



Have you been an "extraordinary" virtual team member? Have you been passively "lurking" on another Zoom call? Are you bringing energy and spice to your meetings? January is a perfect month for reflecting and looking for areas of improvement. Gather, recoup, and regroup to set some guidelines, strategies, and ground rules for a better virtual, hybrid, or in-person 2021 as a team.

And, for the latest on my new book: [123 Ways to Add Pizazz to a Panel Discussion](#) is now on [Kindle](#)! Free for those with Kindle Unlimited.

Kristin

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#### LEARN TO BE A BETTER VIRTUAL TEAM MEMBER

Now that we have been working from home (WFH) for the same time it takes to make a baby (GASP!), AND that we are entering into the new year, now is a good time to reflect on the year and your ability to be a good team player during these tough times.

1. **Set aside some time.** Block off some time in your calendar to do this work. I have rarely seen it done well in between Zoom calls!
2. Take a look at your organization or team's **performance standards** for being a "good team player" or other similar performance criteria. Look at the situation from your supervisor's and team members' perspectives. Chances are, those criteria were written before 2020, so you may want to chat with your supervisor about these criteria and how they have morphed over the year.
3. **Read through** the criteria (and amendments!) and ask yourself: What am I doing well? Acknowledge your strengths (yes, there are some!). Be sure to continue and reinforce what is working well. (Note: do NOT gloss over this step. Be thoughtful and honest with yourself. Give credit where credit is due).
4. Next, take a look at **what you could do differently**. Are there some behaviors you could start doing or do better? If in doubt, ask your teammates for some honest feedback on your team performance.
5. Identify three things that you could do to **enhance your team skills**. Then build a small action plan to put these ideas in place. For example, you discover that you don't ask others for their opinions. You decide that you want to start asking others for their

opinions — especially after you offer an opinion. You decide on the following actions:

- Craft several questions to ask (“what do you think about...”).
- Review the action plan before all team meetings.
- Make a concerted effort to ask for their opinions.
- Review how you did after the meeting.

Unfortunately, many organizations do not have established performance criteria. If this is the case, you may want to ask your team to agree on what makes a good team member. You may even find some guidelines in the team’s ground rules, operating norms, or guiding principles.

6. Finally, make a commitment to follow your plan. You’ll be surprised at how just a few actions can improve your teamwork!

## **14 WAYS TO ADD VISUAL VARIETY TO A PANEL DISCUSSION**

It was a virtual panel discussion at the end of a three-day virtual conference. Not only was I suffering from Zoom fatigue, but all the panels were starting to look the same. Similar to the Brady Bunch or Hollywood Squares, all I saw were heads in boxes. So then my dry eyes wandered over to the unmade bed in the background. Yeck!

It got me thinking about the different ways to create visual variety within a virtual frame. Here are some ideas:

Backgrounds:

1. “Stage” your background to look interesting. [Room Rater](#) is a clever way to see what works – and what doesn’t!
2. Create a virtual background for each panelist that matches their area of expertise.
3. Orchestrate different virtual backgrounds for each panelist that matches the segment of the panel. For example, when the panel moves to Q&A, the moderator and panelists all switch their virtual backgrounds.
4. Encourage the moderator and panelists to have a “two camera” set up so the person can toggle between different camera views.
5. Have a panelist take us on a “tour” of their room, office, or house.

Props:

6. Ask the panelists to write down their answer on a whiteboard and display it to the camera.
7. Have the panelists share an object within reach – or go get a specific item.
8. Encourage the panelists to “show and tell” with a prop that demonstrates their idea.
9. Take a poll using different colored objects e.g. grab something green for agree, yellow for undecided/neutral, and red for disagree.

The People:

10. Have all your panelists wear a specific color (or two colors if you are debating two sides to an issue)
11. Encourage your panelists to dress according to the meeting or panel theme.
12. Dress up – emphasizing the role you have been asked to play.
13. Play a character. One moderator dressed as a soccer referee – complete with a black and white referee shirt and whistle!
14. Don a costume. Dr. Stephen de Wit recently got my attention with his pink boa hat, flashy scarf, and pink fur cuffs!

Please, don’t do ALL of these in the same panel, but one or two techniques will certainly add more pizzazz to your panel discussion!

## FROM THE BOOKSHELF:

### WHY DON'T THEY GET IT? OVERCOMING BIAS IN OTHER (AND YOURSELF)

My neighbor, Linda, recommended the book [\*Why Don't They Get It? Overcoming Bias in Others \(and Yourself\)\*](#) by Brian McLaren as this month's book club selection. It's not in Amazon or any other bookstore – you have to buy it on his [website](#) – which, frankly, is a bit unusual for a book club.

So how did it land on our list? During these times of civil and political unrest, Linda was listening to Brian's [podcast](#), and was so intrigued, she ordered the book and referred it to us. Glad she did as Brian clearly lays out 12 biases that affect our ability to understand and communicate with each other. His basic premise is that:

“People can't see what they can't see...unless someone helps them to see it.”

This very short book allows you to name, see, and overcome some pretty common biases in our world.

As a facilitator of high-stakes conversations and a never-ending student of cognitive biases, I was particularly impressed with his clarity in describing the 12 biases. (Okay, there is one that I don't completely agree with, but it generated great conversation at our book club!)

In Part 2, he talks about how to overcome your biases by using Jesus as an example and how he helped people to overcome their biases. (I have to laugh because his selection of Jesus clearly shows his own bias as a pastor – and some of the examples seem a little forced, but hey, it gets the point across.)

Part III is worth every cent of the book (a mere \$5.99). It includes a checklist of strategies, five ways to help others see what they can't see, and bias-engaging scripts. Priceless.

Another neighbor, Pelly, exclaimed, “EVERYONE needs to read this book!” I agree.