

VIRTUAL PRESENTATION MASTERY

TIPS FROM THE COACH TO
SOME OF THE WORLD'S
BEST SPEAKERS—AND ME



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Virtual Presenting Etiquette

Have you ever attended an online presentation where people showed up late, became a distraction by forgetting to put their PC on mute, had conversations with others off camera or just refused to engage? So, what is etiquette protocol for virtual presentations?

Here are some behaviours you should look to master in your presentations:

Etiquette check list

- Inform your participants if they are being recorded.
- Arrive at meeting early.
- Welcome people to the presentation.
- Start your presentation on time.
- Ask key question so that you engage them straight away.
- End on time.
- If it's a group presentation, and you can't be seen, say your name at all times.
- Pause.
- Remember to mute all if talking to a larger group, and you don't need their verbal input.

Dealing with silence.

One of the more awkward parts of virtual presenting can be when you are looking for an actively interactive, collaborative presentation, and the audience won't play ball. You ask your well-planned question that you hope will release a veritable flood of chat, and all you get is silence.

People are silent because of one or all of these reasons:

- They don't want to look stupid.
- They don't want to speak over people.
- They're not sure if they what they say adds value.
- They have nothing to add.
- They don't want the call to descend into chaos.
- They want time to think through what they're going to say.
- They're just not interested.

Most of these caveats can be solved through framing the call. If you can find a solution to the challenges, participants are far more likely to engage. If you still get silence, here are some techniques that can elicit some noise.

Encourage. Make the first member of the audience who responds sound like a hero. It will inspire the others to get involved.

Wait a few seconds. Chances are someone will fill the silence. It also gives more introverted members of your audience time to work out what they want to say.

Delve a little bit into why people are not speaking. It might be something as basic as, “I don’t understand the question.”

Close-ended question or poll. You can follow up your open question that brings silence with a simple closed question: “Okay, I’m going to leave that question for the moment and come back later. Shall we move on?”

If you have a supporter in the audience—and you likely will—ask them directly. They want it to go well and will be able to sense that the silence is awkward. Calling them out by name will help them come to your rescue.

Put them in a breakout space to discuss. Give them three minutes to see if they have any questions. When they’re in the breakout room, it will give them time to think and also receive validation from their colleague that their question is worth asking.

Finally, when dealing with silence, never blame—otherwise it will just get worse. Be authentic, humorous, gentle, and kind, such as: “Any thoughts on what the answer might be? Okay, no problem, it can feel a bit awkward, calling out answers online. The sort of answers we might be looking at are…”

Dealing with de-railers.

You can often get taken off track in a presentation during a pitch, when one or more of your audience members asks a question or makes a point that, though important to them, takes you off the thrust of your presentation.

Tips for dealing with de-railers:

- **Politely cut de-railers off.** “That’s a great point John, but I’m going to have to cut you off here.”
- **Talk to the more long-winded beforehand.** There’s a good chance they are aware that they go on. Having a gentle chat before your presentation—remind them of their value in engaging and chatting but warn them you might have to cut them off.
- **Get de-railers to focus on agenda.** See the earlier chapter on Framing.
- **Address underlying issues.** Rather than allow the elephant in the room to run amok and uncontrolled during your presentation, address it at the outset.

HERMAN’S ACTION PLAN

- Put together an agreed-upon call etiquette with your team and ideally, also with your audience.
- Have a plan for dealing with silence. Remember the chances are that they’re not responding because they’re disengaged but because they’re not sure what’s the right etiquette.

- Head de-railers off by getting them to focus on the agenda. That means, you've guessed it, you need a clear agenda.