Zoom Lives: How to Read the Room When You’re Not in the Room

By: Rocio Bonet

When You’re Not in the Room

Zoom does not change everything, but to be effective in the new medium, we must accept our new Zoom lives. Before we can read the room, we must accept our new Zoom lives. Before we can read the room, we must accept the fact that most of our interaction takes place online. The good news is that video conferences have the advantage here. Presenters can poll participants as they discuss various topics, making the meeting interactive.

Needless to say, creating a sense of belonging and camaraderie is difficult when most team interaction is online and having a voice in the discussion, you won’t have to work so hard to read the room, because the room will be right in front of you. Furthermore, being able to see people’s body language can help you understand their position on various topics.

In this manner, well run online meetings can reduce the number of meetings required to get things done. The same sense of accountability and productivity can happen in a virtual meeting as in a physical one.

The challenge is that it is equally important to understand how to learn and interact online. In a physical meeting, face-to-face interaction allows you to observe people nonverbally and understand their emotional states. Without this, you have to rely on reading words to get a sense of how others are feeling. In the Zoom era, you have to be careful not to interpret eye rolls or side glances as nothing more than a sign of agreement or disapproval. Whether you are in a Zoom meeting or not, you must learn to read people and understand their nonverbal cues.

The good news is that video conferences have the advantage here. Presenters can poll participants as they discuss various topics, making the meeting interactive. However, the same challenges exist online as they do in-person meetings: you have to be careful not to interpret eye rolls or side glances as nothing more than a sign of agreement or disapproval.

The key to improving online meetings is to make sure everyone understands their role and responsibilities. A good leader keeps the group engaged by asking questions and soliciting feedback. If you are in a Zoom meeting, you can use the “Raise Your Hand” feature to let the presenter know you have a question or comment. This will allow the presenter to acknowledge you and address your concerns.

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