

S P E A K E A S Y

White Paper

# Bridging the Virtual Gap: Nine Strategies for Virtual Communication That Work



S P E A K E A S Y

ATLANTA • SAN FRANCISCO • NEW YORK • AMSTERDAM  
BANGALORE • MUMBAI • CHICAGO • BOSTON • HONG KONG

T. 404.541.4800

Info@Speakeasyinc.com  
**Speakeasy**inc.com



## AN OVERVIEW

In today's business environment, virtual meetings are inevitable and abundant. Teams that once communicated face-to-face on a daily basis have now been tasked with transitioning to a virtual work environment.

As business relationships extend far beyond global boundaries, virtual meetings are a must to connect with co-workers, clients, and key stakeholders.

The most powerful factor in virtual communication is engaging others to build connections.

Despite the tremendous increase in virtual meetings and conference calls, the effectiveness highly depends on several factors : the presenter, the participants, and the environment.

Surveys have documented the lackluster results of virtual meetings, as evident in these statistics:



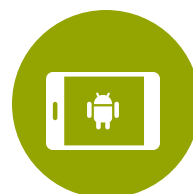
### More than 76%

of virtual meeting participants are engaging in other activities (emails, other discussions, other work)



### About 27%

have admitted to falling asleep during a virtual meeting on at least ONE occasion



### Nearly 82%

of the participants prefer to use their mobile device on virtual meetings - giving them more opportunities to mute the meeting and continue their daily routine

# KEY STRATEGIES FOR VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION

There are nine strategies that lead to better engagement during virtual communication. These virtual strategies should be followed in preparation for and during your next meeting. Keep in mind that your top priority during virtual meetings is to connect with and engage your audience.

1 Video Over Voice	4 Eliminate Distractions	7 Use Non-Verbals and Body Language
2 Plan Your Content and Agenda	5 Pause	8 Exaggeration Necessary
3 Check Your Voice and Video Quality	6 Encourage Engagement	9 Summarize and End the Meeting

# 1. Video Over Voice



It's first because it's important.

It may seem easier to just “speak” rather than use video, but if you are choosing the phone option you may be seriously undermining your communication effectiveness. Video communication allows you to see the other person, to look into their eyes and to have them feel the connection. We may have to work a little harder when using video in order to reach the other person but it is still easier than the visualization required without it. Speak directly into the camera so that your audience sees you connecting directly with them. Use peripheral vision to pick up all sorts of signals that we would not be receiving were we using voice only.

Conversely, choosing video over voice allows you to remove any distractions you might entertain if the video was off.

## 2. Plan Your Content and Agenda



Create an agenda with estimated timeframes for the meeting and share this with the audience PRIOR . This will keep the meeting organized and ensure you are able to cover all topics in a systematic manner. This is extremely important, especially via a virtual medium that is filled with data lags and connection outages.

For time sake, avoid long-winded explanations or drawn out conversations - this will bore your audience. Build in short segments for audience participation and questions to sustain engagement.

## 3. Check Your Voice and Video Quality



Try a practice run. Go in the space where you plan to conduct your virtual communications and sign into your meeting. This will allow you to hear your voice and how clear it comes through to the listener. **Headsets or microphones work better to amplify your voice than using the microphone on your laptop or cell phone.** When using an external microphone be sure to place it closely to the mouth and lay it flat on your clothing. Doing so will eliminate the feedback sound we hear when the microphone rubs against your clothing.

## 4. Eliminate Distractions



Distractions are real and sometimes unavoidable, especially when working from home during a time where children, spouses, and pets are around.

There are some obvious distractions like background conversations or music that should be eliminated before you communicate virtually. It may require you to post a sign on your office door or give a reminder to others that there is a meeting in progress.

**Distractions aren't just noises.** Sometimes its your space or the space of others. During your next meeting, screen shot a photo of yourself and take a closer look. Are there any items such as folders, food, papers, etc. that are laying around that could be distracting to you or to others? Do your best to create a visually neutral space before the meeting begins.

## 5. Pause



**Pause for understanding.** Taking strategic pauses during virtual communication is even more important than during face-to-face communication.

Why? Pausing gives your listeners the moment to catch up and process what has been said. It gives you, as the speaker, the opportunity to breathe and collect your thoughts. Be mindful of the length of your pauses and their frequency. Using too many pauses may disengage your audience and lessen the connection they have built with you. On the contrary, not using any pauses at all might lead others to believe that you aren't putting any thought into your responses.

## 6. Manage Interactions



Nothing is worse than meetings that turn into monologues. If you are conducting the meeting, be sure to engage your attendees.

Manage interactions by asking participants questions or for feedback. You can receive a wealth of information by allowing listeners to provide input. **In fact, over 70% of workers say virtual meetings do not work because attendees are not encouraged or allowed to provide feedback or ideas.** Invite participants, by name, to provide their suggestions and opinions on the topic(s) being discussed.



## 7. Use Non-Verbals

Moving your hands, making gestures, and smiling when you are speaking, are all great indicators to your audience that you are listening and interested in what is going on. **Non-verbal communication is a powerful tool to make your virtual communication lively and more conversational.**

Remember, lectures are not as effective in virtual meetings. Make the communication a collaborative conversation to help engage your audience and build a productive connection.

## 8. Exaggerations Necessary



Unfortunately, the energy you have in face-to-face communications isn't always translated into your virtual interactions. You have to work 10 times harder for your energy to show. You may have a riveting message to share, but if you don't deliver the message with energy, clarity and volume, the message will fall on deaf ears.

Open your mouth and fully own the words you speak. In our program, **Narrowing the Virtual Gap**, we take our clients through an exercise so that they can see for themselves the energy necessary for effective virtual communication.

## 9. Summarize and End the Meeting



Before closing the meeting, the leader should summarize what was discussed and review any assignments or expectations. This can also be a great time for Q&A. Be sure to bring every meeting to an appropriate close and end on a positive note.

1 <http://www.intercall.com/blog/index.php/audio-conferencing/survey-reveals-workers-conference-call-hold-habits>

2 <https://hbr.org/2014/08/what-people-are-really-doing-when-theyre-on-a-conference-call>

3 <https://www.speek.com/resources/meeting-tips/people-not-paying-attention-conference-calls/>

4 <https://hbr.org/2014/08/what-people-are-really-doing-when-theyre-on-a-conference-call>

5 <https://www.speek.com/resources/meeting-tips/people-not-paying-attention-conference-calls/>

# Conclusion

---

It is important to remember that communication is rooted in authenticity, sharing information, and collaborating with others. Following these tips will help you lead and be a more effective virtual communicator.

These nine tips will help guide you as you carry out virtual conversations, however real communication development comes from expert coaching and guidance. With practice and guidance from our full-time credentialed faculty, your communication skills will naturally improve, enabling you to unlock the master communicator within.

The business communication consultants at Speakeasy specialize in empowering speakers, of all levels, to tap into their communication potential. Our best-in-class business communication programs have been experienced by professionals at many Fortune 500 companies including Microsoft, VISA, Ernst & Young and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). For over 47 years, we have provided thousands of participants with real-world opportunities to put proven communication strategies into practice - live or virtual.

Register today for one of Speakeasy's communication programs. Our dynamic and credentialed faculty are excited to help enhance your effective communication skills, for your next meeting and beyond.

To learn more about our communication programs visit our website at :  
<http://www.speakeasyinc.com/virtualofferings>,  
or call one of our communication consultants at  
404.541.4800.