



## Virtual Meetings Provide a Great Option for Rural Enterprises

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Living and working in rural areas doesn't always provide for optimal opportunities to meet face to face. Whether it be many miles between colleagues or inclement weather, virtual meetings have been designed to help overcome these obstacles.

Virtual meetings have become quite popular and an effective option when meeting face to face isn't an option. Since living and working in Wyoming, I have relied on virtual meetings often to maintain and conduct business without delaying the progress. Virtual meetings are handy and can be effective when facilitated well. There are a few things you can do to ensure you get the most out of your virtual meeting. Maintaining an effective virtual meeting requires dedication and discipline from all the virtual participants.

### Identify a Platform

Identify and use a platform that everyone has access to and is relatively robust. Most virtual meeting platforms available today

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### Tip of the Month



#### Beware of Group Think

Group think is a phenomenon that comes into play when people work together. It is the tendency of a group of decision makers to agree on a decision or join together around a policy or person without questioning the legitimacy of the policy or decision. People in the group sit back and let others do the work, they instinctively mimic 'other' opinions and lose sight of their own or there is a very vocal dominant participant who enables others to succumb to peer pressure. What results? Poor decisions that can harm an organization.

Group cohesiveness is a great thing, but group think takes this concept to the extreme. This often happens after a period of success. Be aware of the fact that group think happens. Awareness enables you to identify it.

When your group is becoming unanimous in its decisions, these are steps a proactive leader can take:

**Step 1:** Select a "devil's advocate." This person is given the task to encourage alternative comments and ask questions which broadens consideration.

**Step 2:** Encourage the use of committees or a task force to assess decisions.

**Step 3:** Maintain the right perspective as a leader; humility is key here. Manage by walking around and asking those on the front lines to give their feedback on how decisions have affected things.

**Step 4:** Bring in a business coach or consultant for an "outsider" neutral perspective.



*Other methods for keeping the audience engaged during the webinar include taking a poll or asking a question and asking for answers via chat.*

allow for Power Point presentations, video conferencing and the ability to record the meeting. Prior to hosting a meeting, the leader or facilitator of the meeting should be comfortable and familiar with the program in case others need help. Nothing is more frustrating than logging on to participate in a virtual meeting and having to troubleshoot time after time.

### **Establish Ground Rules**

Set clear ground rules for everyone to follow. Rules and procedures influence how a group operates and governs itself. “The best practice for a virtual team is for the manager to establish procedural work rules and Internet etiquette, rules that dictate how the group interacts,” according to George Root from Demand Media. The group should review the ground rules prior to the start of the meeting. Additional resources suggest conducting a mock meeting to practice group procedures and understanding how to function as a team if recurring virtual meetings are needed. Whether you decide to do a mock meeting or not is up to your team, however understanding the ground rules and, more specifically, exercising them, is vital to the success of your meeting.

### **Pre-Work**

Prior to the actual virtual meeting, the coordinator of the meeting should send the agenda out to everyone participating in the meeting a couple days in advance. This allows for feedback and alterations to be made to the agenda if needed. This also provides time for meeting participants to prepare their thoughts. Remember to include the meeting instructions and log in information. Preparation work prior to the meeting increases engagement from participants as well as makes effective use of everyone’s time. Meetings in today’s world are a must, however, wasting everyone’s time during a meeting doesn’t have to be an option.

### **Engagement During the Meeting**

The ability and tendency to “tune out” or “multi-task” during a virtual meeting is quite tempting; staying engaged and present is an ongoing task. Laura Stack, author and president of The Productivity Pro, a time-management training firm, suggests and encourages participants to submit their questions on the topic before the program begins. She also recommends other methods for keeping the audience engaged during the webinar, such as taking a poll or asking a question and asking for answers via chat.

Virtual meetings are a great method to conduct meetings when meeting face to face isn’t a viable option. Being prepared and understanding best practices for conducting a virtual meeting will only enhance participants’ experiences and overall success of the meeting.

Sources:

<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/five-practices-virtual-team-effectiveness-13569.html>

<http://www.inc.com/guides/2010/12/5-tips-for-conducting-a-virtual-meeting.html>

