



As the subtitle on this month's book cover says, "Tiny changes, remarkable results." It's all about the details! As we navigate this volatile, uncertain world, we still need to slow down and pay attention to the small things that make a big impact. For instance, did you notice your team member looking a little gloomy lately? Did you think about how you will handle those few minutes your virtual audience lingers in the "room" before the meeting starts? This month's articles can help you change the subtle behaviors that will make a difference to your team.

Kristin

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FACILITATORS: SHARE HOW BEST TO USE THE CHATBOX

One measure of audience engagement in a virtual meeting is the use of the chatbox. One of my clients said, "I want to see the chatbox blow up [with tons of comments]!" And while that might be a laudable goal, it's not always appropriate.

As a facilitator, I like to keep the chatbox functionality "on" in case the participants want to chat. However,

Commenting in chatboxes may not be a fit in these situations:

- **Topic.** Some topics are so somber that a live chat might not be a great place to comment.
- **Audience.** Some audiences are not "chatters." For example, executives (as a general rule) are not big contributors to the chatbox – for various reasons. So don't expect them to comment!
- **Culture.** Perhaps the culture of the organization doesn't encourage freewheeling comments – even in the face-to-face world!
- **Event.** Some events are just more "proper" than others and the chatbox stays empty.

Almost all digital platforms **HAVE** a chatbox. The question is **HOW** the participants should use the chatbox.

In your introductory remarks including comments about the platform, either encourage or discourage the use of the chatbox **AND** give a little guidance as to *how to use the chatbox*. Here is what I typically say:

"The chatbox is a perfect place to capture key takeaways, insights, or additional

information you can add to the conversation. Please use it to benefit all of the participants. If there is something you want to say to a specific person, please direct your chat to that person. If you want to mention a participant, just use the @ sign followed by the starting few characters of the person you want to mention. If you have a question you'd like to ask, either put it in the question box OR put 'QUESTION' in capital letters before your question, so I'll be able to see it and quickly find it in the chatbox."

I then like to add this comment:

"PLEASE remember that for some, the chatbox can be very distracting. If you get distracted, just close your chatbox. Yet some of us suffer from "fear of missing out" (FOMO) where we feel compelled to keep the chatbox open and read ALL the comments – *just in case* we have a need to know. So for the benefit of others, please use the chatbox constructively and limit the seemingly random thoughts, comments, and shout outs that do not contribute to the overall conversation."

Note: If you don't care if there are random comments in the chatbox, then don't say that last part. Sometimes, community and connection are more important than the speaker – but I would never tell the speaker that!

At the conclusion of the meeting, the chatbox is a great way for the participants to send kudos and compliments to each other. Furthermore, you can save the chatbox to capture the key takeaways and action items. Clean it up a bit and send it out as a reminder of the agreements made during the meeting!

Personally, I like having the functionality of the chatbox during a virtual meeting. Sometimes I use it, and other times I don't. As a facilitator, it is our responsibility to share how BEST to use the chatbox.

4 IDEAS TO ENGAGE THE AUDIENCE BEFORE A VIRTUAL PANEL DISCUSSION

I recently attended a virtual panel discussion that went a bit sideways right out of the gate. Rather than use the "waiting room" feature and have all of us enter the virtual room at once, many of us meandered in a few minutes beforehand as well as a few minutes after the official start time.

What greeted us was nothing. No video, no audio, nothing. Well, that's awkward. I started to wonder, "Am I in the right room? Do I have the right time?" So weird. Then, at the top of the hour, the moderator comes into the room, turns on her microphone and web camera, says a few words under her breath that I am pretty sure I wasn't supposed to hear, and welcomed the audience to the panel discussion. Still awkward.

To top it off, she said, "We're going to wait a few minutes until the rest of the folks get here" and then goes silent again. Double awkward. So why did I bother showing up on time?

When I enter a physical room in the face-to-face world, I expect a bit of mingling before the show starts. The same holds true during a virtual panel discussion.

4 Ideas to Engage the Audience Right Before the Virtual Panel Starts:

1. **Waiting Room.** At some conferences, the doors open at a precise time, people rush in to take their seats, and the show starts. By enabling the waiting room function, you can by-pass the mingling and just start the virtual panel discussion. Easy-peasy.
2. **Music.** Play music in the background – perhaps a song loosely related to the topic!
3. **Visual.** Display a slide that has the title of the panel discussion along with the date and time. If there is room, add names and photos of the panel moderator and panelists. If you have some sponsors you want to recognize or other information, consider a looping slideshow of a few slides.
4. **Mingle.** As the panel moderator, "virtually mingle" with the audience by recognizing people as they enter the room:

- If their camera is “on,” look straight into your camera and welcome them by name. Notice something in the visual frame that is interesting (e.g. their virtual background or the impressive set of books behind them).
- If the group is small, start a conversation with a few of the participants, just like you would in the face-to-face environment.
- Use the chatbox to engage the audience by asking them to:
 - *Share* their name, location, and one other pertinent item such as job title/function. Welcome them by name. Comment on the names you recognize, the diversity of locations, functions you see, etc.
 - *Ask* an intriguing question related to the panel topic. Verbally encourage them to answer the question in the chatbox. Comment as the answers come rolling in.
 - *Poll* the audience. Rather than using the polling functionality, show a slide with three or four options and ask them to answer in the chatbox: Is it A, B, C, or D? For example, you could ask about the audience’s familiarity with the topic: A – Not much, B – A bit, C – A lot, or D – I should be a panelist!

Set the appropriate tone for your virtual panel discussion by intentionally thinking through the audience experience even *before* the panel actually starts.

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: ATOMIC HABITS BY JAMES CLEAR

Even if you don’t think you need to read this book, You do!

When I hear about a book, I note the name and author. When I hear about it two or three more times, I buy it. [*Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones*](#) is just such a book. Not that I “needed to read it” nor was I trying to break bad habits, but I am always open to new ways of looking at the world.

An extremely easy to read book, author James Clear shares a personal story of how habits helped him achieve “remarkable results” (He shies away from the word “goals,” but you gotta have a destination or a “to be” state, so if you want to call this results vs. goals, so be it). He then shares the precise ways of how incremental habits help you achieve these results.

It’s not rocket science. It’s nothing I haven’t heard before BUT he shares his system in a highly practical and compelling way. He combines psychology, biology, and neuroscience to create an easy-to-understand template for making good habits stick and shift bad habits into good habits or leave them in the dust.

As I was reading the book, I was able to quickly note why a new habit I have adopted over the years would “work” and when one wouldn’t....as well as why I have failed to give up some of my “bad habits” (fess up, we ALL have them).

On the business side (go to www.atomichabits.com/business for the bonus chapter), I can immediately see the applicability to teams in the workplace. Teams have habits, routines, and rituals and it is worthwhile to have a frank conversation about the habits that support the business results and those that don’t....and what the team wants to do about it.

No one is an “overnight success.” Rather, that success is built on layers of small, incremental habits that contribute to mastery. I highly recommend this book – even if you don’t think you need it. You do.

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