



Questions to Make Your Virtual Meetings More Effective

Few consider meetings the highlight of their workday – more probably consider it the bane of their work life. It is true that meetings, while important and potentially useful, aren't always very good. Sadly, now that most meetings are being held virtually, it hasn't gotten any better. The challenge is how to have more effective virtual meetings. And part of the answer is the questions you use.

The pregnant pause, the uncertainty of who should speak next, the lack of engagement – all are common occurrences in virtual meetings. While the causes of these challenges vary, the solution is often to ask the right type of question in the right way. Here are tips to help you with both the question approach and the questions themselves.

Four Question Approaches

Think about the flow of most any meeting. Questions will be asked by the group and most will wait for you, the leader or facilitator, to answer. If you do, you aren't creating an engaged dialogue, but rather encouraging a question and answer session that won't create new solutions or greater participation. Before we get to the types of questions, let's look at four approaches for extending the conversation, removing the uncertainty of who should respond, and reducing the concern of interrupting others.

- **Overhead Questions.** These are the questions asked inviting anyone to respond. The value is in giving anyone the opportunity to weigh in, but these are overused in virtual meetings. Consider asking them at two points in time – to kick off a discussion and to extend it once it is going well. The problem with these is when they are the only type of question used, and they lead to silence, as know one wants to respond first or knows if they should.
- **Directed Questions.** The opposite of the overhead question is the directed one. This is the question asked specifically of one person. Because of the lack of visual clues in a virtual meeting (even with webcams on), these can

be used more often than in a regular meeting. Always say the person's name before you ask, giving them a moment more to think, and to keep them missing the question. The directed question can also be used very effectively asked to a subgroup (i.e. the sales team or the western region) rather than to an individual.

- **Redirected Questions.** Imagine that someone asks you a question during the meeting. Your natural reaction might be to answer. But if you want discussion and engagement, resist that inclination, and instead turn the question back to the group. You can redirect it overhead, or to a specific person or group.
- **Reflective Questions.** Reflective questions are those you reflect back to the person who asks. Often when people ask about something, they have an opinion or perspective they might want to share. Use reflective questions to encourage people to share, not as a challenge or to avoid answering their query.

Three Types of Questions

Now that you have some strategies for how to ask questions, let's explore the types of questions that will help you get good responses, and encourage people to stay engaged. After all, it is hard to have effective virtual meetings without engaged participants.

- **Ask for opinions.** People may not have "the answer" but they most always have an opinion. Ask people what they think, or how they feel about a situation, problem, or possible solution.
- **Ask for experience.** People have experience and when you value it, you engage them and encourage them to bring their best to the meeting. Questions like: What have you tried? What was your experience? Can help you elicit great responses and create effective virtual meetings.
- **Ask for data.** To make good decisions (which is likely one reason you are meeting), you need the data. Ask people for the specific information, the numbers and the details. After all, if you had all of that already, you might not be meeting.

The first two types of questions set people up for success – they likely have opinions and relevant experience. By asking questions like these you make it safer and easier for people to participate. Regardless of which type you ask, make sure you are using questions to create new perspectives and lead the group to better decisions. Always view questions as a tool for creating effective virtual meetings that get great results – not as weapon to force people to pay attention.

While not your only tool, questions are a powerful part of the toolkit of a virtual meeting facilitator. Hopefully now your toolkit will be more useful to you in creating effective virtual meetings.

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