RUNNING A VIDEO-CONFERENCE

3M Meeting Network

So you've been asked to lead a videoconference in two weeks. The first thing to do is relax. Nobody expects you to be professional television interviewer, and none of us were born knowing how to act on live video. The key is to take a deep breath and follow these helpful steps to a successful videoconference.

Before the videoconference begins

Because your participants are dispersed over different locations, it's necessary to take some time, before you get down to business, to make yourself and others comfortable with the videoconference setting.

It's best to arrive 10 to 15 minutes early to arrange equipment that will be used and to have time to test it. Because a remote site may have already called into your videoconferencing system, assume someone can see and hear you the minute you step into the room. It's also a good idea to have a wall clock hanging behind the camera, so you can easily keep track of the time.

When the videoconference begins

Welcome the participants when all sites have been connected. Always begin with a roll call for all sites to acquaint participants with speaking in the videoconference setting and to introduce them to one another. If you don't already know everyone, make a seating chart of remote sites with people's names as they introduce themselves. This will help you to call on participants by name when they have a question or you want to acknowledge them.

Tell participants how to respond to or ask questions. You may want them to state their name and location before they begin or simply raise their hand when they have a question so you can give them a chance to speak. Next, review the meeting agenda, objectives, breaks and end-time as well as any materials sent to participants prior to the meeting.

Sometimes you'll notice a small video or audio transmission delay when the sites are connected using slow transmission speeds. This can result in people at multiple sites starting to speak at the same time. To avoid this, allow a few seconds for people at other locations to ask or respond to a question.

Microphones are placed at each site in order to transmit audio. Remember to speak clearly and concisely and don't let your voice trail off at the end of a sentence. To cut down on distracting noises follow these simple rules: avoid finger tapping, rustling and shuffling of papers because your microphones will amplify these sounds. To prevent transmission of background noises when someone at another site is speaking, use your microphone's mute button. And, remember to avoid side conversations. The microphones amplify them and the side conversation at your site may become the center of attention at the other sites!

Keep the videoconference interactive

The goal of a videoconference is to be highly interactive, not just to be "on television." People think of television as entertainment or passive. For a videoconference to be interactive, you must remove the barriers between the origination site and remote locations.

Always call on participants by name to acknowledge their question. During the meeting, ask participants for feedback and keep them involved. Ask each site, one at a time, if anyone there has questions, thoughts or ideas, and then wait for them to respond. It's also best to look at the camera when speaking, to establish eye contact with participants.

Good face-to-face meeting practices are equally useful during a videoconference. For example, to avoid the concentration or tune-out problem, change the activity or the pace every 20 minutes. You can vary the pace by moving slower for new or difficult topics and faster for reviews and less complex materials. Be alert for signs of fatigue and take a break if energy is running low.

Wrapping up

When you've covered your agenda items and met your meeting objectives, it's time to wrap up the meeting. Allot a few minutes at the end to summarize decisions, action items and open issues. Sign off by acknowledging each participant or group at the different sites, thanking them for their participation.

Make the meeting.

Helpful Hints
To handle a confrontation between two individuals in a videoconference, suggest they phone each other after the conference to continue their discussion. This allows them to gracefully end the confrontation and to "save face."

Before your videoconference begins, you can program preset camera views into your remote control. This allows you to quickly move the camera around to focus on different people or a group shot. Presets help keep your attention on the meeting and not the equipment.

If one or two people will be doing most of the talking or presenting, have them sit next to each other so the camera is not moving back and forth constantly.

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