



Online Etiquette: Is Your Home Working?

Article | March 26, 2020

As we end another week of working remotely, I am reminded of the host of distractions I've juggled so far—my family popping into meetings or passing by in the background, being distracted by my phone and countless pings from chat boxes. It wasn't the same as being around a boardroom table where the ambiance is set to a steady and expected degree of professionalism.

However, it highlighted one of the small but significant changes we're all currently experiencing. As our new normal shifts from corporate attire and meeting rooms to sweatpants and the kitchen table, we start letting colleagues and clients into our homes—places we would never otherwise take them. Therefore, it raises the point that we all need to be mindful, more than ever, of our online etiquette.

AUTHOR

Tessa Desatnik
Director

First, there's the background. Ask yourself this question—are you presenting people with a background you would want to see?

Video conferences should be approached as if you're preparing for a date with someone you're trying to impress—before the date you, hopefully, clean the house and decorate the space with some attention to detail. Hold



the same attention when you're connecting online. The meeting may be happening in isolation, but the professionalism should still be maintained. Whereas the boardroom had magical elves that came at night and made the space spotless, at home you're on your own.

Next, think about camera angle and lighting. No matter how powerful a person's message is, it's going to be distracting if all you can see is a bobbing chin, the top of a head or a dark silhouette. By centering your image like a bust sculpture—head and shoulders—you frame not only yourself, but also your message. If you are unsure how it looks, just ask. It's far better to clear up distractions at the beginning of the meeting than be the 'distracting chin' throughout the call.

Then there are actual distractions, external and self-created. Many people remember [Robert Kelly's infamous TV interview](#) that went viral, when his children gatecrashed his explanation of South Korean politics while live on the BBC.

External distractions will always be there—kids are home from school, pets roam and make noise, and others may be around trying to hold their own meeting. Try creating a dedicated space to work from and communicate the importance of this space to the rest of the family. In cases where these distractions can't be managed, set the scene upfront at the beginning of the meeting. People get it; we are all experiencing the same difficulties, which means our ability to empathize is currently sky high. Sometimes a child or pet popping into the screenshot is refreshing, it humanizes the meeting. But remember, always be professional—this is a virtual boardroom after all.

Self-created distractions are a no-go even if you're sitting around a boardroom table. Unless there is something urgent you must stay connected to, paying attention to a cellphone while someone else is talking in a meeting is has always been disrespectful – in a boardroom, at a dinner or on a video call. And it's easy to be inattentive; shifting our operations online means we're swamped by notifications and pop-ups from every angle.

Therefore, hold the meeting as sacrosanct and try disconnecting from the noise. If there is something you must do, then share it upfront. Remember, the phrase working from home is important. You may be at home, but it's still work. The idea is not to stifle your natural authentic self or eradicate your reality. Rather, think about the standards you and your organization hold and apply them. And, if you want, leave a wish under your pillow when you go to sleep that the magical cleaning elves make a turn past your house.

What challenges are you experiencing when it comes to remote meetings? Since we're in this together, let's try and give each other the best chance of success. Please [join the conversation about this topic on LinkedIn](#). And for more on this topic, please stay connected with me. I would also love to hear from you.

Recommended for you:

COVID-19: Are You Hearing the Emotions of the Organization? [Learn more.](#)

Our Contributors

Tessa Desatnik is a Director with the Organizational & Talent Development practice of B. Riley Farber. She focuses on improving the communication skills and confidence of clients—including presentation skills, executive presence, vocal



technique, and personal leadership. Tessa can be reached at tdesatnik@brileyfin.com or at 437.294.4655
