



CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

LETS MEET

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Honestly, I haven't stopped communicating since I uttered my first words! I was called Chatterbox as a child and then this was channelled into years of Speech and Drama and Debate training throughout my youth. Moving through my qualifications to become a Lawyer and Chartered Accountant I relied on this training as I started to be called on to present to clients.

Transitioning into the public sector meant I fell naturally into roles that held a large amount of external collaboration and consultation. Very soon I became the go to person to speak externally on behalf of the organisation. Whilst many dread public speaking, I love it. I love sharing ideas in a way that it can be understood, seeing the change in attitudes as they understand what the organisation is trying to do and diffusing holding difficult spaces as we meet in place of difference and celebrating moments of unity.

Working as a facilitator and coach has taken that to a whole new level.

The lessons contained in here are sharing some of what I have learned and observed over the years as I hold my own meetings and attend many others.

Happy to chat more
Penny

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The top-left portion of the image features a series of thin, light-colored lines that intersect to form various irregular polygons and shapes, creating a complex, abstract geometric pattern. The lines are white or a very light beige, contrasting with the dark blue background.

**WHAT MAKES A
GOOD MEETING?**

ALL WE DO IS MEET

- Studies have shown that since Covid 19 meetings have increased. A recent Harvard study showed that remote meetings have increased 60% since the pandemic.
- We have all experienced the increased productivity, engagement and work life balance that comes from being able to have online meetings, however there are downsides with regard to overwork particularly around burn out
- In our experience the biggest contributor to burnout is ending the day with a feeling of having spent all day attending meetings that don't have a clear purpose, sense of outcome and feel like a "waste of my time".

When you balance this feeling against the increasing desire from leadership for teams to be more collaborative as they work across silos and reach integrated solutions to delivery issues, the importance of us elevating our skills in this area become even more important and are a way for us as individuals to improve our professional presence and agency in our role.

BUT HOW WELL DO WE LISTEN?

Its easy to get ready for a meeting to talk, and that is what most of this toolbox will ready you to do, but how you listen in a meeting is more important than what you say.

Level 1: Passive Listening

- Hearing words but not fully engaging.
- Easily distracted, thinking about other things.
- Minimal comprehension and retention.

Level 2: Active Listening

- Focused attention on the speaker.
- Asking questions and seeking clarification.
- Demonstrating empathy and interest.

Level 3: Reflective Listening

- Deep understanding of the speaker's emotions and message.
- Paraphrasing and summarizing to confirm understanding.
- Building trust and rapport through active feedback.what you say.

IN A NUTSHELL- IF YOU READ NOTHING ELSE, READ THIS

Whether you are preparing for running big team, delivering a presentation, or meeting with a stakeholder, the secret to preparation is the same: you must achieve a clear understanding of the “six Ps.”

- **Why are we holding this session? (Purpose)**
- **What do we want to have when we are done? (Product)**
- **Who will be attending the session? (Participants)**
- **What are the potential problems or issues that may surface? (Probable Issues)**
- **How will we go about achieving the purpose and product? (Process)**
- **Where will the session be held, or what virtual meeting platform will be utilised? (Place)**

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

CLEAR PURPOSE AND AGENDA

Effective meetings have a well-defined purpose and a clear agenda. Participants should know why the meeting is being held and what topics will be discussed. This helps everyone come prepared and ensures that the meeting stays focused and productive.

SKILLED FACILITATION

A skilled facilitator can make a big difference to meeting effectiveness. They guide discussions, manage conflicts, keep the meeting on track, and ensure that all participants have an opportunity to contribute. They also manage disruptions and encourage open communication.

INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

Effective meetings encourage active participation from all attendees. Participants should feel comfortable sharing their insights, opinions, and concerns. This leads to better decision-making and fosters a sense of ownership and engagement.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Respect for participants' time is crucial. Meetings should start and end on time, and the agenda should be followed to prevent unnecessary tangents. Time should be allocated appropriately to each agenda item to ensure all important topics are covered without rushing.

ACTIONABLE FOLLOW UP

An effective meeting results in clear action items and next steps. Each decision or conclusion should be accompanied by a plan for implementation, including assigned responsibilities and deadlines. Follow-up after the meeting to track progress and address any challenges that arise.

GOAL ORIENTATED AND OUTCOME DRIVEN

Successful meetings have specific goals and desired outcomes. Whether it's making a decision, brainstorming ideas, sharing information, or solving a problem, participants should know what they're trying to achieve by the end of the meeting.

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ONLINE MEETING CHECKLIST

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Camera Placement:

Position your camera at eye level or slightly above to create a natural line of sight. This prevents awkward angles and helps you maintain better eye contact. Science shows you should be about an arm's length away from your screen. This means your head is a good size for the screen and participants can still see your facial expressions well. Helping to build trust.

Lighting:

Ensure you're well-lit from the front to avoid shadows on your face. No one likes having a meeting with someone when you can't see their face to read facial cues. Ensure natural light from a window or using soft, diffused artificial light will help people relate to you.

Background:

Look around you and ensure you have a tidy and clutter-free background that's not too distracting. You want people to be looking at you and not scanning your background trying to see what books you read in your spare time. Virtual backgrounds can be used, but ensure they are appropriate and don't cause visual glitches.

ONLINE MEETING HOT TIPS

Eye Contact:

Look into the camera when speaking to simulate direct eye contact. This helps create a connection with participants on the other end. Also feel free to lean in and out of the screen as you talk in the same manner you would if you were talking in person.

Engagement and Body Language:

Maintain engaged body language—sit up straight, nod, and use hand gestures as you would in an in-person conversation. This shows active participation and studies have shown builds trust with participants if they can see your hands occasionally. Raising and lowering your voice – leaning in to whisper, or out to make a statement makes your conversation seem more natural.

Dress and Appearance:

Even though you might be working from home, there is still a requirement to dress professionally and appropriately for the meeting. Avoid distracting patterns/offensive logo's etc.

ONLINE MEETING HOT TIPS

Test Camera view in advance:

Test your camera before the meeting starts, what is their view? Can you elevate your laptop to avoid the “up the nostrils” view, is the sun causing you to be in shade? distractions in background?

Participate Actively:

Have your camera on unless you have explained why it's off.. This shows your involvement. Remember you can use emoji to express agreement “thumbs up” to support the presenter if you are introverted and aren't likely to engage vocally. Although it's tempting to do work on your other screen or phone be careful of the message this sends to participants. If you are online for the meeting it's assumed, you are fully engaged. Consider whether it's better to be absent completely than present and disengaged.

Mute When Not Speaking:

Keep your microphone muted when you're not speaking to prevent background noise from disrupting the meeting. Consider this especially when you are working in an office and people are picking up conversations from those around you clearly.

ONLINE MEETING HOT TIPS

Use Visual Aids:

Share your screen or use visual aids to enhance your points. This keeps participants engaged and reinforces your message. But do turn screen sharing off as soon as possible as it stops people from seeing each other. It can also be really good to use a live white board to capture notes, ideas etc just like you would if you were in a room. Handwriting on the online white board looks good too as its more natural.

Practice Good Etiquette:

Wait for your turn to speak, avoid interrupting, and give others the opportunity to contribute. Use participants' names when addressing them.

Follow Up:

After the meeting, follow up with relevant points, action items, or thank-you messages to demonstrate you heard their comments during the meeting.

ONLINE MEETING FACILITATION

It feels harder because it is harder. Facilitating online is harder because there isn't natural exchange of energy like there is in a room. It's harder to read people's expressions and engagement online and therefore harder to respond.

Get your tech ready if you are using teams, then have the white board set up prior to the meeting, have post-it notes sitting ready for people to grab and drop which saves time etc.

Get your timing ready know how much time you need to spend in each area before moving on, keep conversation to time to allow each part of your agenda the time it occurs. Usually, my advice is to look at your agenda and then halve it – most people put too much in their agenda, the meeting is too full of presenters whipping through slides and nothing is engaged with at a deeper level.

ONLINE MEETING FACILITATION

Take time at start to slow things down, as mentioned before, slowing the room down is important as you need to make sure everyone is on the same page as you and you have channelled their attention into the right spaces before you start. Being patient to get to the key point of the meeting will pay off as you will bring people with you, rather than spending time redirecting them when they are off track....if you didn't get what you wanted from the meeting, then reflect on how you perhaps directed their thinking in the wrong direction.... consider an exercise in navigating!

State your purpose and outcome even though you read this presentation and were clear in the invite what your purpose is, state it again, talk about the outcome, this makes sure that everyone is with you on that –helps ensure questions etc are targeted in right place or people who have been delegated the meeting know why they are there.

ONLINE MEETING FACILITATION

Introductions don't assume that everyone knows each other. Be specific in your introductions, get them to say their name and deliver a prompt like:

- What specific aspect of today's topic are you most interested in exploring?
- Share an example from your own experience that relates to (insert subject matter).
- Tell us about a recent development or trend in our field that caught your attention.
- What challenges or obstacles have you encountered in relation to this topic?
- Share a recent success story or best practice that you think is relevant.
- How do you envision applying the ideas discussed today in your work?
- What questions or uncertainties do you have regarding this topic?
- What key takeaways do you hope to gain from today's presentation?
- Discuss a recent project where you faced a similar issue, and how you handled it.
- Share a resource, tool, or methodology you've found useful in this context