



12 New Rules for Virtual Meetings, Since We're Still In a Pandemic

By Vu from Nonprofit AF

It seems that with Omicron and everything going on, we are going to be having virtual meetings for the foreseeable future. I've been reading through lists of guidelines for virtual meetings, and they are ridiculous, still stressing the standards of "professionalism." One dude recommended wearing slacks or other work-related pants, even though people may not be able to see what we're wearing below the waist.

We are in an apocalypse! Most of us are barely hanging on by a thread, and just getting out of bed, or even turning on the laptop while in bed, is in itself an accomplishment. The rules must change to accommodate. We should dispense with many practices rooted in archaic notions of professionalism. Most meetings should probably just be eliminated so we can nap or watch Encanto again, but if we must have them, here are a few new agreements I am proposing:

1. Anyone is allowed to eat food at any time, no matter the type of meeting, on or off camera, without any judgment. It doesn't matter if you're doing a staff meeting, virtual team building retreat, chat with a donor, or zooming with the Queen at 7am, feel free to eat an entire 2-pack of Costco baguettes, soup straight from a can, or ice cream directly from a container.

2. All one-hour meetings will now default to be 50 minutes. The therapists got the right idea. Having 50-minute meetings prevents the stress of back-to-back meetings without breaks and will give us all time to run to the bathroom, grab a snack, take a rapid test, or stare out the window and shake our fists at the sky in futile resentment.

3. It is perfectly acceptable to call from bed for all informal meetings. Catching up with a colleague, checking-in with friends, etc., one or both party may be in bed, snuggled under a blanket, possibly munching on some chocolate and/or an entire charcuterie board. For formal meetings, this rule can be adopted by consensus.

4. We will prioritize accessibility. All meetings will be on platforms that at least have automatic captions built in, if live captions will not be provided, to be inclusive of colleagues who are deaf or hard of hearing. And where needed, we'll self-describe what we look like, as this can be helpful for colleagues who are blind or have low vision; however, there is a moratorium on comparing oneself to Beyoncé.

5. The maximum time allowed to "give people a few minutes to show up" is 90 seconds. That's the time social scientists have determined is the threshold for human endurance of awkward silence punctured by occasional coughing and small talk.

6. We will not judge one another's clothing, unless they have racist or other objectionable messages. If business-casual helps you get into the mindset for work, great. But even if POTUS calls, I'm not changing out of this "Hummusapien" T-shirt I've been wearing for the past four days.

7. If you have a dog or a cat, it is mandatory they make an appearance. For everyone's general well-being, not only are pets welcome, they are now required to show up and do something adorable, which may include just standing there and being fluffy.

8. We will not judge one another's room messiness, choice of art, or need to use virtual backgrounds. Yes, that is a pile of unfolded laundry on my bed next to a plate with half an enchilada—I'm saving it for later!—under a Final Fantasy VI poster.

9. If "popcorn" is used, it must be used accurately. "Popcorn" must refer to giving people the time to speak up whenever they're ready, NOT when one person speaks then calls on the next person to speak. Do not say "please introduce yourself, then

popcorn to the next person," as that makes no sense. For that, use "pass the baton" or ball, or hacky sack, or whatever.

10. Anyone can turn off their camera, and those who can leave it on should try to leave it on. If you need to turn off your camera for various reasons, feel free to do so. If you can leave it on, though, it can be helpful to colleagues who are deaf or hard of hearing to be able to see your face when you talk. Also, it creates a sense of community to know that all of us look haggard and run-down.

11. We will not judge one another for natural displays of emotions. However, if you anticipate you're going to scream, beat your chest, and fall down on the floor, weeping in anguish and despair at the state of humanity and existence during a meeting, please make sure you are on mute.

12. Above all, we will be gracious, patient, and understanding with one another. It's been a brutal several years. We get brain fog. We will be late or accidentally miss meetings. Sometimes we will forget the name of a colleague, and then they're like "we've known each other for 17 year; I drove you to get your vasectomy." We're in a pandemic. These things happen. Let's be kind to one another.

Add your suggestions below. Now, if anyone needs me, I'll be staring out the window, shaking my fist at the sky in futile resentment before my next meeting.

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