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10 TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE

CONFERENCE CALLS

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With increasingly dispersed work forces, conference calls are becoming common place.

We've probably all experienced the pain of the examples shown in Tripp and Tyler's video; 'A Conference Call in Real Life'.

(If you haven't seen the funny video, it's really worth a watch: <https://youtu.be/kNz82r5nyUw>)

And let's be honest, we've probably all been guilty of at least one of their conference call sins.

So, let's not be part of the problem. When you're next running a conference call, use these tips to make it more effective.



Coach and Director
Pressurevalve™ Ltd

1. Do you even need a meeting?

According to a 2013 study by Officebroker.com, U.K. workers waste a **year** of their lives in useless meetings! So, before you send the Outlook invite, think: *Do we even need this meeting? Is there a better option?*

Avoid a meeting if the objective is one-way information dissemination. In these cases, the information could be covered in an e-mail, intranet blog or brief report. (Unless it's a sensitive issue that requires a more personal approach). If you want to be certain you have delivered the right message, you can schedule a meeting just to answer questions about the info you've sent.

Still think you need a meeting? Okay, but take two minutes to estimate how much that meeting will cost you in terms of attendees' time. You can use this calculator:

<https://hbr.org/2016/01/estimate-the-cost-of-a-meeting-with-this-calculator>

Does the meeting justify that cost?

2. Be clear on the objective/s of the meeting.

Make sure you have a purpose for the meeting. Be clear on its objective, to help you define this, imagine yourself at the end of the meeting and think:

- What will a successful meeting have achieved?
- What question/s will we have answered?
- What decision/s will have been made?
- What will we have that we don't have now?

Remember, if it's just to tell people some information, is a meeting really necessary?

3. Who really needs to be there?

Don't just invite the usual suspects out of habit. Think about who really needs to be there. If you're trying to solve a problem, invite people with the best skills, experience and knowledge to solve it.

When people feel what's being discussed isn't relevant to them, or that they lack the skills or expertise to contribute, they'll view their attendance as a waste of time.

Plus a huge crowd on conference call is very tricky to manage!



4. Set a clear agenda

The next step is to draw up the agenda. You may be able to do this on your own, or it may require input from others.

Your agenda needs to include a brief description of the meeting objective/s, a list of the topics to be covered and a list stating who will address each topic and for how long. Follow the agenda closely during the meeting.

Think about when it's best to hold the meeting and how long it needs. Don't send an invite for a one-hour meeting if the topic only needs 45 mins. (If you use Zoom, it's only free for video conference calls of 40 minutes or less, this can be a good motivator to keep the meeting pacy).

Share the agenda with the attendees. If there's any preparation required from them, communicate this, then they'll understand why they are needed and what's required of them.

If possible, I'd recommend assigning some preparation to each attendee. That way they'll be more focused in the meeting. For example; if you are trying to solve a problem, you could provide pre-reading on the issue, asking each attendee to come to the meeting with at least one possible solution to share with the rest of the group.



5. Assign a note taker

Assigning a note taker enables you to stay focused on chairing the meeting, guiding the group to achieve the objective/s. Also, by having a clear agenda, the note taker will be able to flag if the conversation moves onto the next item without a clear action/decision being stated for the notes.

6. Practice using the conference call software

So far, these tips apply to any type of meeting: face-to-face, video/online, or on the phone. The following three tips are specific to video, online and telephone meetings.

Your meeting shouldn't be the first time you've used the software. It sounds obvious but set up a practice call and learn how to use all the features, including how to mute and un-mute all callers. It's pretty cringe-worthy when the host doesn't know how to use the technology.



7. Think through the what-ifs

Technology isn't perfect, so have back-up plans. If you're using a video call/webinar service, do you have an offline conference call number that people can call if the tech doesn't work? Could you email the slides ahead of time?

If you'll have some people in a meeting room, as well as dialling in, ensure there's an adequate speaker telephone, with multiple speakers throughout the room.

8. Be a good chair

- Dial into the conference/video call 5 minutes before the start time. Welcome each person as they dial in and jot down their name so you know who is in attendance.
- Before you start the meeting, run through the list of attendees you've jotted down and check there's no-one on the line that you've missed.
- Ask attendees to put their telephones/computers on mute while they are listening, this is to avoid background noise. Tell them to un-mute their telephone if they have a question or comments. (Or use the 'raise hand' function available in some software packages).
- Ideally, have all attendees dialling in via their computers or landlines, mobiles are not great for conference calls.
- So everyone will know who is speaking, ask attendees to speak loudly and clearly and preface all comments or questions with their name,
- Keep to the agenda. Diplomatically move the discussion along where necessary. (If someone is monopolising the conversation, interject and thank them for their contribution, explaining that you now need input from other attendees).
- Address people by name if you want them to respond, otherwise there will be awkward pauses whilst people try to figure out who you are speaking too. (Keep asking questions directly to people, rather than general questions to the whole group, e.g. So, Claire, what do you think about that suggestion? This keeps people on their toes, rather than switching their attention to their emails etc. and leaving it to someone else to respond)
- Provide regular time checks to avoid drift.

9. Summing up

It's not unusual for people to leave meetings with different interpretations of what was agreed. To avoid this, ask the note taker to read out the agreed decisions and actions. Check everyone agrees and is clear on their actions and deadlines.

Document this information and circulate within 24 hours of the meeting.

10. Evaluate

Keep the last five minutes of the agenda to ask the group:

- What worked well in this meeting?
- What can we do to improve our next meeting?



Finally, if you want to have a one-to-one conversation with someone from the call (on another matter), finish the call you are on and start a new one with them. Calls can take a few seconds to disconnect, it's alarming how many people don't seem to realise this and start talking because they assume all the other callers have gone!!!

Please note: If, how and with whom, you use the information in this guide, is solely at your discretion. Pressurevalve Ltd cannot be held accountable for your choices and resulting actions.