How to Master the Art of Hybrid Meetings

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Virtual meetings, in-person meetings, hybrid meetings – the list goes on. As business leaders, what do we need to learn to master? When we had in-person meetings, it was easy to tell if someone is not paying attention or being a strong contributor. In the virtual world, things get a little more difficult to gauge.

With hybrid meetings, how do you satisfy the people in person and the people online? These are all challenges to deal with in the current business environment. It's fair to assume that business as we know it has been changed permanently. For example, many major metropolitan areas have seen a max exodus of people who want to live in more desirable areas where there is a better quality of life since they can now work remotely. Additionally, for people who cannot travel or may have limited mobility which can make it very difficult for them to maneuver to an office, do you think they won't be allowed to work remotely when things go back to "normal?"

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The "hybrid" environment is here to stay for the long term and business leaders need to learn the art of mastering these hybrid meetings to maximize their effectiveness as leaders. To understand this, let's take a look at the trends over the past 2 years:

- **Physical meetings:** This was the norm for larger meetings, board meetings, client meetings and other meetings where intense brainstorming and collaboration were required.
- **Virtual meetings:** This was forced upon everyone for all meetings. Common platforms for these include Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet. This is great for smaller groups but starts to become ineffective for collaboration with more than 10-15 participants. Although these platforms have started to include breakout rooms, they are still at their infant stage and require a lot of intervention/coordination by the host.

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I was recently at an event hosted by David Cogan, who is the managing partner and founder of a leading entrepreneurship community networking group. I was awed at what I witnessed and learned from watching this event. The blend of high-quality audio, visual, technology, interactive sessions, breaks (actually stretching breaks) and strong facilitator coordination was amazing.

For Cogan, he says people need to "start with the end in mind." He explained that he treats every event as a full production. You need to keep people's attention by having a well-choreographed event that is interactive, instead of structured like a lecture. We went on to talk about the major factors to consider for virtual meetings:

1. **Audio quality:** You have to up your audio game. You should have a single microphone, in front of a professional backdrop, that in-person participants have to use when they are speaking. This ensures that your online participants have both a good audio and visual experience.

2. **Technology:** Just Zoom or Slack is not enough. Explore other platforms, like ones that can create a virtual conference environment or an enjoyable speed networking experience.
3. **Test, test and pre-test:** Once things don't work, you will lose your virtual audience. Make sure to properly prepare and test all components to minimize audio or technical glitches that can damage the experience.
4. **Design meetings for all attendees:** Think of a game show where the contestants in the audience come up to the stage to play the game or the announcer goes to them with a microphone – the same concept for virtual meetings. Having a professional backdrop with one camera angle where in-person participants get up to talk balances out the experience for all users.
5. **Provide strong facilitation:** The leader of the meeting is like a football coach that needs to manage the players, the fans and the fantasy league. This is not an easy task and requires a strong team. Leaders need to work even harder to plan and orchestrate the event to ensure a great experience for all.

We are in a new paradigm of the pandemic. You can either adapt and thrive or resist change, or complain and hope it goes back to how it used to be.

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