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Preparing for Virtual Events

With online meetings and events becoming more common, you would be surprised how similar preparations for online and in-person sessions are. Virtual events can have different titles and purposes. For instance, some virtual events are meant specifically for networking (e.g. 'meet-ups) and many, such as information sessions, webinars, workshops and video conferences have other intended purposes. Here are some tips to help you navigate the differences so you can get the most from your virtual experience.

Technical Considerations

Confirm what video platform the session's host will be using and study how it works ahead of time. There may be a free one to download. Test the video and audio connection of your device as well as volume control in advance. You may want to test on all devices you may want to use as some devices may have limitations. A computer with a webcam is highly recommended. Take note of the conference call details in case of technology issues.

Note: It is also best to shut down all open files, apps and streaming software as they can interfere with your video speed and picture quality.

Camera

Set up your computer so that the camera is close to eye level. Make sure you know how to angle your camera so the person you are meeting with can see your entire face, and not just your forehead or eyes. Think portrait photo perspective. If you are using your smart phone, prop it on a stack of books to stabilize your image.

These details convey professionalism to the employer, it allows them to see who took the time to ensure a proper set-up and other subtle cues.

Sound

It is recommended to use a headset to avoid system feedback and extraneous noises such as keyboard clacking and/or ambient noise. Most webinars will mute your microphone upon entry into the virtual space. You should mute your mic until you are ready to speak to avoid privacy breeches.

Lighting

When it comes to lighting, facing your light source is always better than having it at your back as it can cause the camera to compensate for the bright background and keep you in the shadows. If you are wearing glasses or jewelry, check for glares to ensure it is not distracting to your audience.

Check your Surroundings

Be sure to set up in an area in your home that is free of distractions and noise. What is behind you? – in camera view or who may come in your room. Remove all clutter and keep your space professional looking. Many videoconferencing applications allow you to set a background if you choose.

Be fully present and switch off all electronic notifications, including text, email, alarms to avoid any distractions while you are on your video conference.

Prepare in Advance

Do all the same prep that you would do for an in-person event. Check the company's website and social feeds so that you know your hosts. Check out this post on what to look for in your research.

Be ready with a few questions. Having several allows for flexibility if some of the questions are answered already. Check out some of our examples here.

Tips for Questions:

- Introduce yourself upon entry into the virtual space ("Hi, I'm Jane Smith. My questions is ...") Keep it short and direct.
- Participate as an engaged attendee. Comment professionally as appropriate and if participation is encouraged. Some events are meant to be one-way, so your mic may be muted for the entire time of the event. Follow the lead of the facilitator.
- Be inclusive, share the stage. Depending on the size and format of the session, be thoughtful letting others finish their point before you talk. Use features such as chat and hand raise, if available.
- Timely - it's too soon to ask about salary and benefits but you might ask about how they on-board new hires; ask about something specifically mentioned in the session, if possible.
- Attending a virtual *networking* event? – check out this resource on creating connections and networking with the right mindset.

What to Wear?

Dress appropriately, wearing the same attire you would for an in-person event. You will feel or act more put together if you are dressed from head to toe! Keep colors neutral and avoid wearing large distracting jewelry or heavy makeup.

Body Language Still Matters

If you are on video, try to maintain eye contact by looking at the camera and not at the image of yourself in the picture frame (as tempting as that can be!). Whether you are speaking or listening, eye contact demonstrates you are interested, focused and taking the engagement seriously. You can also be engaging by displaying social cues such as nodding, smiling and laughing if appropriate, just like you would in person.

Maintaining good posture can also make a noticeable difference how you present yourself and even the way you project your voice, both on and off camera.

Following up

While exchanging business cards is a common practice during networking events, it is not possible for virtual events. Be sure to capture the names, emails of the people you interacted with digitally and send a follow-up email or message. For privacy, it is not recommended to share your personal email while online unless you use the private feature to message a specific person in the session. Be sure to thank them for their time and share what you enjoyed about the session, what resonated with you the most with a personal note. Keep the conversation going by sending a link to an article on a topic discussed.

And lastly…

Remember to have fun, be yourself and bring your positive energy with you! Perhaps you might be inclined to invite your professional contacts to meet for a (future) virtual coffee chat!