you move to a virtual meeting, but your speakers are not tech-savvy? What could you do?
 - What if your venue won’t release you from your contractual obligations? What could you do?
 - What if you can’t have an opening reception? What could you do?
 - What if your meeting requires hands-on learning, such as a wet lab? What could you do?
 - Attendees: please add your ideas to the chatbox! We’ll be collecting ALL our ideas and sending them out post-panel.

0:30 SEGMENT TWO – Rapid-Fire Session

- Brainstorming session about [topic]. We’re going to brainstorm different ways future F2F meetings could be modified to adhere to potential social distancing protocols (no evaluation here, just making a list of possibilities!). Attendees: add to the list in the chatbox! Panelists: Come PREPARED. We will use the following order, so you’ll pop off your answer after the person listed above you:
 - Panelist First name
 - Panelist First name
 - Panelist First name
 - Panelist First name

0:45 SEGMENT THREE – DISCUSSION

- Let’s talk about leveraging resources and ideas. Unique times call for unique solutions. (Come prepared to share your ideas.)
- Attendees: Add your ideas to the chatbox!
- Discuss ways to leverage resources and ideas
- Check in with Host regarding ideas in the chatbox
- Summarize ideas

0:55 SEGMENT FOUR – Final Question to All Panelists

- What’s the one thing we should all keep in mind as F2F meetings return as must-attend events? (Please have several ideas prepared as we want to be additive and not repetitive in our answers!) Panelist identifies who should answer next until all have answered.

0:59 HOST – Thank you and wrap up

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: THE MOTIVE: WHY SO MANY LEADERS ABDICATE THEIR MOST IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITIES

I recently heard Patrick Lencioni give a speech about his latest book: [*The Motive: Why So Many Leaders Abdicate Their Most Important Responsibilities*](#) and immediately bought the book! It is, by far, his shortest book with the main premise centered around the “why” one chooses to be a leader.

Is it for the glory, prestige, or “rewards” for achieving the pinnacle of success OR is it for the responsibility of leading a successful organization? Those “reward-centered leaders” believe they can pick and choose what they want to do, abdicating five core responsibilities that cannot be delegated:

1. **Developing the leadership team.** Often delegated to HR or an external consultant, the leader has to spend time developing their team members’ interpersonal dynamics and collective behaviors.
2. **Managing subordinates.** We are not talking about micromanaging highly paid executives! The leader needs to set the general direction of the work ensuring that it is aligned with and understood by their peers and stays informed enough to identify potential obstacles and problems as early as possible. And the leader needs to make sure their subordinates one level below are managing their people too.
3. **Having difficult and uncomfortable conversations.** While having difficult conversations is certainly one part of managing a team and subordinates, the leader must confront difficult, awkward issues and behaviors quickly and with clarity, charity, and resolve. Left unaddressed, these issues eventually degrade the organization’s performance.
4. **Running great team meetings.** Meetings are one of the most unpopular and underestimated activities in business. Yet this is where leaders make critical decisions and set the tone for all of the meetings within the organization. If team meetings are boring and a chore to get through, the fault rests squarely on the leaders’ lap!
5. **Communicating constantly** and repetitively to employees. Just because a leader has expressed themselves once or twice, doesn’t mean that people heard it or understand it. Employees have to hear a consistent message at least seven times before they believe executives are serious about it. Leaders need to have a consistent drumbeat – and if they get bored saying the same thing, they need to get creative in their messaging.

These five areas are not a list of the key responsibilities of the leader of an organization (that would be in his book, [*The Advantage*](#)), yet they are good reminders of specific situations and responsibilities that leaders avoid all too often.

What I found most compelling in Lencioni’s speech was his speculation on leading in the post-COVID world is that these five areas are even MORE important. He said,

“Leadership and the way we run our organizations and lead and manage our people has changed in a way that I don’t think it will ever go back. CEOs have become far more human – exceedingly human – in the way they manage their people, compared to the way they did four months ago. Just having to deal with people in their homes and knowing that people are going through difficult things medically or interpersonally, or in their families and the uncertainty. I think any good CEO will look back and say, ‘Well, I have never cared more and known more

about my direct reports and other people in the organization. And I've never poured myself into this...the people because they need it.' And there's not really a good reason not to do that.

Here's the thing: As things open up again and as our businesses get back going...We are not going to go back to the old way of leading and managing people in relationships. Just don't go backward in intimacy. It's like you don't break up with somebody in a relationship... So if we've gotten to know our people and they are more human, and we are more interpersonally connected, we are not going to go back to the old way of managing. Good employees are not going to stand for that and neither should you.

I think there's going to be a new normal where people say, 'If I'm going to work there, I'm going to work for people that care about me and that I care about and we are going to be completely human at work.' I think that we will look back in 30 years and say, 'That's when business – when organizational life – became more human, and it pivoted and it didn't go back.'

Okay, so it's a competitive advantage to be a CEO and to create a culture where you're actually pouring into your people, even more than you did before. And the good news is you're going to get more commitment from them. More loyalty, more productivity, more innovation. This has been the period of the greatest innovation in my company's 24 years – in these last four months.

But it's not happened without accident. We have been more frank with each other and more involved in one another's lives and more completely immersed personally. And that's led to great results....It's time to take on this new level of intense responsibility."

I couldn't agree more, Patrick, and I appreciate your reminders on my motive to lead others!