

Ah, the joys of videoconferencing!

By LAURA RUBENSTEIN

With so many people now homebound, videoconferences have become the new communication norm. From board meetings to happy hours to religious services, video-conference technology has allowed us to stay connected, continue business, remain observant and socialize.

Personally, I enjoy getting a sneak peek into people's homes and it's a fun way to break the ice when people stand up to reveal they've paired sweatpants with their button-down oxford, or their unsuspecting spouse, child or pet pops up on the screen during a call.

I get a kick out of watching first-time users adapt to the technology, too. My father-in-law, for example, likes to answer a FaceTime call by putting the cellphone up to his ear. Often the first several minutes of a Zoom or WebEx meeting involve providing instructions to someone to unmute the audio or switch on their video camera. That assumes the participant has the right technology in the first place. Inevitably, dozens of minutes are lost for the one-on-one tutorial while others on the video try to keep straight faces.

My Aunt Marion recently took up 25 minutes of our family's Passover Zoom Seder when she attempted, unsuccessfully, to join in 10 minutes late. During that time, she called her son and my brother twice each only to learn that she didn't have the right technology. She ultimately participated through the host's cellphone using the speaker. Next year in Jerusalem!

Angles and lighting are also important on video calls. Should you tell someone when they appear as a silhouette? You know, that's when the light is brighter behind them and dimmer in the front. Or how about the person whose eyes and forehead you see, but not their mouth? Do you suggest they lower their camera or find different lighting? What about when the participant rests their iPad in their lap so we get the view of their neck and chin while their hand covers up the speaker when they talk? Have you ever become dizzy watching participants swivel in their chairs during an hour-long call?

While I'm certainly no expert, I've been participating and hosting videoconference calls for the last year. When I'm



home preparing for a video call, I first make sure the dog is someone else's responsibility. I then make sure the rest of the family knows what time my videoconference starts, where I'll be located and how long it will last. Finally, I look at myself in the mirror and figure out what I need to do not to look like I just rolled out of bed (e.g., hair, makeup and non-sweatshirt top).

News flash – if you want to be taken seriously on a business call, ditch the athleisurewear that doubles as your pajamas. Instead, wear something on screen that you'd wear on a business casual day at the office. Skip the tie and blazer – that just looks silly. A button-down blouse, collared shirt or company-branded top is most suitable.

If anything has been discovered through this ordeal, it is that videoconferencing is here to stay, so make sure you have the right technology now and know how to use it before your client asks you to send a teleconference meeting invitation with you as the host. Let's use this time that we're in quarantine and isolation to get past the learning curve so when we return to our workplace we can again hide in our office and videochat with clients. Stay safe!

(This column is intended as a lighthearted read and is in no way meant to minimize the very serious coronavirus pandemic that has affected the health, lives and finances of so many of our friends and loved ones.)

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