July 13, 2023

Communication Strategies for Remote Teams

Attendee Advocate

We are talking less, so our communication, when it happens, needs to mean more

Our transition from in-person to online changes how we communicate.

In this series, we'll talk about pragmatic communication strategies inspired by our Meetings Done Right inclusion cards.

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Upcoming sessions

The **meeting host** is responsible for using people's time with purpose (March 23)

A **devil's advocate** creates spaces where teams speak with candor (April 20)
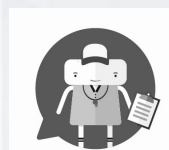

The **parking lot attendant** harnesses the energy in group situations (May 18)

An **attendee advocate** builds healthy conversational environments (July 13)

In my opinion supports all kinds of voices to ensure we are all being heard (TBD)

Together we'll walk through some of TXI's favorite **inclusive facilitation techniques** (TBD)

The attendee advocate is a **concierge for participants**

Cultivate a welcoming, supportive experience

〉 Plan for access needs by default (turn on transcriptions, use tools like Otter.ai)

〉 Ensure people have important context prior to meeting.

〉 Confirm access to shared materials (including whiteboards).

〉 Check calendar invites to confirm "right" people are in the room.

〉 Amplify async communication during synchronous conversations.

〉 Troubleshoot individual technical issues.

〉 Broadcast information post-meeting if appropriate.

Participant experiences impact outcomes

| We used to think	Now we can see
We can easily make accommodations if people ask	Proactively planning for accessible interactions means people don't have to self-disclose
People are resilient and will flex ad hoc	Intentionally supporting various interaction styles increases innovation by amplifying people's voices
Attendees need very little prep	Providing materials in advance supports multiple processing styles and optimizes time spent together.

Prioritizing people, prioritizes progress

People-first conversations bring multiple benefits:

- Increased innovation
- Decreased risk
- Improved engagement

All positively impact the company's financial health.
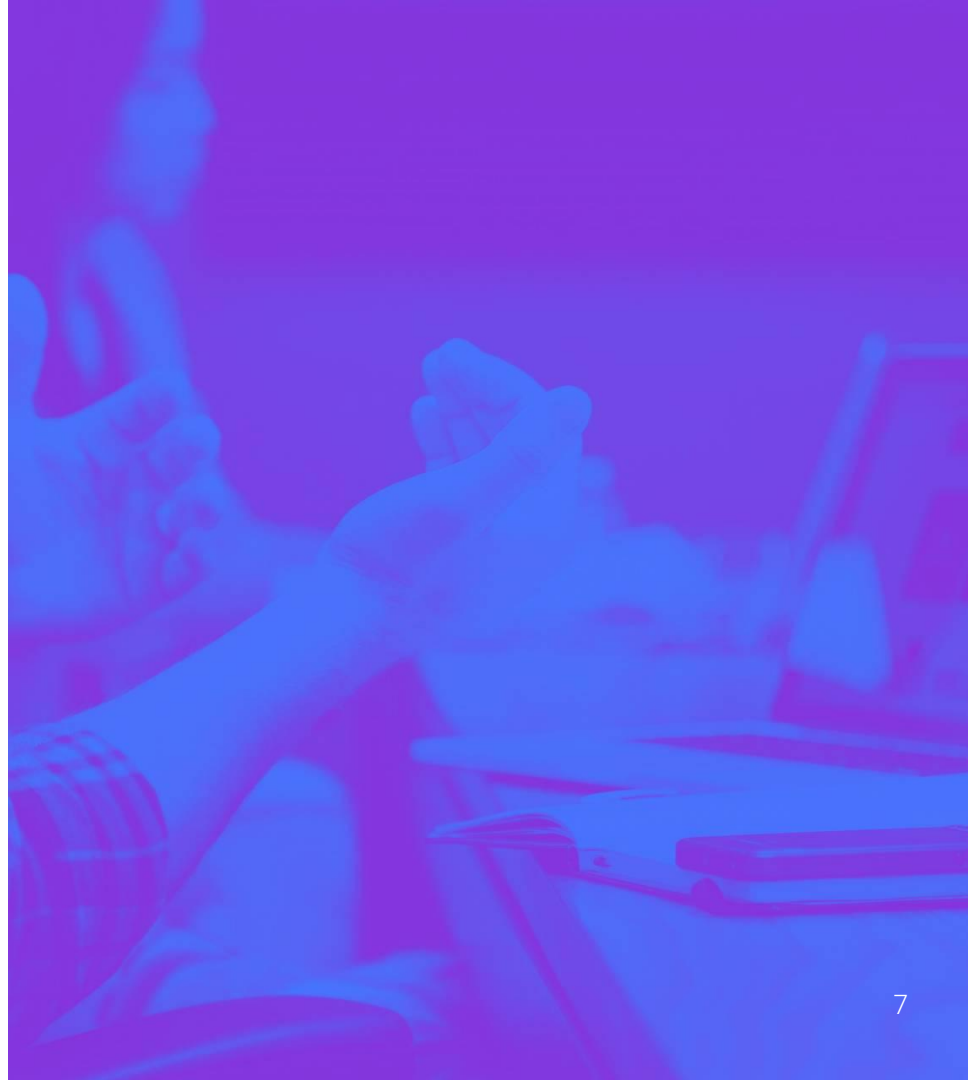
Biggest meeting challenges

1. Off topic conversations
2. One person dominating
3. Lack of clear next steps
4. Not starting on time
5. Tech and A/V issues

Source: Martin, Matt "The State of Meetings in 2020" Last accessed July 12, 2023, https://www.getclockwise.com/blog/the-state-of-meetings-in-2020

Strategic Communication Principles

45% of respondents described [participant] **lack of preparation** as a "meeting pet peeve"

Strive for balance

Individual support for attendee advocates looks like:

> Reading prep materials before the meeting.

> Arriving on time to meetings.

> Respecting a "no thanks" or "pass" during conversations.

> Committing to collaborative note-taking.

> Understanding group silence is not a proxy for consent.

When we lead, we can't always see the periphery

Facilitator support for the attendee advocate looks like:

› Scheduling a pre-meeting gut check on what might create participation barriers.

› Including introductions if there's 1 or more people participating who haven't previously met.

› Starting on time.

› Deferring to someone else to monitor the chat.

› Soliciting feedback around how an experience supported (or didn't support) an individual's participation.

Respect pauses & transitions

Team support for attendee advocates looks like:

> Observing norms around speaking order.

> Explicitly asking if there's anything else around a topic before moving on.

> If it doesn't compromise focus, keep chat open & actively follow exchanges.

> Where appropriate, recap key points in the chat.

> Curb unrelated side chatter.

representation
≠
participation

Strategic Communication in Practice

Guidelines for identifying an advocate

The advocate role is inherently subject to bias, because at its core, it means making decisions about what's best for the group.

Successful advocates:

> Multi task (listen, monitor chat, provide participant support).

> Gut check themselves to be sure what they're doing ultimately benefits the group.

> Catch up on content later since they may need to address issues during meetings.

> Confidently push back on deviating from norms "just this once" unless there is a compelling reason.

Cultivate a personalized experience

Gain awareness of people's participation preferences and find ways to amplify those opportunities.

Know if participants

› Feel comfortable being called on by name

› Prefer to speak vs comment in the chat

› Answer in the moment, or prefer async processing time

So that advocates

› Leverage people's social comfort to jump start conversation

› Focus people's attention on the right channel

› Avoid putting someone on the spot

Advocate for participation over attendance

If there are

- ❯ 5 or more people on the invite
- ❯ Unrelated topics on the agenda
- ❯ 60 minutes scheduled
- ❯ Invites sent within 24 hours

Try

- ❯ Recording a video and only meeting for discussion
- ❯ Having people on standby and joining for part of the meeting
- ❯ Timeboxing each topic to ensure everything gets discussed
- ❯ Asking if the meeting can be rescheduled for 48 - 72 hours out

Calendar with care

July 2023 < >

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
25	26	27	28	29	30	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	1	2	3	4	5

Chicago Time   5:22pm 🌤️

United Kingdo...   11:22pm 🌙

Toronto Time   6:22pm 🌙

Rotate optimal scheduling across team time-zones

Bookend meetings where possible to avoid breaking up individual focus blocks

Keep teams accountable for taking **bio & stretch breaks**

Respect core team hours (especially for parents & caretakers)

Tuesdays
are the best day for meeting attendance

The best time for meetings* is

Attendance = 2:30 pm
Decisiveness = 10 am - Noon

*probably said by people who didn't work remotely on a team with members in multiple time zones / have school pickup / like uninterrupted focus time

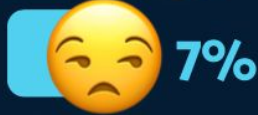Source: deBara, Deanna "What is the Most Productive Time to Schedule a Meeting?", www.hourly.io, Last accessed July 12, 2023.

Plan intentionally

Is there an **agenda available 48 hours in advance**?

Is there a Zoom / Teams / Google Meet **meeting link in the calendar invite**?

Are **pre-reads available** with enough advance notice?

Did we create opportunities for people to **participate async**?

Encourage participation through selective invitations

Attendee advocates can protect focus by making sure that being in the room isn't the only way to guarantee input and impact.

Sometimes the **best way to advocate for people is to keep calendars clear**.

Pair with the meeting host to:

- Ruthlessly prioritize async participation
- Reduce information distribution meetings
- Amplify decisions made in meetings to reduce pressure to attend
- Get feedback from people who opted out of the meeting to understand how to adapt

Create low impact, low effort ways for participants to signal mood

It's important to understand the energy and emotions people bring into conversations. Be explicit about checking in with where people are before the meeting starts..

Communicate through color
Use shaded backgrounds to signal if a participant wants to listen / observe, or actively contribute to the conversation at hand.

Take a temperature check
Ask each participant to raise 1 - 5 fingers indicating how much energy they have at the moment.

Just ask
Depending on the team, people may feel comfortable disclosing. You can lower the stakes for this with an easy prompt such as "if your day today was a movie, what genre would it be?"

Help participants know what success looks like

Treat people's time as you would a product or service.

Be clear about how the group will know that an interaction has been successful.

> Context shared.

> New process introduced.

> Decision made.

> Team unblocked.

Headwinds & Gentle Waves

1. Find your name on the board.

   Add 1 - 2 stickies for headwinds(what will slow us down)

2. Add 1 - 2 stickies for gentle waves (what moves us sustainably forward)

3. When we're done, we'll take a moment to read each other's input & use that to help shape our participation in the day.

Headwinds
What slows us down? Makes the day harder? Keeps us from achieving our goals?

Gentle Waves
What keeps us moving forward? Makes the day productive?

Antonio

Dael

Esther
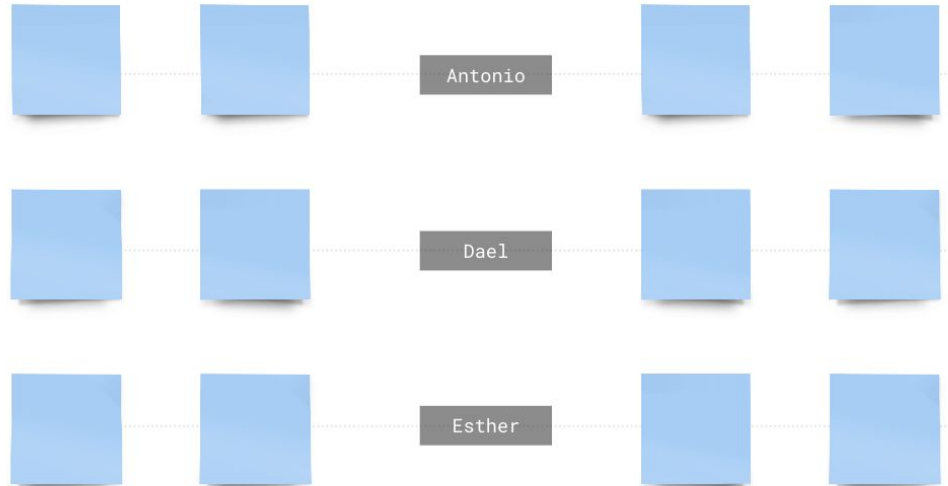
Monitor for what can be misunderstood

Step in and proactively ask for clarification.

Be the "meeting toddler" and explicitly ask for clear information. Answer "no," to prompts like "does everyone know what X is?"

Prompts include:

› "I don't understand, explain it to me like I'm 5!"

› "How does will this part work?"

Avoid abbreviations

There will always be a "newest" person in the room.

Avoid creating an unnecessary sense of embarrassment by gently re-directing use of jargon.
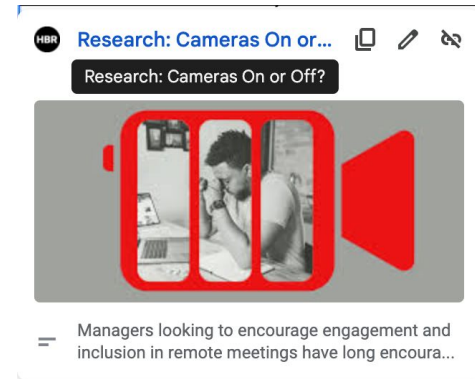
Strategies include:

› Defining an acronym as part of a follow up question.

› Typing out abbreviation in a chat window.

› Asking "What does ABC stand for?" even when you know.

To be seen, or not to be seen

Attendee advocates help manage camera norms and expectations:

› Announce camera on preferences *before* meetings start.

› Amplify any on-camera expectations

○ During intros? When you ask / answer questions? When you present?

› Gently curb feedback that involves commenting on facial expressions.

Note: camera opt out should be carefully considered if access needs indicate otherwise.

Research: Cameras On or...

Research: Cameras On or Off?

Managers looking to encourage engagement and inclusion in remote meetings have long encoura...

Source: Gabriel, Allison S., Robertson, Daron, Shockley, Kristen "Research: Cameras On or Off?" Last accessed July 12, 2023.

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Gut check how invested people are continuing a conversation

〉 Don't mistake the amount of conversation about a topic as a proxy for (mis) alignment.

〉 Be explicit about asking if there's more to discuss before moving to the next topic.

〉 When discussion seems to drag on, try using "levels of care" survey.

○ High levels of care = consider more conversation

○ Low levels of care = consider moving to the parking lot

Communicate the outcomes to folks who aren't in the room

Advocates can help decrease the cognitive load required from meeting participants and folks who opted out of joining:

> Confirm timely distribution of notes to participants.

> Share action items & owners as promptly as possible.

> Summarize next steps.

> Forward a high level meeting recap including decisions made to people who opted out of joining.

> Manage "just enough" documentation that people who are interested can self-serve information.

Employees report they could skip 41% of meetings led by a leader not in their department or team, as long as they were kept in the loop.

Source: Report. The Cost of Unnecessary Meeting Attendance. Last accessed July 12, 2023.:

28% of people in the U.S. say **digital interruptions** from social media or instant messaging platforms **affects their productivity**

Protect people from "the ping"

Strive to optimize communication in ways that don't cause "death by 1000 pings"

> Configure reminder prompts to fire at the same time each day.

> Strive for gathering in the moment success metric feedback vs follow up surveys.

> Update to do's and action items at a consistent cadence (e.g. before 10AM or after 3:30PM).

Have questions?
**We love to talk about team communication.
Find us at txigital.com.**

TXII