

ZOOM: ONE YEAR IN

Evaluating the Relationship.

It has been almost a year since COVID-19 revolutionized our working landscape in the United States. Companies and workers alike have grappled with changes to staff structure, daily routines, and the increase of time spent at home. While we're approaching a new phase in the pandemic with vaccine distribution and the promise of spring around the corner, we haven't slowed when it comes to our new primary mode of corporate communication: the video call. Zoom, Skype, Teams, and WebEx all seem to be here to stay, at least for the time being. Like in all relationships, anniversaries are a great time to reflect; and after a year of video calling, it's time to break down what's working, what's not, and what we can do better.

In an industry like consulting, the video call has major benefits, especially when compared to the traditional phone call. When everyone from a Client is working remotely, they might be less wary of hiring an out-of-region consultant, something they otherwise might not have considered. In fact, due to so many staff working remotely, video calls allow a remote consultant to be equally connected as the Client's own employees, even if they're a time zone away. This is all without the cost of travel (and the loss of productivity due to spotty airplane WiFi). It's even a step-up from the previous standard of calling-in to a meeting when you're not onsite. In a remote Client/Consultant relationship, the video adds a new level of connectivity, and you also get the added bonus of non-verbal cues: a thumbs-up is your new best friend to confirm something quickly – no need to unmute.

For its benefits, the video call has its disadvantages. For one, it requires a protected, dedicated working space. If the only space for your work from home desk is on the wall opposite your kitchen, you might have the occasional child, significant other, or roommate grabbing lunch, inadvertently in the background of an important video call or presentation. The video call adds pressure to ensure your home space is consistently tidy, serving as the backdrop for work calls; something you might not have intended when you designed your home space. A virtual background is a great, inexpensive way to help with this. Some are taking more extreme measures - moving into larger homes and apartments, building makeshift room dividers, or even buying a prefabricated work from home office sheds for their backyard. Unfortunately, these solutions aren't equally attainable, and are more accessible to those who can afford to expand or already had plenty of workspace to begin.

Chances are, after a year of video calling, you've taken some time to evaluate your work from home setup and make a few necessary improvements. It's important to re-evaluate your video habits, too. Here are a few tips on how to upgrade your space and improve your video etiquette.

- Invest in a camera cover. No one wants to be caught off-guard by joining a meeting they didn't realize would have video on by default. Check with your IT department first – they might be able to send you one specifically fit for your computer, and if not, you can order a pack online for a few dollars.
- Speaking of the camera – make sure you look at it! There's nothing that says 'I'm distracted' more than looking at yourself when someone is speaking. Believe me – you can always tell. Plus, looking into the camera will help you stress less about your appearance, preventing that all-too-familiar Zoom fatigue.

- Make sure your setup is ergonomic. This one is important. Your camera should be at eye-height (remember what I said above about looking into it?), so if you're working from a laptop, you might want to pick up a laptop stand (or get a sturdy stack of books) to raise it up a few inches so you're not hunkered over all day. Grab an external keyboard and mouse so you can still type easily. Want a second monitor but not looking to shell out the cash? Consider repurposing an older TV – a 22"-24" one is about the same size as most monitors, and all you need is the proper VGA or HDMI cable to get yourself set up. Your second monitor should be at eye-height, too, so stack up a few more books to make sure you keep that spine healthy. Check out [this article on ergonomics from Mayo Clinic](#) for more information.
- Last, and most important: Be patient and understanding. Resist apologizing for your dog or your kids in the background. We're all doing our best! Look at it as a great opportunity to share a bit about your life – after all, building relationships is foundational to doing business, and we're all missing a bit of that pre-meeting small talk.

I don't know what the future of remote work holds. What I do know, as someone whose pre-pandemic life involved a lot of time on the phone with Clients, is that I've appreciated the added interaction and familiarity that video calling brings in the Client/Consultant relationship. Despite its drawbacks, the video call adds a layer of connection that allows deeper communication, without which business could not as easily be done. When it comes to the relationship with Zoom, I'm choosing to appreciate the good things, and take it one day at a time.

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