

The **NON-OBVIOUS**
GUIDE TO

Virtual Meetings & Remote Work

(When You Just Can't
Be There In Person)

By **ROHIT BHARGAVA**



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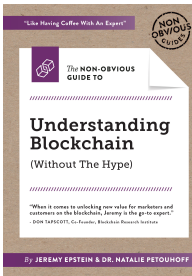
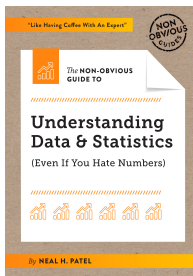
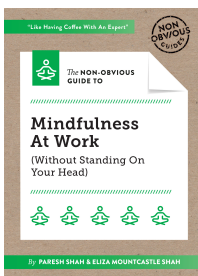
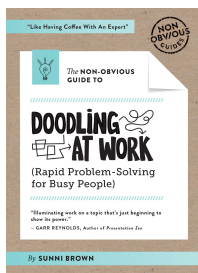
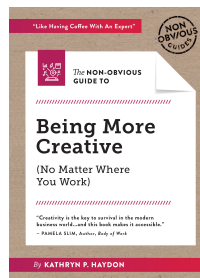
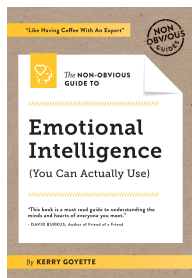
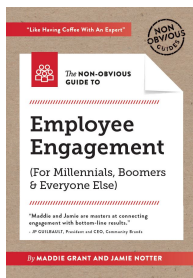
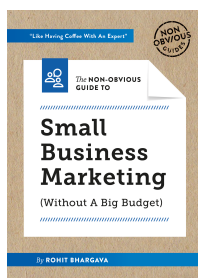
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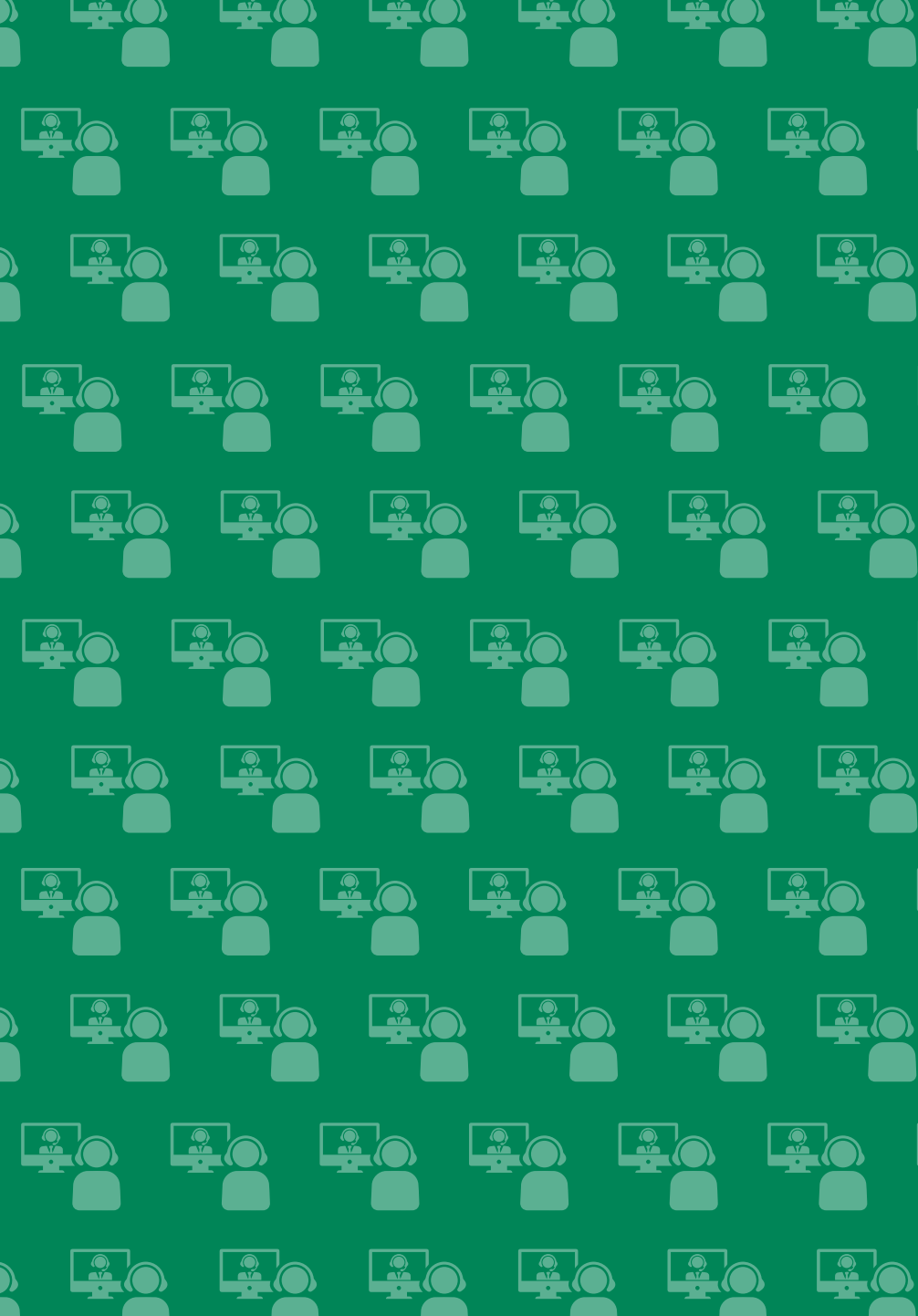
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DEDICATION

For those brave enough to reinvent
how they work every day.

Read this book to learn how to avoid distractions and be more productive when doing remote work. Whether you need to collaborate with people virtually, deliver a compelling virtual presentation, or lead a remote team, this book will give you the step-by-step advice on how to do it.



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FOREWORD

How to Work in a Disrupted World

If you picked up this book, you are not a dummy.

Many business guides treat you like an idiot. Some even say so on the cover. This book is different.

The **Non-Obvious Guides** all focus on sharing advice that you haven't heard before. In this guide you'll learn how to succeed in a world where working remotely and holding effective virtual meetings has become more important than ever.

This book was written and researched during the COVID-19 pandemic which already has and will continue to change how we all work. While the future of work remains uncertain, we know it will take a far more flexible mindset than ever before.

Whether you are used to going into an office every day or you are an entrepreneur already accustomed to working remotely, this book is a compilation of useful insights to help you be more successful.

The rapid changes in the world are dictating that we each become more adaptable and willing to reinvent how we work. It is not an easy challenge to face.

The good news is, there are people who have done it and who continue to do it today. And this guide is a testament to just how many of them are willing to generously share their best advice with you.

You can manage this disruption. We all can. As long as we continue to be generous with each other.

Rohit Bhargava
Washington DC, May 2020

How to Read This Book

Throughout this book you will find links to helpful bonus content online. All the resources shared in this book can be downloaded at this URL:

DOWNLOAD LINK:

www.nonobvious.com/guides/virtual/resources

You also will see these symbols, which refer to content that will further your learning.

FOLLOW THE ICONS:



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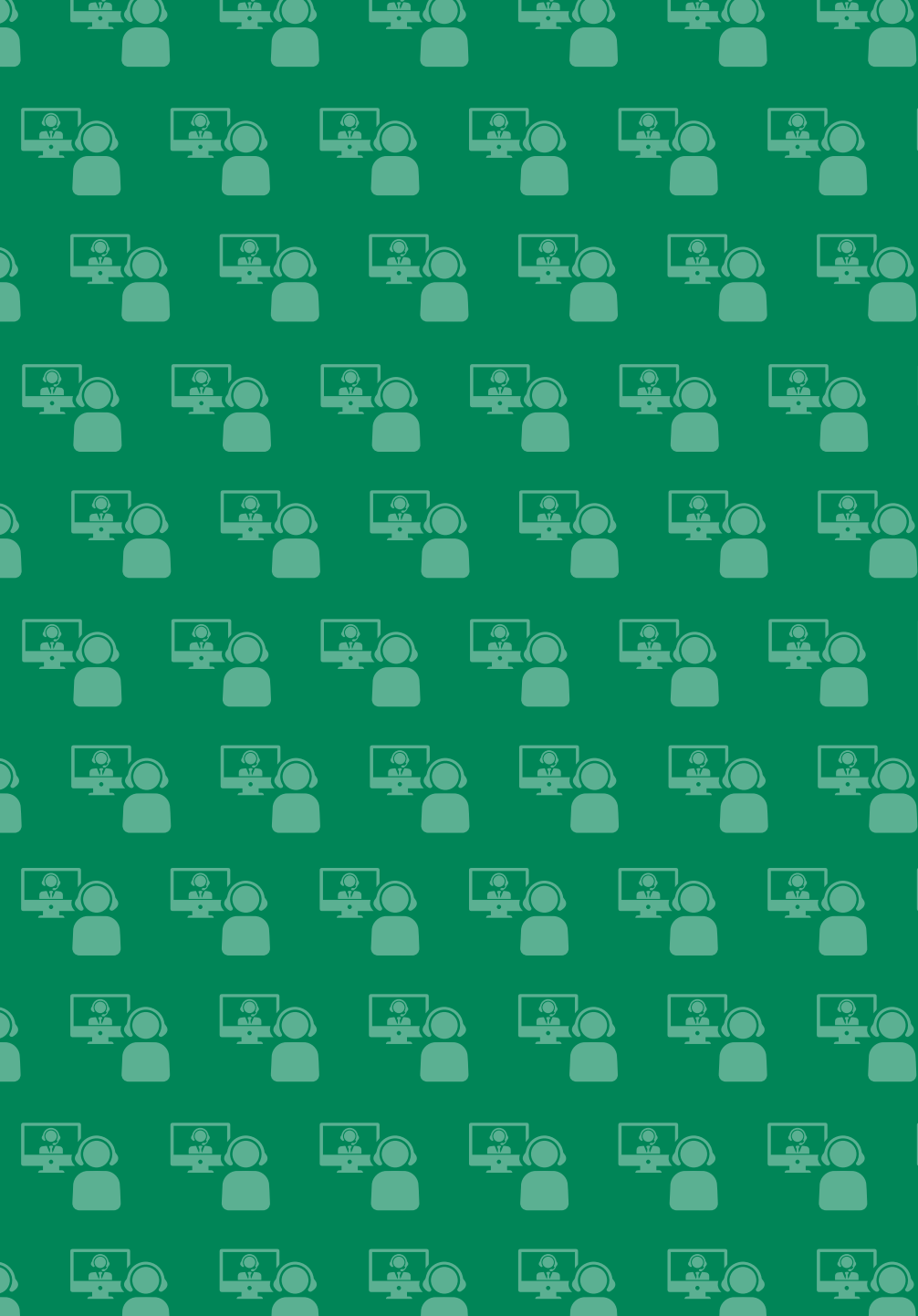


→ CHAPTER SUMMARY:

Quick takeaways and important points.

In this book, you will learn how to ...

- Avoid distractions and be more productive no matter what happens around you.
- Choose the right technology to get things done more quickly and easily.
- Assess your working style to divide your day between deep vs. shallow work.
- Conquer the loneliness and isolation that often comes with remote work.
- Deliver a compelling virtual presentation in a meeting, webinar or online training session.
- Collaborate with people you've never met and colleagues working remotely.
- Manage and prevent conflicts in a virtual setting with more emotional intelligence.
- Effectively lead a virtual team and improve accountability.
- Prepare for the virtual future of work and be more flexible.



Introduction

It was the winter of 2004, and the large marketing agency where I worked had just moved into a new office in downtown Washington, D.C.

As part of the move, our seating chart was being completely changed. The day the assignments came out, we all rushed to read the list as if we were high schoolers checking the cast list for the winter musical.

It was a good day. I had been given an office with a window. In the new building, those were prized possessions, so earning one of my own was a big deal.

It was the first time in my life that I ever had an office. It also would be the last.

For the next several years, that office became like a second home. Colleagues would come by to have impromptu brainstorming sessions, post-work drinks, and therapeutic venting sessions after a difficult client call.

The office was where our team bonding happened.

A few years later, my wife and I were expecting our second baby, and I had just been offered a publishing deal to write my first book, *Personality Not Included*.

To manage the workload, I went to my boss and made the unusual request to have every Friday off for five months to write the book. He agreed.

During that time, I had been assigned to a team that worked nationally, so I was spending a day a week working from our Manhattan office in addition to writing from home on Fridays. A few weeks before my book deadline, I received a brief email from the head of our D.C. office.

It was a short note informing me that since I was never in my office, it was being reassigned to someone who would use it more regularly. I was devastated and angry.

That was *my* office, the one I had worked hard to earn. This wasn't fair. I immediately felt the urge to fight to keep it until my wife logically explained that if I did that, I would probably have to go into the office more often to justify why I needed it.

That night, as I held my three-week-old son in one arm and typed with the other, I knew I didn't want to go into the office anymore.



I was lucky enough to have a job with so much flexibility that I didn't have to choose between bonding with my son and commuting to the office every day – and despite my one travel day to New York every week, I was still getting to be home much more.

So, I continued along my remote working journey, vowing never to look back.

Until I started feeling something was wrong.

I started to miss going into the office.

It had been three years since I had chosen the life of a **digital nomad** working inside a large company. I had no office space, used **hot desks** when I went into any of our offices around the world, and had no office location printed on my business cards.



Over that time, business had gone well, and our agency had landed some huge new clients. The book had done well and my reputation as an engaging keynote speaker was also growing. I was starting to get paid invitations to deliver talks at conferences around the world.

But I no longer had the close connection with my colleagues I once enjoyed.

Every time I visited the office, I saw new team members I didn't recognize ... and they didn't know me either. What made it even harder to accept was the fact that I had *chosen* this working lifestyle.

In just a few years, I had gone from a remote working enthusiast to a lonely and disconnected virtual team member.

Wait, I hear you thinking ... isn't this supposed to be a book about how awesome it is to work remotely and how great virtual meetings can be?

Actually, no, it isn't.

The truth is that working remotely isn't better than being face to face.
But sometimes you don't have a choice.

My aim with this book is not to persuade you that working remotely is better than any other arrangement.

As much as we want to tell ourselves that we can do virtual meetings and be more productive without the distractions of colleagues, the serendipity that happens when you are with co-workers is hard to recreate virtually.

In a great work environment, the people around you will challenge and inspire you to be better.

WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

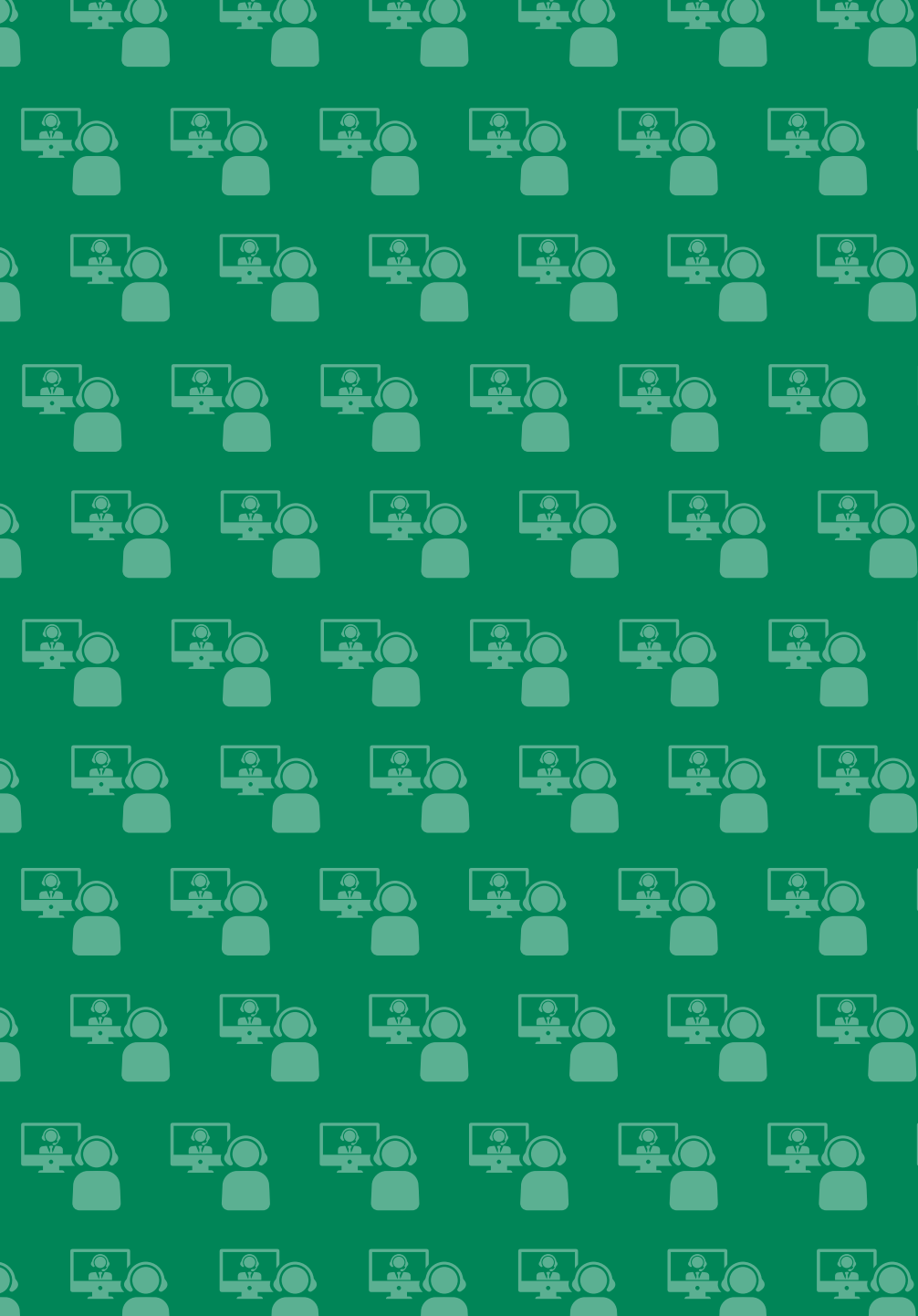
The goal of this book isn't to pretend that working remotely is always better or that offices are irrelevant. Instead, you will read about how you can continue to make human connections, collaborate effectively, present virtually, and do business without being in the same room.

It's a book for a world forever changed by a global pandemic, where more employers might ask you to stay home, avoid the office, skip the commute, and be productive from afar.

The future of business is going to require this sort of flexibility. In this book, you'll find a collection of the skills, habits, and techniques to help you get ready for the new reality of modern work.

PART ONE

Working Remotely



CHAPTER 1

Remote Work 101

The founders of Basecamp, a popular project management platform, described the modern office as an “interruption factory,” observing that “a busy office is like a food processor – it chops your day into tiny bits.”¹

In the popular television show *The Office*, the modern workplace is portrayed as an outdated ritual, filled with time-wasting colleagues and meaningless meetings.

The traditional office, once seen as a standard part of our working life, is becoming increasingly optional. Instead, more people are opting to join the gig economy or work from places other than the office.

1.1

3 Factors Leading to a Rise in Remote Work

According to one survey, more than half of the world’s employees work from home at least once per week, and 18 percent of people work remotely full time.²

Given these numbers, it would be easy to think that remote work is a recent trend. After all, the types of jobs we often hear people doing remotely seem to be those that only appeared in the past three decades, such as web designers or virtual assistants.

Remote work is hundreds of years old.

In medieval times, most artisans worked from home. The famous tenements of the early 1900s in New York were examples of people working from home. The term **telecommuting** was coined by NASA engineer Jack Nilles nearly 50 years ago, in 1972.³

Building on remote work's long history, three factors are accelerating the ability of people to work from anywhere:

1. **Ease of communication:** Thanks to our advanced communications tools and the Internet, it has become easier to communicate in real time and collaborate without being there in person.
2. **Rise of information work:** As we live in a time where information has become a commodity, the nature of our work has shifted. More people work with information and content today than ever before.
3. **Disruption of work:** The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly forced a change in the number of people working

remotely. Even before coronavirus, developments in globalization and dispersal of teams have contributed to the rise of remote work.

The bottom line is that more work is getting done outside the traditional confines of the office, and this trend shows no signs of slowing.

1.2 Why People Love Remote Work

If you do a quick search for online advice about working remotely or browse any bookstore for written advice on the topic, you'll generally find a single point of view: Remote work is better.

Most of the time, the champions of remote work cite the same three reasons why they love it:

1. MORE FLEXIBILITY

This is a huge factor, particularly among the younger generation. One study found that 69 percent of millennials would give up other work benefits for a more flexible working space, and another found that companies that allowed remote work had 25 percent lower employee turnover.⁴ The more control people have over where they do their work, the happier and more loyal they seem to be.

2. FEWER DISTRACTIONS

Anyone who has worked in offices knows that they indeed can be distraction factories, laden with unexpected drop-ins, unnecessary meetings, and time-filling tedium that doesn't accomplish anything. When you're working remotely, many of these distractions disappear.

3. BETTER LIFESTYLE

One disturbing Swedish study found that couples with commutes of 45 minutes or longer had a 40 percent greater risk of divorce.⁵ While this may seem like an extreme statistic, those who love remote work often talk about their ability to live in a beloved place, commute-free, as an important benefit of leaving the office life behind.

1.3

Why Companies Love Remote Workers

Though remote work often is described as a benefit offered to employees by reluctant companies, the truth is that there are several reasons why companies might prefer for employees to work remotely:

1. **Lower Cost:** Research published by Global Workforce Analytics found that the average real estate savings per remote worker was \$10,000. It noted that allowing this

type of work helped IBM to save more than \$50 million in real estate costs.⁶ When combined with the lower costs for office supplies, support staff, workplace perks, and other routine expenses, the numbers really add up.

2. More Productivity: In a fascinating two-year study profiled in his TEDx Talk, Stanford Professor Nicholas Bloom shared the results on the benefits of working from home at one large Shanghai-based company. His research showed that a group of employees working from home had a huge productivity boost compared with their counterparts in the office.⁷ Many other companies found similar results.

3. Higher Loyalty: The numbers also show that the more control you give to people around how they work, the more loyal they are.⁸ This translates into lower turnover and better results in the long run.

1.4

The Difference Between Doing Remote Work and Working from Home

Working from home is usually a temporary choice, often made out of necessity or convenience. Remote work, on the other hand, is work done consistently outside the office.

When you're working from home, you might want to prioritize the tasks that are better done out of the office because you have precious uninterrupted time. If you

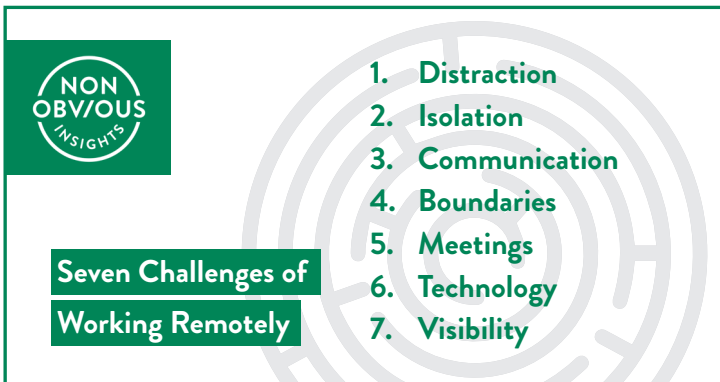
work from home once per week, for example, you may want to avoid all meetings on that day since you can do those meetings in person anyway.

With remote work, you may want to establish a more regular routine, particularly for a future that probably will include far more **hybrid work** than most of us do today. Hybrid work is the combination of working from an office and working remotely.

Either way, as Harvard Business School Professor Tsedal Neeley notes, “remote work is actually a learned skill. People don’t just do it well organically. So it’s important to help people, to coach people, to provide resources on how to do it well.”⁹

1.5

Seven Challenges of Working Remotely



The infographic features a green circular logo in the top left corner with the text "NON OBVIOUS INSIGHTS". Below it, a green rectangular box contains the title "Seven Challenges of Working Remotely". To the right of this box is a numbered list of seven challenges. The background of the infographic is a light gray maze pattern.

1. Distraction
2. Isolation
3. Communication
4. Boundaries
5. Meetings
6. Technology
7. Visibility

Fifty years ago, UCLA Professor Albert Mehrabian published a book called *Silent Messages*, in which he suggested that 93 percent of all communication is nonverbal.¹⁰ If that's true, then working remotely poses some obvious challenges.

This isn't the only challenge of being a remote worker. For better or worse, the Internet is filled with discussion about the problems of working remotely. Let's take a candid look at what they are:

Challenge 1 **DISTRACTION**

Whether you consider yourself someone who is easily distracted or not, the truth is that our homes or other places we might work from can be filled with distractions. Sometimes they are immediate (someone ringing the doorbell or a dog barking), and sometimes they are self-inflicted (temptation to binge-watch another episode of your favorite show or to eat constantly).

"The three great enemies of working from home are the fridge, the bed, and the TV."¹¹

For more on how to conquer your distractions, turn to Section 2.3 – How to Stay Focused and Avoid Distractions.

Challenge 2 ISOLATION & LONELINESS

It is natural to crave human connection, and people new to working remotely often cite the isolation and loneliness as their biggest struggle. The first thing to remember is that isolation and loneliness often can be two different problems.

Isolation is a feeling of disconnection that can come from processes or a workplace culture that removes them from colleagues or information. Loneliness, on the other hand, is an emotional state and can happen with those working remotely as well as those who go to an office.

Working without colleagues around can be lonely, and the sense of isolation can lead to depression or a feeling of disconnection from everyone else. Even if you have virtual meetings regularly or visit the office on occasion to meet with people, this is one of the most common and natural emotions you may feel.

For more on how to deal with the isolation, turn to Section 2.4 – How to Conquer Isolation and Loneliness.

Challenge 3 COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION

Most of us are not accustomed to collaborating with others effectively without doing so face to face, and unfortunately we never had much training on how to do it. Adding to the problem is the fact that there

are so many ways to communicate today, from video conferencing to instant messaging to email. It's hard to know what to use and when to use it. The ironic truth is that we feel disconnected even though we have so many technologies to help us connect.

For tips to improve your communication, turn to Chapter 11 – How to Communicate Virtually.

Challenge 4 WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES

One of the real dangers of working remotely is overworking. Since your day is no longer dictated by the traditional 9-to-5 schedule, you may find yourself working far more hours than if you were in the office. This is particularly true in the cases where you have a global team working across time zones, requiring you to work odd hours.

For more on how to set boundaries, turn to Section 2.6 – Seven Ways to Create Remote Work-Life Balance.

Perspective: SHELLY PALMER ON OFFICE HOURS

If you are supposed to work from 9 to 5, then work 9 to 5. Take the same breaks you'd take if you were in the office, including – and this is important – lunch! Regular hours increase productivity. I promise.¹²

– Shelly Palmer is an advertising, marketing and technology consultant and business adviser.

Challenge 5 MEETINGS

A virtual meeting is very different than an in-person one. Virtual meetings actually make it harder to collaborate, and most people lack the training to run them well. When they don't work, virtual meetings become a source of frustration for everyone involved.

For tips on running or participating in virtual meetings, turn to Part II, which features four chapters on the topic.

Challenge 6 TECHNOLOGY

The same thing that enables many of us to work from home can be a barrier to doing it effectively. Sometimes the technology just doesn't work, or we don't have it set up correctly to allow us to work.

For more on how to set up technology to help you work better, turn to Chapter 3 – Creating Your Workspace.

Challenge 7 VISIBILITY

This final challenge is the one I shared in my book introduction about feeling invisible within an organization and suffering for it. When you aren't there in person, you'll need to work doubly hard to make sure you aren't neglected, dismissed, or forgotten.

To learn how to promote yourself and ensure you don't become invisible, turn to Chapter 4 – Building Your Reputation and Personal Brand.



CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- Remote work is not a recent phenomenon. People have been working remotely for hundreds of years.
- Contrary to what many leaders believe, studies show people who work remotely can often be *more* productive than those who commute to an office every day.
- There are seven big challenges of working remotely that need to be overcome: distraction, isolation, communication, boundaries, meetings, technology and visibility.

CHAPTER 2

The Remote Working Lifestyle

There is one conclusion from Professor Nicholas Bloom's research that I didn't mention yet. At the end of his nine-month research program investigating the differences in productivity between groups of workers at a large Chinese company who were randomly assigned to work from home and or told to continue working from the office, the company decided to offer a choice to all employees.

Almost immediately, a significant number of the workers who had been assigned to work from home decided to switch back to coming into the office every day. At the same time, some but not all the workers who had been required to come into work every day chose the remote work option.

After the employees were allowed to choose, the overall productivity of the entire company rose even further. It turned out that people working from home weren't inherently more productive unless they wanted to work from home.

2.1

The Five Habits of Remote Workers Who Get More Done

Is it possible that some people are better suited to working remotely than others? It certainly seems as if some are better self-starters or show more introverted tendencies, and you might suppose that remote work would fit their personalities better.

During more than a decade of working with colleagues remotely and in person, I have realized this isn't true.



Habit 1 SET BRAVE BOUNDARIES

When your commute time is three minutes, it's always going to be tempting to go to work at any hour of the day. The flexibility is one of the great advantages of remote work. It can also be a disadvantage. The biggest

effect on your overall sanity will be your ability to set the right boundaries between work and your personal life. In order to get more done, be brave about where you will create those boundaries, and stick to them.

For advice on how to set brave boundaries, read Chapter 3.

Habit 2 GIVE UNDIVIDED FOCUS

Distractions are a normal part of any working day, but you may find that they become far more tempting and unavoidable when you are working from home. There are always dishes to put away or a comfortable place to lie down for a moment. No matter whether you're working from home or remotely from another location, the ability to focus while remote is a critical skill you will need to learn and practice.

For advice on growing your ability to have undivided focus, read the later sections in this chapter.

Habit 3 HAVE CREATIVE RESILIENCE

When working alone in a more open-ended environment, being able to think like a self-starter is critical. The people who adjust best to remote work are more proactive, entrepreneurial and motivated. The best remote workers are uncomfortable with the status quo. They avoid complacency and are not afraid to disrupt themselves when necessary. Most of all, they know that

any work situation can change quickly – from where they work to the nature of their job. As a result, they are more flexible and adaptable for the future.

For advice on how to be creatively resilient, read Chapter 11.

Habit 4 PRACTICE VIRTUAL EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to understand and appreciate what others are feeling. Doing it virtually requires a combination of creativity and observation.

The people who understand people always win.

This is something I often say during my keynote presentations. The truth is that the more we can understand the mindsets of the people we deal with, the more persuasive and valuable we can be as a teammate, leader, or service provider.

For advice on practicing more virtual empathy, read Chapter 10.

Habit 5 USE DELIBERATE CLARITY

It took me far too long to realize that the most effective way to communicate is to do the opposite of what I was expected to do in my Comparative Literature class

back in university. In the class, I was expected to use the biggest words I could imagine and work hard to make every sentence a work of art. In business, most people hate that. Clarity is the ability to express yourself in a straightforward way that people easily understand.

For advice on how to use deliberate clarity with teammates, read Chapter 9.

2.2

How to Set an Efficient Schedule

How do you plan your day when you are working remotely? In some areas, such as prescheduled meetings, you may not have much choice about when you work. But there are techniques to create an optimal calendar for yourself the rest of the day. Here are a few tips to follow:

Tip 1 CALENDAR WHAT YOU HATE

Most normal people push the things they hate doing to the bottom of their lists. It's the reason so many of us do our taxes right before the deadline. However, if you put the things you hate on your calendar, it is more likely you will do them.

Tip 2 START YOUR DAY OFFLINE

You have the chance to set your mindset for the entire day based on what you choose to do first. So hide the phone (or charge it overnight somewhere other than on the nightstand by your bed!). Instead find a morning ritual that helps you get grounded and proactively ready for the day.

Perspective: **AUSTIN KLEON ON MORNING RITUALS**

There's almost nothing in the news that any of us need to read in the first hour of the day. When you reach for your phone or your laptop upon waking, you're immediately inviting anxiety and chaos into your life. You're also bidding adieu to some of the most potentially fertile moments in the life of a creative person.¹³

*– Austin Kleon is a bestselling author of three books including **Steal Like an Artist** and **Show Your Work!***

Tip 3 KNOW YOUR DEAD TIMES

I can't write in the afternoon. From 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., I will stare at the screen and get nothing done. So I decided to stop trying. Now I'll often schedule phone calls in that time span, or coach soccer practice with my kids, or respond to email. The point is that those afternoon hours are now productive for me because I am intentional about what I choose not to do.

Tip 4 GROUP YOUR MEETINGS

Meetings are notorious for becoming interruptions that stand in the way of getting real work done. Why not group them back to back in a single part of your day? That not only can help you get them all done, but also can give you an excuse to make sure that each one ends on time. Then you can leave since you have another call to make.

Perspective: JOEL GASCOIGNE ON “THEME DAYS”

I generally theme my days. Some are focused on managing and supporting my awesome executive team. Other days I'm working on the product, putting together documents for strategy and process improvement or digging into customer research or product metrics to find opportunities. Once a week I have “deep work Wednesday”, where I aim to have little to no meetings, and use lengths of unscheduled time to read and reflect on high-level vision and strategy.¹⁴

– Joel Gascoigne is the founder of Buffer, a social media management platform.

Tip 5 BLOCK TIME FOR WORK

I used to have a calendar so filled with meetings that I didn't have time for anything else. So I started blocking time for writing and other work. Technically I was blocking time for nothing because I didn't always know what I would be doing then. Having that

time unavailable on my calendar became a big deal—especially after I started giving access for assistants to add meetings to my calendar without advance approval.

Tip 6 SET OFFICE HOURS

Setting specific hours when you will be working each day has many benefits. It can help to motivate yourself and tell your teammates when you're available. It also can let family or others who live with you know when you are not available. That will minimize the number of times you are interrupted during the day.

Perspective: BRIAN FANZO ON WORKING WITH ADHD

I firmly believe there isn't just one right way of working from home. As someone with ADHD, I like to learn from multiple different people in multiple different formats. Many would guess working from home would create laziness but it's more likely to lead to burn out because working from home requires a new life mindset not just a work location change!se.¹⁵

— *Brian Fanzo is a digital futurist and founder of iSocialFanz*

2.3

How to Stay Focused and Avoid Distractions

Conquering the many distractions while working remotely is an ongoing battle and one that I often am losing. However, I do understand *why* I lose that battle. In this section I'll share some techniques that have helped me to stay focused even when a seemingly constant stream of distractions is conspiring for my attention.

Tip 1 USE THE FIVE-SECOND RULE

My friend Mel Robbins has written about something she calls the Five-Second Rule: "If you have an instinct to act on a goal, you must physically move within five seconds, or your brain will kill it." Her advice to avoid this is simple. "When you feel yourself hesitate before doing something that you know you should do, count 5-4-3-2-1-GO and move toward action."¹⁶

It turns out this rule is surprisingly effective to help yourself avoid distractions as well. If you feel yourself getting off task, use Mel's rule to reset and focus yourself.

Tip 2 INTEGRATE WHITE NOISE

When I'm writing or trying to concentrate, I prefer having some ambient noise. It turns out I'm not alone. Some people concentrate better when there is white noise in the background. Also some sound can help to drown out the more distracting noises that you can't silence, such as boarding announcements or barking dogs.

An environment can be too quiet.

Perspective: **PAMELA SLIM ON TAKING A MENTAL BREAK**

When you spend a good amount of time working remotely, your physical environment becomes increasingly important. Add multi-sensory elements to your space (a fountain, a candle, beautiful art on the wall, favorite books or objects, a polished stone).

When you take a break from your keyboard, turn to the burning candle and look into the flame. Close your eyes and listen to the ripple of the water from the fountain. Pick up the smooth stone on your desk and feel the weight and texture. Such actions shift your focus from your brain to the rest of your body and clear the fog of screen overload.¹⁷

– *Pamela Slim is the author of **Body of Work** and **Escape from Cubicle Nation***

Tip 3 **ADD FRICTION**

One of the reasons why social media can be so distracting is that it's so easy to check your feed whenever your mind wanders. Sure, you can try to build stronger willpower, or you can make it harder for yourself to check in the first place. Here are a few tricks I use to minimize the potential diversion by social media:

- ➔ Disable all alerts and notifications.
- ➔ Remove the apps from your phone or organize them in folders to make them harder to reach.
- ➔ Set automatic logout timers so you are forced to log back in every time.
- ➔ Download the "lite" and less functional versions of popular social media apps. These can be frustratingly slow and inelegant to use, which means you'll end up using them less.
- ➔ Use tools that help manage your screen time by locking your apps when you reach your pre-defined limit.
- ➔ Turn off the Internet. Yes, believe it or not, there is a feature on every computer that allows you to go offline – but you may never have used it!
- ➔ Add a note for delivery services instructing them NOT to ring the doorbell and just to leave packages outside so you're not disturbed while working.

Tip 4 TIME SHIFT YOUR DAY

In his book *When*, author Dan Pink argues that if we want to optimize our productivity, we should move our most important and concentration-heavy tasks to the morning when our ability to concentrate is higher.

The ideal way to start your day is *not* by checking email or spending time on social media.

Instead, try to spend the first part of your day planning what you want to accomplish that day instead of reacting to the latest urgent email.

Attention expert and speaker Neen James suggests to also “invest 15 minutes in a strategic appointment with yourself every day; identify your top 3 not-negotiable activities, write them on a post-it note and use this as your daily decision filtering system.”¹⁸

Tip 5 BE LESS AVAILABLE

It's tempting to respond to texts, emails, and social media comments right away. The problem when you do that is that you're building an expectation from your

friends, family, and colleagues that you'll always do that, setting yourself up for distractions. Instead, set automated replies for social media, use "away from my desk" settings, and funnel people toward the best way to reach you.

For example, I don't use Facebook messenger to connect. Anytime I get a message from my page, this is what people see as a response:



"Thanks for the message. This is an automated reply to say this isn't the best way to get in touch with me. Please use the form on www.rohitbhargava.com or my email instead to connect."

2.4

How to Conquer Isolation & Loneliness

There are some smart ways that you can address both issues, feel more connected with work, keep your sanity, and connect with others while working remotely:

1. AUDIT THE ISOLATION MOMENTS

Back when I was working in that office in D.C., I used to get interoffice emails about colleagues' birthday parties. Then one day they stopped. Modern workplaces are full of moments like this when remote workers are unintentionally cut off from the team, but we can prevent that if we can understand when they happen.

Back then I never mentioned to anyone how it made me feel to be taken off the list, and no one ever asked. Looking back now, I use the example as a reminder for myself and leaders whom I advise that sometimes you have to ask about these small things in order to identify them ... and then you can do something to fix them.

2. CONNECT WITH INDIVIDUALS

Contrary to what some people think, spending too much time on social media seeing how connected everyone else seems is a recipe for making yourself lonelier. Instead, reach out to reconnect with people individually. You might be surprised how many friends who appear to have amazingly complete lives on social media are just as hungry for a real connection as you are.

Perspective: TODD CAPONI ON GETTING SUPPORT

Find at least one person (not a family member) with whom you can talk to — about personal worries, issues, potential decisions and feelings. Once you do, seek ways to make sure that's happening in your teams. Do your team members have an individual outside work they can confide in?

This doesn't have to be a "mentor." It's ok to just have someone who's at any level. Just make sure you find someone.¹⁹

— *Todd Caponi is a sales leader and the author of **The Transparency Sale***

3. FOCUS ON GIVING & SHARING

When you focus on what you can give instead of what you miss, you can change your perspective. Could you find a volunteer group where your expertise or time might be valued? Not only can this be of great value for your community, but also you can feel positive yourself and make some connections in the process.

4. ACCEPT MORE INVITATIONS

Anytime I started to feel disconnected from colleagues, I realized it was at least partially self-inflicted. I was too busy to go to the events I had been invited to. Don't make the same mistake. When you are invited to participate, make it happen.

5. FIND A MENTOR (OR BECOME ONE)

Many modern companies are using programs such as **reverse mentors** to ensure everyone feels connected – even those working remotely. If your company has a program like that, join it. If not, try to find a similar group in your area that runs this type of program.

6. SPEND MONEY ON AN EXPERIENCE

Any number of self-help books will tell you that the path to happiness lies in focusing on experiences instead of accumulating more stuff. Think about how you might spend money on an experience that can allow you to

feel more connected with other people and challenge yourself to do something new and unusual, whether it is jumping out of a plane or trying a new cuisine.

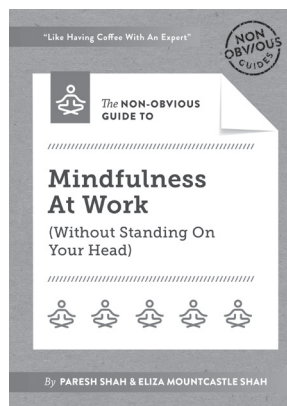
2.5

Five Mindfulness Principles to Make Remote Work Better

Contributed by Paresh & Eliza Shah, authors of the Non-Obvious Guide to Mindfulness at Work

Some people associate mindfulness and yoga with sweaty spandex-clad people who greet their day with downward dog and sit like pretzels. But mindfulness and yoga are much more than a physical fitness practice.

As millions of people, from top business performers, athletes, creative artists, top students and entrepreneurs are realizing, the ancient practices of mindfulness deliver a range of powerful benefits, from less stress, to laser-calibre focus, hearing customer needs better, innovating brilliant solutions, elevating difficult conversations and ultimately, getting more of the right stuff done with less time and effort.



A great benefit of mindfulness that many remote workers are taking advantage of is the ability to intersperse short mindful practices between meetings, to boost performance, without concern of seeming odd or disrupting co-workers.

It's an invisible competitive advantage that is counter-intuitive to our busy "must do more" mindset. As practitioners and trainers of mindful leadership, every day we witness the evidence of what at first seemed silly to us when we heard it.

Mahatma Gandhi had said, "I have so much to accomplish today that I must meditate for two hours instead of one."

We are not advocating that you need to spend anywhere near an hour to boost your work performance dramatically to tap into the practical business, career, relationship and health benefits of non-obvious mindfulness in action.

Below are some mindful tips and practices to help you get more done while working remotely:

Tip 1 HAVE A STRAIGHT SPINE

A simple practice to boost your remote productivity is to simply focus on your posture and sit (or stand) straight to activate your best thinking. Like trying to water your

garden with a kinked hose, sitting with a bent spine can slow down or even block neural connections you need to activate the awesome within you.

Helps with Habit #2 – Have Undivided Focus.

Tip 2 HAVE MINI-GRATITUDE CELEBRATIONS

When switching between tasks, meetings, and family, have a mini-celebration signaling completion to your mind and body – this could be washing your hands with a smile, playing fetch with your dog, picking up your guitar, or making that lovably imperfect TikTok. Mini-celebrations are like a palette cleanser and signal the start of a new time-space.

Helps with Habit #1 - Set Brave Boundaries.

Tip 3 SINGLE NOSTRIL BREATHING

For more energy or calming, work with your parasympathetic nervous system by breathing as follows: For more energy, if bored or sleepy, breath strongly through your right nostril (sun center according to yoga). To calm, cool or relax yourself under stress breath through your left nostril (moon center).

Helps with Habit #3 – Have Creative Resilience.

Tip 4 USE ONE WORD OPEN AND CLOSE

When clients ask us to facilitate their virtual meetings and workshops, we kick them off and end with each team member sharing one word to express how they feel. We do not go into any explanations. This approach presents a golden opportunity to feel empathy towards teammates, acknowledges where people are, and engages mindful listening at the start and end of meetings.

Helps with Habit #4 – Practice Virtual Empathy.

Tip 5 TALK LESS, SMILE MORE

As Aaron Burr said to Hamilton, it is especially important to be mindful of when NOT to speak. Sometimes, remote workers feel job insecurity and speak more, hoping the boss will notice them. Instead, allow what you feel you want to share to “mature” through three waves of the urge to speak. Trust that the moment for your contribution to land will arrive, if it moves the team forward. Your contribution will be powerful. Your presence will be known. By actively listening and being highly present, even in silence, you become visible. Presence is the new visibility.

Helps with Habit #5 – Use Deliberate Clarity

Paresh and Eliza Mountcastle Shah, PhD., are founders of Lifter Leadership, a global training and development firm that drives talent motivation, loyalty, team harmony and innovation through a virtual-meeting facilitation service, and live or virtual training workshops.



DOWNLOAD EXCERPT:

www.nonobvious.com/guides/mindfulness

2.6

Three Ways to Create Remote Work-Life Balance

When working remotely, it is far too easy to let work take over all parts of your day. How do you create a better balance between your work and real life? Here are some proven techniques that may help:

1. Create daily rituals to help separate your day and set moments when you know it's time to stop working. For example, block time for a class or set a quitting time for yourself – and then follow it.
2. Go offline and turn off your devices to allow yourself to think and to offer a separation from your work. When you do this in the morning, you can help set yourself up for a productive day getting your work and your personal goals both done.

3. If you work late or on the weekend, schedule messages to send automatically during business hours so people don't expect you to be available on email at all hours because they see you sending emails late.*

***Note:** The exception to this rule is when you want your boss or colleagues to know that you're working late – but during those moments you're probably not prioritizing a work-life balance anyway.

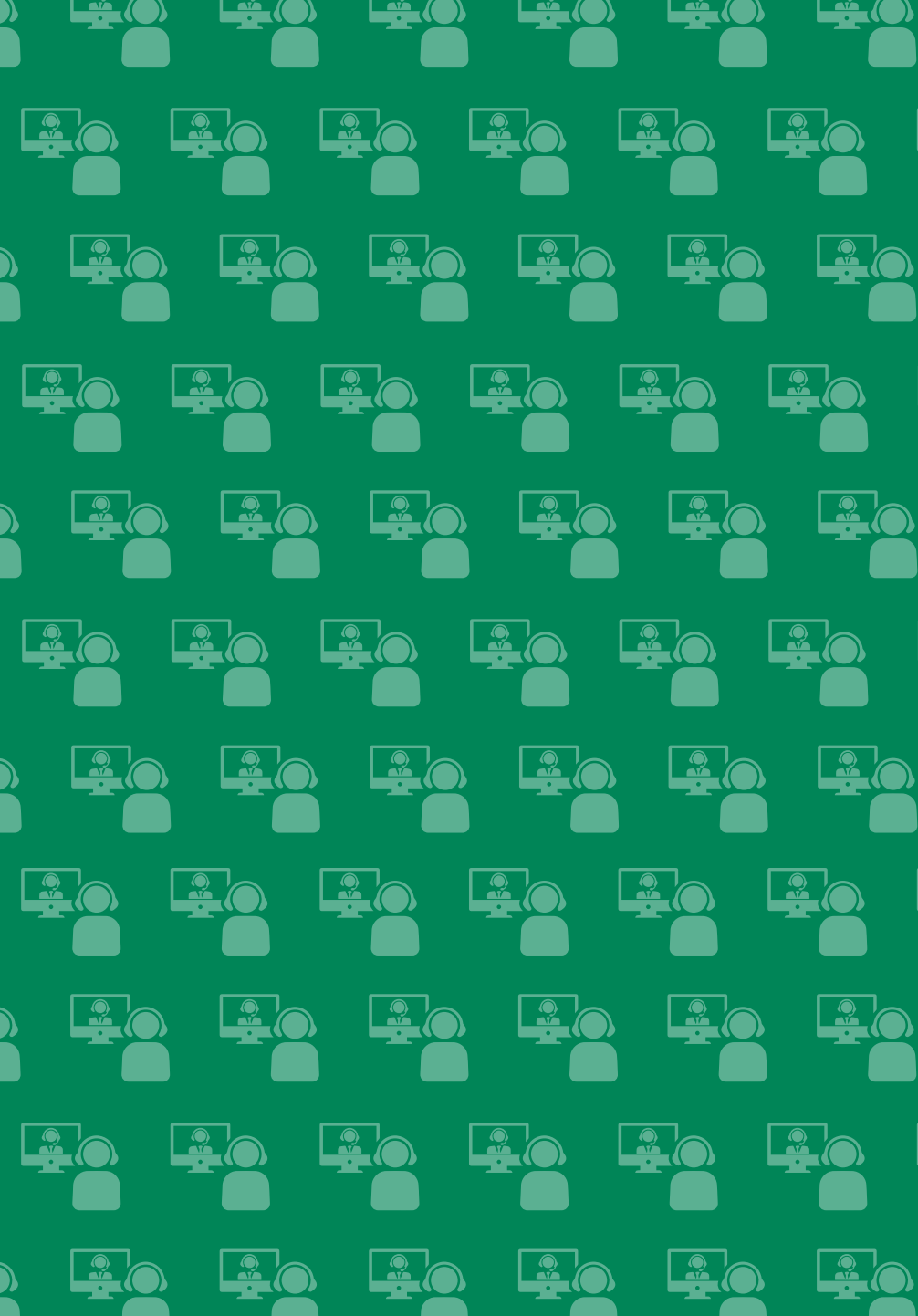


CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- There are five habits of remote workers who get more done: they set brave boundaries, know how to be creatively resilient, have undivided focus when it matters, practice virtual empathy and use deliberate clarity.
- To set an efficient schedule for yourself, start your day offline and be intentional about how you spend your time.
- To stay focused and avoid distractions, make it harder to indulge in sidetracking activities and redirect yourself frequently.
- To conquer isolation and loneliness, consider finding ways to share your expertise use mindfulness practices like breathing and being present in daily activities.

PART TWO

Virtual Meetings



CHAPTER 7

How to Deliver a Virtual Presentation

For three years I taught presentation skills and storytelling at Georgetown University. At the time, we spent only a small part of one class on how to present virtually. Since then, this skill has become much more important not only to teach my students, but also to employ when delivering virtual presentations myself.

In the past few years, I probably have presented virtually more than a hundred times. Thanks to several event cancellations, in the past thirty days alone I have done 15 virtual presentations, training sessions, or webinars. The hardest thing about them is delivering an engaging talk without having live audience feedback.

As a speaker, when you can't see your audience react, it can be exhausting to try and create engagement.

In this chapter, you will learn some of the fundamentals for what does and doesn't work when presenting remotely. They will help you ace doing virtual presentations, no matter how often you need to do them.

7.1

Getting the Setup Right

There is no single way to set up your space to deliver a virtual presentation. However, knowing a few of your choices and the logistics involved can help ensure that your setup isn't a distraction for your audience, but rather helps you present in the best possible way.

Beyond the obvious basics, like testing the technology, here are a few simple tips to ensure you are set up to deliver a successful presentation:

1. **Get to eye level.** When your computer is on the desk in front of you with the camera angled up, you'll appear as if you're looking down. Instead, prop up your computer to bring your camera to eye level. It makes a big difference.
2. **Follow the seven rules.** The seven rules for virtual meetings shared in Section 6.4 are even more important when you're presenting. Get the audio right, make sure you're not accidentally sharing personal information, avoid backlighting, silence your devices, and follow all the other rules, too.
3. **Invest in professional tools.** Depending on how often you are presenting virtually, you may want to invest in a small number of tools to make your

setup more professional. This includes a better microphone, upgraded camera, appropriate lighting and an uncluttered background.

4. **Know your model & participation strategy.**

In Chapter 5 we looked at the various models for virtual meetings and how to structure a participation strategy. When presenting, you need to ensure you have thought about both issues and have a clear approach on how you'll handle them.

7.2

Ten Tips for Effective Virtual Presenting

The biggest question I am asked is whether presenting virtually requires a different approach than presenting in real life. The short answer is yes.

Here are some of the most common tips I have shared with people to help them conquer the unique challenges of doing a presentation virtually:



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Tip 1 **MAKE IT SHORTER**

At first I used to try and translate my usual forty-five-minute keynote into a virtual session. It didn't work. Holding attention is harder in a virtual setting, so start

with your most powerful points, share only what you really need to and keep your presentation as short as you can.

Tip 2 MIX IT UP

Can you use a mix of visuals, props and video? What about incorporating a virtual poll? The nice thing about presenting virtually is that you have an opportunity to use the technology in your favor to add a variety of methods to engage your audience. Though many of them do add a bit of technical complexity, it is often worth the effort because it makes your presentation more engaging and memorable. As Idea Enthusiast founder Greg Roth notes, “the biggest thing we may be losing in an all-remote work world is the power of visual thinking. Team leaders should emphasize sketching, speaking visually (anecdotes, analogies, etc), and sharing powerful visuals to make meetings more compelling.”²⁷

Tip 3 DOUBLE THE ENERGY

Without an audience, you will have to work extra hard to bring energy to your presentation so it doesn't feel flat. It is much easier to bring energy if you allow yourself to move. If you can, consider presenting while standing up. At least use your hands or arms in gesturing. Making sure your energy shows through in

how you present. As a general rule, when you feel like you're overdoing it with your energy level, you probably have it just right.

Tip 4 LOOK AT THE CAMERA, NOT THE PEOPLE

On a virtual call, you may be tempted to present to the room or people you can see. The problem is, when you do that, it will seem like you are looking sideways. Instead, look directly at your camera. It will seem unnatural not to look at your audience, but when you look at the camera it will appear as though you are looking directly at your audience.

Perspective: MARK BOWDEN ON EYE CONTACT

Look people in the eye. One way to do that is to draw a smiley face on a post-it note and then you post that on top of your camera and it just attracts your attention to the camera and gives you that smile which your instinct easily gravitates towards and repeats back that smile. It just means I pay more attention to the camera than I do my own image.²⁸

– *Mark Bowden is a human behavior and body language expert.*

Tip 5 SKIP THE RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

Questions that don't require an answer or require people to raise their hand if they believe something doesn't work in a virtual environment. They just end up making

people feel silly, and you look out of touch. Skip the questions, rhetorical or otherwise, unless you're actually integrating a poll to allow people to do a live vote.

Tip 6 BRING THE HUMANITY

How can you inject your personality into your talk and make it more human? Perhaps you incorporate a picture of yourself with your family. Or you let them see your home office behind you on screen. Or you integrate a prop as part of your talk. Any way you can, try to make your talk more personal so people can feel connected to you.

Perspective: LAURA GASSNER OTTING ON GREEN SCREENS

Frankly, I hate green screens. Your efforts to hide who you are leave me lonelier than before. It's not that I realize I don't know you. It's that I realize you never wanted me to in the first place. That's not a recipe for trust.

Instead, I'd like to see your bookshelf. I'd like to see your 5K medals. I'd like to see your family pictures. I'd like to see your puppy. I'd like to see you. Show me your human side, and I'll show you mine.²⁹

– Laura Gassner Otting is the author of *Limitless: How to Ignore Everybody, Carve Your Own Path, & Live Your Best Life*.

Tip 7 REPEAT MAIN POINTS

When listening to a virtual presentation, I have found that my attention tends to wander, and I anticipate this from my audience as well. To make sure they don't miss my most important points, I usually find a way to repeat them more often than I might when presenting in person, and I remind people they can always take a screen grab or email me to get my slides later.

Tip 8 USE MORE TEXT

When you are doing a virtual presentation, the chances are people are sitting right next to their screens. This gives you an opportunity to use slides with more text than you ordinarily would in a stage presentation. This doesn't mean you should fill your slides with 8-point font, but the general rule of 24-point font as a minimum for presentations can be lower for a virtual presentation. As long as the text you're sharing is valuable, having a bit more of it on screen can help reiterate your point without detracting from the flow.

Tip 9 TALK SLOWER (OR PAUSE MORE)

Everyone has a tendency to speak faster when presenting –sometimes even more so when presenting virtually. The immediate solution is just to slow down. An alternative is learning how to use pausing in your pace to make your speaking better.

Perspective: MICHAEL PORT ON PAUSING

"Instead of slowing down, focus on pausing. Speakers who speak too slowly have a soporific effect. I speak quickly. But I pause at the right places. That creates rhythm. I slow down when it serves the speech to slow down. Audiences can easily absorb the important points if you give them pause time."⁵⁰

– *Michael Port is the founder of Heroic Public Speaking.*

Tip 10 FOLLOW UP QUICKLY

When you promise something as a follow-up, you always want to share it. However, audience expectations when it comes to a virtual presentation are higher. Since your audience members are already sitting there on their computers or phones participating and listening, you can share any follow-up materials right away. Better yet, schedule the materials to be sent just as your talk ends. Then you can keep their engagement going even longer.

7.3

How to Add Variety to Your Virtual Presentation

As I shared above, a virtual presentation works best if you have some variety around the content that you are presenting. What does this variety look like? Here are a few things you might incorporate into your presentation to add more variety and interest for your audience:

- Move the camera (or yourself).
- Switch among external videos and visuals.
- Integrate polls, surveys, or other interactive features.
- Bring a guest to break up the flow and add interest. You can get creative here. For example, I recently read that you can hire a farm animal to join your next virtual meeting!
- Use a **virtual background** purposefully. Just remember that these can appear disjointed if you tend to move a lot, so use this with care.

More than in-person presentations, you need to mix it up in virtual sessions and offer more breaks and reminders.

7.5

How to Sell with a Virtual Presentation

The hardest kind of meeting for many people to do virtually is a sales presentation. The lack of audience feedback and inability to read the room may seem like deal killers. They certainly make it harder.

When you have no alternative, though, there are some things you can do to make your virtual pitch as strong as possible.

- 1. Set ground rules** – If everyone knows how to interact with the tools you're using, you can make interaction more likely. Show your prospect how to use the chat feature and make sure the technology isn't a barrier to engagement.
- 2. Ask them what format they prefer** – It's tempting to go into a virtual sales presentation and launch straight into PowerPoint. Doing that robs your prospects of giving you important direction up front. Instead, start the meeting by confirming how they would like the meeting to go. Do they prefer that you present slides or just have a conversation? Letting them choose puts the decision in their hands and shows that you're not afraid to be flexible to work in the way that is best for them.

3. **Start with what's most important** – In a real life presentation, you have more license to build up to a big reveal. In a virtual meeting, you risk distractions or losing their attention faster – so bring your best insights and most compelling messages up front and share them earlier. That way if they do check out (mentally or physically), they won't miss the best part.
4. **Tell a better story** – The best sales presentations offer a vision for a potential future that is appealing. If you can get your prospect to imagine that future during your presentation by telling them a powerful story to paint that picture, you are much more likely to be successful.
5. **Don't blame the tech** – If things aren't going well, it's easy to blame the technology or make excuses. Instead of doing that, be proactive and handle issues that may arise in a positive and confident way.

Perspective: WEBEX TEAM ON SCREEN SHARING

Your teams puts a lot of time into creating and personalizing sales presentations; screen sharing ensures that those efforts don't go to waste. Everyone in the screen sharing session can view documents together. Multimedia can help add dynamism to a sales presentation, and graphical elements presented through screen sharing can help illustrate numbers that lack life on a traditional sales call, as well as reinforce benefits.³²

7.6

Why Apologies Kill Virtual Presentations

Contributed by Dr. Carmen Simon, author of The Non-Obvious Guide to Memorable Presentations

I was just listening to a presenter at a conference who started this way, "I am so sorry this presentation is right before lunch."

When you apologize, you are asking your audience for leniency; you are asking them to expect a poorer presentation. You are also destroying your credibility before you have a chance to demonstrate you have it. And, given that the brain might remember firsts and lasts better than the middle of a sequence, an audience might remember you for the wrong reasons.

Never apologize before you begin your presentation.

Avoid these phrases if you want to be memorable for the right reasons: "I'm sorry the meeting software is slow," "I apologize we started late," "I am sorry the text on the slides is so small..."

But what if you did start a little late and the meeting software had problems and the slides are even worse? Simply address the problem, tie it to what you want people to remember and move on. For example, let's imagine someone gave you really complex and text-intensive slides to present. Say something like, "Even though the slide is convoluted, it reminds us that the product offers a lot of capabilities and substance." [Click quickly to next slide.] If all slides are like that, black out the projector and have a conversation with your audience instead.

Avoid tentative phrases when you start a presentation too. Questions such as, "Can you hear me OK?" or "Can you see these slides OK?" or "Let's see, where shall I start?"... don't do justice to how or what you want people to remember.

A bit of self-deprecating humor is ok when you keep it succinct and tie it to a topic instead of using it just for the sake of using humor.

Avoid demeaning yourself in a presentation. Never make comments like, "I'm not very good at..." or "I suppose I should have known this slide was here." Demeaning yourself destroys your credibility, weakens your presentation, and is uncomfortable for your audience.

Picture a beginning like this: "I used to have the body of a football player. Now I have the body of a fantasy football player. And this is what I am noticing in our software development too: sometimes we let fantasy cloud our judgment. Here's what I am recommending to trim down our fantasy feature list..."

Avoid short, introductory expressions that ask participants to be tolerant or understanding about your topic. "I'm not an expert in this field but..." or "I'm not a CEO but..." Phrases like these prime the listener to devalue or question what you are about to say.

Overall, look at your beginnings as ways to prime the brain for what's to come.

Priming means that we can use a stimulus to influence how the brain interprets the next stimulus. A weak beginning offers the wrong prime and you have to work a lot harder to recover from it as the presentation unfolds. A strong beginning offers a strong prime. And when you prime your audiences' brains the right way, you don't have to work so hard during every single minute of your presentation.

Create a strong association between your content and sub-sequent triggers and you will be consistently and effortlessly on people's minds.³³



CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- When presenting virtually follow these quick tips to improve how you look and sound: face a window, invest in a high quality microphone and get your camera to eye level.
- To keep your audience's attention when presenting virtually -- keep it short, mix it up, make eye contact and double your energy level.
- More effectively sell in a virtual presentation by setting ground rules, asking what format they prefer and tell a better story.
- Maximize your credibility in virtual presentations by using self-deprecating humor, avoiding apologizing and creating strong associations between your content and subsequent triggers.

CHAPTER 8

Virtual Events, Trainings, Webinars, and More

Beyond virtual meetings between team members or business colleagues, growing numbers of events are being held virtually as well.

In this section, you will learn how to navigate this expanding world of virtual events, whether you want to join one as a participant or host one of your own.

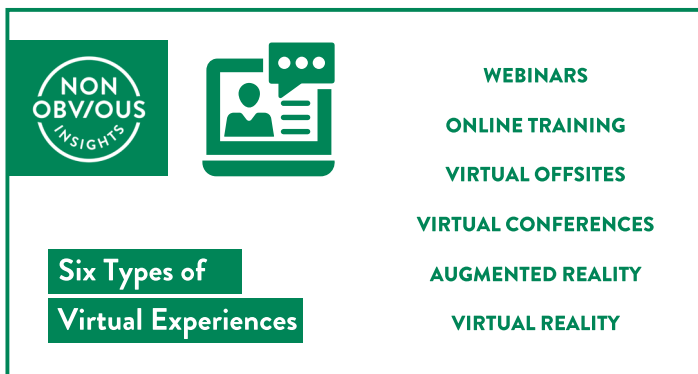
8.1 What is a Virtual Event?

A virtual event is any gathering of people other than a meeting that can be used to inspire, train, inform, or otherwise engage. These include remote training sessions, online educational sessions such as webinars, distance learning initiatives, and even full-scale virtual conferences with avatars and simulated virtual-reality event spaces.

One category we probably will see much more often is the **hybrid event** – a description for events that have both in-person and virtual ways for speakers and attendees to participate. This category is poised for big growth as people re-evaluate which events they will travel to and which they will be content to join virtually.

8.2

Six Types of Virtual Experiences (and When to Use Them)



We already have talked about virtual meetings and presentations. Let's consider a few other types of virtual experiences you may encounter:

- ➔ **Online training/master classes:** These are usually on-demand modules available to help someone learn about a new topic. They can cover anything from teaching technical skills such as coding to getting a lesson on playing the guitar. Use this when you need to deliver education accessible on demand.

- **Webinars:** Often similar to online trainings, webinars usually are hosted as a live event and recorded to watch afterwards. Since they typically are delivered live, webinars often incorporate discussion or Q&A sessions with the speaker or between participants. Use this when you need to build momentum for a new product or service or share thought leadership with a live audience.
- **Virtual offsites:** When you bring a team together virtually to discuss core business issues or strategy, it is a virtual offsite. The key for such sessions is to have a good integrated method of collaboration so all members can contribute their perspective to discussions. Use this when you need to bring your team together to plan for the future or discuss key issues and cannot include everyone in person.
- **Virtual conferences/trade shows/expos:** These are experiences created primarily to connect buyers and sellers in a particular category or to share insights from experts. Some can be highly interactive, where participants create their own avatars and physically move through the space in a 3D-generated way. Use this when you want to bring buyers and sellers together without the significant cost, effort, and time required to host a live in-person event.
- **Augmented Reality (AR):** The simplest way to describe AR is as technology that overlays graphics, animations, or text onto what you are seeing in the real world. This could include information that “unlocks” when you point your phone’s camera at a code or location. Use this



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when you want individual people to experience a different sort of immersion with what they already are seeing.

- **Virtual Reality (VR):** The types of experiences you can have in this category are growing quickly. At the moment, all VR experiences require you to wear a headset in order to place yourself inside an imagined reality. Some have sensors and therefore allow a more immersive world you can explore in 360 degrees, while others offer a flatter experience. Use this when you can create an experience or use an existing one to help immerse your audience and give them a memorable perspective.

8.3

How to Produce a Virtual Event

*Contributed by Andrea Driessen, author of **The Non-Obvious Guide to Event Planning***

With so much of our lives online, the virtual or hybrid experience you're producing must deliver true value to compete with all the other available choices. Here are some tips on how to do it:

Tip 1 PRELOAD THE FUN

When promoting a virtual event, seed messaging with a few practical insights and content-driven teasers. These can build buy-in and foster a feeling of exclusivity. That way, registrants don't just learn when your event's happening; they have even more reasons to attend.

Tip 2 PLAN CONTENT BEFORE PLATFORM

First choose the content you want to communicate, and then choose your platform of content delivery technology.

Tip 3 START WITH BEST FIRST

On the day of your event, optimize attention by beginning with your very best, most enticing, carefully scripted content. Dive right into your most compelling ideas. These are never sponsor-related remarks or profuse thank-yous. If you're recording the programming, superb content ensures the footage can be used in promotional teasers for the next event (See what you missed?!).

Tip 4 TRANSFORM PASSIVITY INTO ACTIVITY

If you're not planning to add interactivity, you should reconsider migrating online. Your "experience" may be better and more simply communicated via email. Build engagement beyond a simple chat box by ensuring that content includes varied interactivity. Try quizzes and contests before, during, and after. Use audience polling and integrate Q&A time and whiteboarding. Choose a platform in which your presenter can highlight and draw in real time. Play music and video. Close with a pithy, practical summary and a strategic call to action to end on a high note.

Tip 5 **REMEMBER: LESS IS MORE**

Your virtual guests will remember more when you remember to keep the agenda streamlined. The best online meetings or meeting segments are short: thirty minutes or less. Focus on just two or three important messages and takeaways, and design every agenda element around those outcomes.

Tip 6 **BOOST THE AFTERGLOW**

After virtual or hybrid events, hold smaller online meetups so attendees can continue connecting, learning, networking, and boosting accountability. This also can enhance in-person event attendance over time as relationships crystallize.

Tip 7 **DELIVER DATA-DRIVEN RESULTS**

An inherent benefit of virtual events is easy tracking of virtual attendance, participant retention rates, and your most click-worthy content. Take advantage of this built-in ROI richness so you can prove value to your stakeholders and make measurable improvements over time.



Tip 8 CREATE MORE KA-CHING

Record your meatiest virtual meetings so you can reuse the footage for new hire training, social media posts, sponsor acquisition, video blogs, and **sizzle reels** that sell future events.

Andrea Driessen is the Founder and Chief Boredom Buster at No More Boring Meetings.



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8.4

How to Select a Virtual Speaker

Contributed by Andrea Driessen, Author of The Non-Obvious Guide to Event Planning

Whether speakers are in person or virtual, they must project authenticity, trustworthiness, and confidence. However, these qualities are often more difficult to convey when a live audience isn't present.

The reciprocal energy, eye contact, enthusiasm, modulation, and feedback that normally emerge from a live audience in a room are lacking in virtual events. That's why online presenters need to be evaluated and selected differently.

Here are my top four questions to consider as you evaluate potential speakers to select one who will be able to bring energy and really deliver in a virtual context:

Question 1 CAN THEY BREAK THE FOURTH WALL?

The best speakers build relationships with each individual by looking right into the camera, according to virtual speaker coach Dia Bondi. This is a nonobvious and trainable skill for most speakers. Unlike humans in a live audience, a camera doesn't give feedback. Speakers must learn to create connection with people they can't see.

Question 2 IS THE ENERGY LEVEL RIGHT?

Look for a speaker who can deliver a talk with a wider vocal range and greater inflection than others might normally. Monotone is a buzzkill online, where attention spans are extremely low to begin with.

Question 3 DO THEY INCORPORATE VARIETY?

The speaker should be accustomed to replacing boring data dumping and switching up the spoken word with music, Q&A, quizzes, relevant stories, polling, and fast-paced clicks through elegant, easy-to-read slides.



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SPEAKER

Question 4 **WILL THEY DO THE PREP WORK?**

You must be able to count on the speaker to participate in pre-event training and a rehearsal using all intended technology. This should include a thorough equipment check in the same way you would if your event were in person.

8.5

Three Tips for Crafting Virtual Experiences That Engage People

Contributed by Jay Baer, founder of Convince & Convert and best selling author

Just like face-to-face events, several success factors typically determine whether virtual events are magical or mediocre.

Tip 1 SHORTEN SESSION LENGTHS

It is far more difficult to hold audience attention in a virtual event. We created the concept of a “Webinine” – a webinar that lasts just nine minutes. The audience show-up rate is much higher.

We’re not suggesting that every session be just nine minutes, but consider shortening the time slots you would use for a physical event by fifteen or thirty minutes.

Tip 2 SHARPEN YOUR TITLES AND DESCRIPTIONS

In a physical event setting, attendees often rely on word of mouth, asking other participants which breakout they are attending and why. Most virtual conferences lack this dynamic, so participants in your virtual event have less information when deciding which sessions to tune in for and which to skip.

It is even more important to use clear and compelling session titles and descriptions for your virtual conference programming.

Tip 3 USE A MODERATOR OR AN EMCEE

In a face-to-face event, the moderator or emcee helps contextualize the information presented and keep energy up.

In virtual events, having a consistent face and voice that “stitches together” the virtual sessions for participants adds much-needed familiarity and helps alleviate the isolated feeling that online events sometimes produce.

The best way to implement is to have the event moderator open up the conference online, then moderate questions for speakers and pop back online between sessions to chat with attendees.³⁴

Jay Baer is the founder of Convince & Convert and the author of multiple bestselling books.

8.6

Non-Obvious Ideas for Virtual Experiences

The world of virtual events is transforming, and many organizations are getting more experimental in producing them – particularly since the COVID-19 crisis. To see where the world of virtual events may be headed, consider this smart compilation of “eEvents” that the team of researchers at PSFK, an insights platform that tracks retail, fashion and consumer trends, put together:

- ➔ **Ready-player platforms:** Look beyond current video portals and video conferencing technologies and consider sports, gaming, and social platforms.
- ➔ **Influencer exclusives:** Invite social media influencers to record and share content from your stages and other event experiences.
- ➔ **Insider reporting:** Ask employees to act as reporters from the event and share content.
- ➔ **Overload information:** Augment the live viewing experience with additional information and stats or offer a second screen experience for phones or tablets.
- ➔ **Instant build:** Create features that enable the audience to add to the learning experience. Attendees could contribute by providing written, video, and audio content at a click of a button.
- ➔ **Embedded attendee:** Allow virtual attendees to sit anywhere—even on the stage. eSports fans already have the option to view the games they are watch-

ing from multiple viewpoints, even from within the theater of the game itself.

- **Use data to connect:** Connect like-minded people in the audience by matching profiles. Use this approach to help sponsors pinpoint the right attendees to interact with.
- **Watch parties:** Coordinate virtual and real-life meeting spaces that help people watch your e-event together. These gatherings help attendees focus together on the content and interact with each other to build on the ideas they learn.
- **Create team challenges:** Build virtual teams out of the audience and speakers, and set tasks and challenges throughout the event.
- **Make them play:** Keep the audience engaged and motivated by mixing the content up with activities between and sometimes during main sessions. Consider running contests, virtual games, and even karaoke!
- **Augment the attendee:** Provide content that could enhance the way the attendee appears to the others. Share branded background videos to play in video-conference calls, then send exclusives as prizes when they win!
- **Sell stuff:** Let people buy things from you, both physical and virtual. Some of the most successful live-streaming companies are eCommerce retailers.
- **Gift exchange:** Provide a mechanism for attendees to reward speakers, event organizers, and other attendees with monetary gifts, and other tokens.³⁵

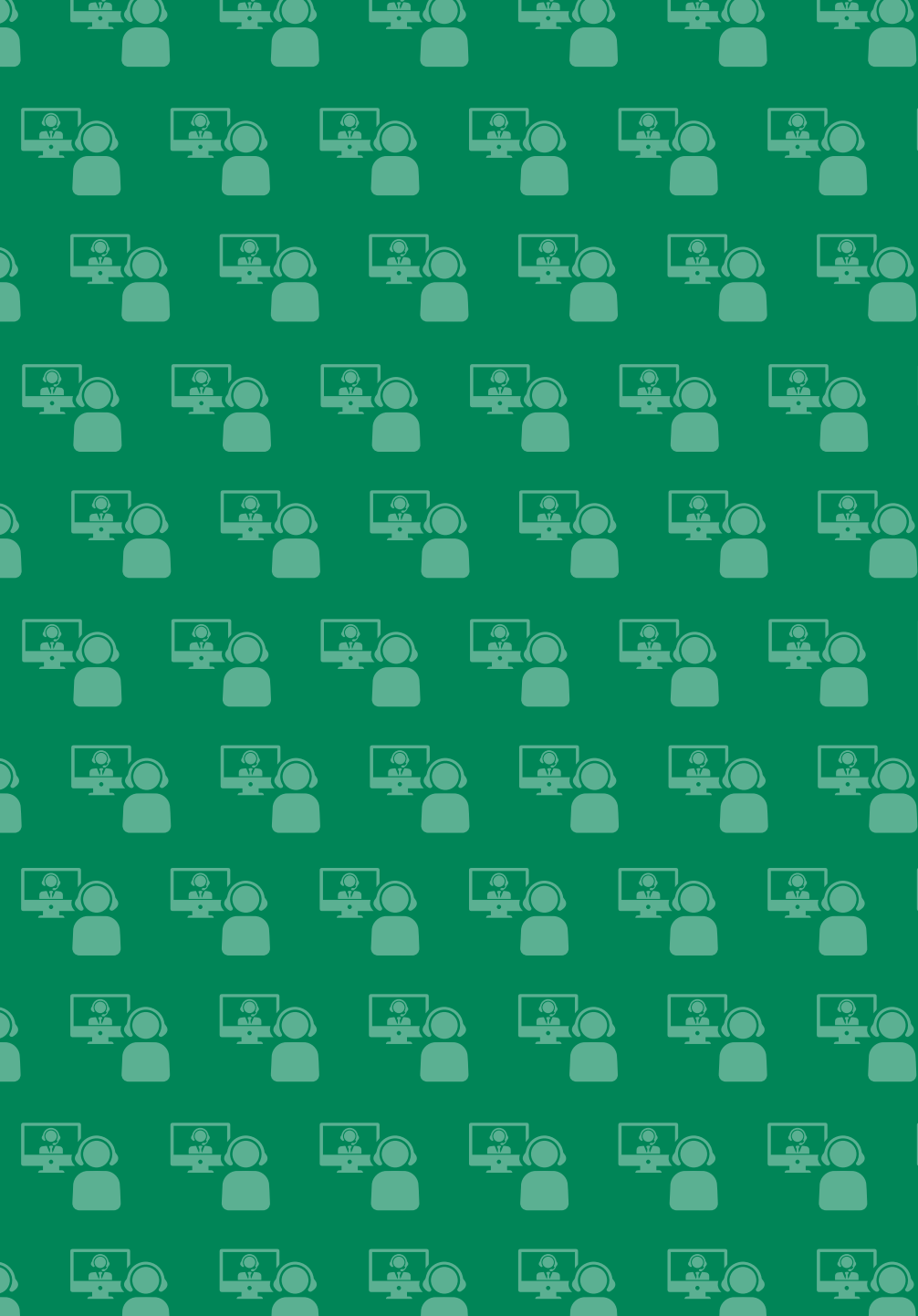


CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- Events will increasingly offer a mix of in-person and virtual experiences. These are known as hybrid events.
- The most common types of virtual events or experiences are webinars, online trainings and master classes, virtual offsites, virtual showrooms and trade shows, augmented reality, and virtual reality.
- To better engage people in virtual events, use shorter sessions, sharpen titles and descriptions, and use a moderator or an emcee to contextualize the event.
- When selecting a virtual speaker, make sure they have the right energy level and offer a variety of ways to engage.

PART THREE

Virtual Collaboration



CHAPTER 9

The Art of Virtual Communication

Given how often we do it, we all should be experts in virtual communications such as emails and instant messaging. Yet for all the time we spend communicating, most of us haven't had much training on how to do it well.

In this chapter, we will look at the biggest common mistakes that people make when communicating virtually and how to fix them. We also will look at how to collaborate with people you have never met, what you should know about digital body language, and how to avoid overcommunicating with digital tools.

9.1

Why Virtual Collaboration Is Hard

I remember taking a tour of the MIT Media Lab and passing an empty couch with a live video feed in front of it. On the other end of the video was a similar couch in the European outpost of the Media Lab in Ireland. The idea of the live video was to enable real-time collaboration with peers from across the ocean. Anyone

could come sit and have a conversation with anyone on the other end. It was brilliant. Unfortunately, as my brother who worked there told me, on most days that couch was usually empty.

It turns out that having the technology for connection doesn't magically make connection happen.

In fact, more often than not technology stands in the way of those connections happening because the interactions feel disjointed or artificial.



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How do we avoid those technological barriers and find better ways to collaborate when we can't be there in person? The first important step is to focus on the type of communication we want to have.

9.2

Setting Expectations with Your Virtual Team

When it comes to communicating with someone in a virtual way, there are generally two methods: synchronous and asynchronous.

Speaking to someone on the telephone or live in a virtual meeting is an example of **synchronous communication**. Sending an email is an example of **asynchronous communication**.

This seems obvious, but the problem is that there are many forms of virtual communication sitting squarely in between. Take a text message, for example.

What is a reasonable amount of time to wait for a response to a text? Ten seconds? Five minutes?

Your answer may be different than what a colleague would say, and within that gap is the potential for misunderstanding and conflict.

Perspective: **ILMA NAUSEDAITE ON ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION**

Our whole communication is totally asynchronous and because of that you can plan your day and week ahead. It's really connected with productivity and why we can work faster as a team just because of that mindset. No one will interrupt you.

I think having a team that is in deep flow, in deep work is much more important than just putting out fires.³⁶

— *Ilma Nausedaite is the COO of Mailerlite.*

Luckily, there are a few techniques to help you to manage this challenge and set better expectations.

Tip 1 SET WORK CULTURE GUIDELINES

The best way to manage the potential for conflict is for a leader at work to set clear expectations on the team's virtual work culture. What are the standard working hours? Are people expected to respond or check emails on the weekend? When people don't know what's expected, they create their own expectations. Make it easier for everyone and set expectations centrally.

Perspective: DHARMESH SHAH'S PAJAMA PRINCIPLE

Remember that remote people are people. Treat them with the same care that you do anyone else in the team. And you can dramatically open up the pool of possible talent that you have access to just by letting the best people do their best work. And often their best work is done when they are in their pajamas. The Pajama Principle is simple. It states that your success is proportional to the degree to which you let people stay in their pajamas. I live by the Pajama Principle, both as a beneficiary and an implementer."³⁷

– *Dharmesh Shah is the CTO of HubSpot.*

Tip 2 TRAIN YOUR TEAMMATES

Aside from having a centrally dictated set of expectations, you have a personal responsibility to train your teammates on what to expect from you in terms of communication. How quickly you choose to respond to requests or engage in virtual communications sets expectations for the next time. Do you agree to meetings right away? Do you pick up the phone any time it rings? Do you respond to emails at 11 p.m.? Each time you do any of these things, remember that you are setting the new expectation for next time.

Tip 3 ACKNOWLEDGE NOW, RESPOND LATER

One of my favorite techniques to help manage expectations from my team and my clients is to respond immediately. I acknowledge receiving their email or request, and I say I will be getting back to them. This offers the best of both worlds: They get a response quickly and know that their message was received. I don't have to drop everything else I'm doing to address their need right away. Also, I avoid unintentionally setting their expectations for an immediate solution the next time.

9.3

How to Mind Your Digital Body Language

Contributed by Erica Dhawan, founder of Cotential

Digital body language involves the new hidden cues and signals in our digital conversations. We all know that most communication is through body language. Today, things have changed. We're often in virtual teams.

Do we understand the new cues and signals of "virtuality"? I have a few best practices to help people make sure that they're learning more about their own digital styles. One is that timing is everything.

Often what we see is that people respond 24/7. Some people expect that; others never would dream of it. If you send a thank-you email within a few minutes or an hour of a meeting versus a few days or a week later, there's a significant difference in how people feel connected to it.

I encourage everyone to ask themselves: What type of digital body language am I projecting? How can I make sure I'm being clear and avoid being misunderstood in today's digital era?³⁸

Erica Dhawan is the world's leading expert on Digital Body Language and author of *Get Big Things Done: The Power of Connectional Intelligence*.

9.4

The Secret to Better Virtual Communications

When I visit any group of students or am invited to do a guest lecture, I often share how lucky I feel that I was an English major as an undergraduate. The world has been moving toward English majors, I tell them, because many of our communications are based on being a good writer.

Great writing matters in everything from sending team emails to crafting a compelling online dating profile. Each day that passes, there seems to be yet another way that our personalities are defined by the things we choose to write and share online.

The secret to better communications, virtually or otherwise, is to become a better writer.

I realize that sounds intimidating, especially if you never thought of yourself as a writer or if you grew up hating to write. The good news is that, in my experience, becoming a better writer takes an unwavering focus on three principles:

- 1. Write like you talk:** I spent many years studying screenwriting, and the one thing you learn from that is the rhythm of human dialogue. We can all use that to write in more human ways. There's a simple test to make sure you're doing this: Just read what you have written out loud. If it sounds like something you would say, keep it. If not, change it!

- 2. Use just enough words:** Some people will tell you that less is more. To some degree, that's true. But there is such a thing with virtual communications as making it too short. A one-word email reply may seem like you're being clear, but it also can be misinterpreted. Instead of focusing on just brevity, focus on the combination of making it short and making it clear.

Don't use too many words,
but don't use too few either.

- 3. Always choose clarity:** Pontificating with lucid insights may demonstrate your enviable intellect. Simple words are usually better. I love vocabulary as much as the next English major, but the best communication has clarity. Be direct, choose your words intentionally, and say what you mean.

9.5

Three Tips for Better Emails when Working Remotely

You might be thinking this section is unnecessary. Do you really need a guide for better email? Perhaps you already have great habits when it comes to email,

or maybe you could be a bit better. No matter what you think your level of savvy is, these tips are worth reviewing:

- 1. Make the subject line relevant:** This line communicates the context, and sometimes it's the only thing people look at to decide whether they want to read the rest. Even if you're sending emails to colleagues that you know they will open, writing a great subject line can be as useful as being there in person to capture attention.
- 2. Avoid writing "me-mails."** Email expert and author Gisela Hausmann cautions against starting all your emails with "I" or "my." Both put the focus on you instead of your reader. An alternative is to start with a phrase such as "Thank you." For example, instead of writing, "I wanted to follow up with you on your concerns ...," you might say, "Thank you for raising your concerns ..."
- 3. Start with what's most important:** A press release has a specific style. The most important information is in the first sentence, and every sentence that follows is less important. The assumption is that busy journalists won't read much, so public relations people know to put the most vital information up front. You should write your emails the same way.

9.6

Three Tips for Using Instant or Team Messaging

Nothing comes closer to the disruptive nature of just swinging by someone's office than instant messaging (IM). While its immediacy and ability to help people feel connected throughout the day are valuable, its potential to disrupt work is high. To use it well, consider these tips and share them with your colleagues:

- 1. Set your availability:** Most IM tools come with a critical function: an availability indicator. You usually can set it to indicate that you are online/available or away/busy. This feature is there for a reason. If you use it consistently, and your colleagues do the same, it will work better for everyone.
- 2. Direct your posts:** If you're using team messaging, make sure to indicate where your posts should go and who should see them. This includes using category tags, segmenting your messages and tagging individuals if specific people need to see it. Though the ways you can do this may vary based on the tools you're using, the important thing is to add the necessary context to anything you share.
- 3. Keep it light:** Instant messaging conversations are best for quick questions, easily addressed issues, or requests on things you already know. They are not

good for longer, deeper conversations, or talks that include conflict or high emotion. Those are much better done in person and should be kept off IM.

9.7

How to Communicate in a Multicultural Team

After spending five years working and living in Australia, I had become accustomed to the language of business down under. A few weeks after moving back to America, I realized I may need to rethink some of that language.

I remember sitting in a brainstorming meeting with colleagues and throwing out ideas. I used some profanity to illustrate a point and the look I saw on several people's faces immediately told me it was the wrong thing to say. Back in Sydney this language was ordinary. Even tame.

A bit of profanity to indicate passion for an idea was no big deal in Australian work culture.

But now I was working in what was (and still is) one of the most politically correct cities in the world: Washington DC. People had different expectations and I had to retrain myself when it came to my language.

I was lucky. That happened in person and I immediately saw the reaction from the team, corrected my language and made a mental note to be more careful in the future. But what if that had been a virtual meeting?

It's possible I may not have noticed the backlash, which is just one of the problems that can happen when people working remotely need to collaborate with those from different cultures.

So how do you improve your intercultural intelligence? The first and most important lesson which I learned from my friend Paolo Nagari, a multicultural communications expert, is to fine tune your powers of observation.

What language or gestures are the people on a call with you using? How have they communicated with you over email or on the phone?

One of the fastest ways to appreciate and respect a culture is to notice and mirror their behaviors.

So, for example, if you are on a virtual call where they share how "honored" they are for you to be presenting, you reflect back that you are honored to be there as

well. When you see that the team you're interacting with is highly hierarchical, make sure to address your questions to the person in charge and not to their subordinates.

Learning to respect another culture is a skill that you can develop with practice. What it requires most of all is constant observation and a willingness to integrate and immediately act on what you notice.

Perspective: **LISETTE SUTHERLAND ON
MULTICULTURAL ETIQUETTE**

In some cultures, being direct is considered impolite. Or someone might equate accepting a compliment, even gracefully, as being conceited. Some see asking for feedback as a form of weakness. Some would be reluctant to pronounce an opinion before learning the views of those higher on the totem pole. Others refrain from making a decision before getting input from the entire group.

When we're not in the same room with our coworkers we lose important context – even when communicating with video. And diminished context can lead to misunderstandings. The particular trouble with misunderstandings arising from different cultures is that we don't know what we don't know.

We can succeed in working with anyone, from anywhere, when we take the time to learn as much as we can about each other. Do what you can to learn about your remote colleagues' traditions and customs – including, ideally, the motivation and reasoning behind these customs.³⁹

– *Lisette Sutherland is Director at Collaboration Superpowers.*

9.8

How Doodling Improves Collaboration

Contributed by Sunni Brown, author of The Non-Obvious Guide to Doodling At Work

In a recent conversation with a city's Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO), it became crystal clear why visual language is so important.

The CSO I was speaking with was tasked with re-thinking the environmental quality of her city. Everyone involved in her department was working at full capacity and had good intentions and appropriate skills.

The problem was, no one could see the big picture.

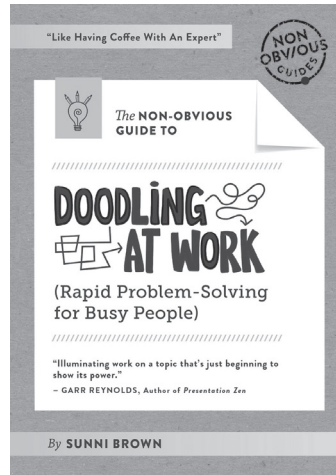
You see, large cities don't pose fun, quick challenges. They are messy, complex systems that change rapidly and involve competing interests, multiple stakeholders, and public accountability.

Anyone working for a city and responsible for its growth must balance these things as well as quality of life issues for everyone living inside the city limits. It's a big job that affects thousands upon thousands of individuals.

To make sense of the larger perspective, we must doodle, and we have to doodle as a group. That's because the kind of doodling that results in large-scale visual maps is best when it's done with others.

So, if we really believe that good communication is core to intelligent strategy, to seamless teamwork, to the pursuit of excellence, we must take seriously the limitation of being literally blinded to larger realities. We don't know what we don't know until we ask others to add their perspectives and until we start drawing it out for everyone to see.⁴⁰

Sunni Brown is the author of several books on doodling at work, including *The Doodle Revolution* and the *Non-Obvious Guide to Doodling at Work*.



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www.nonobvious.com/guides/doodling



CHAPTER SUMMARY:

- There are two methods for virtual communications: synchronous (like talking on the phone) and asynchronous (like emailing).
- To be a better virtual communicator, start with improving your writing: write like you talk, always choose clarity, and use just enough words. (not too many and not too few)
- Your digital body language are the hidden cues in your digital communication that help people get to know you and what you really want.
- Better email communications start with avoiding "me mails," putting the focus on your reader instead and starting with what's most important.
- The key to better instant messaging communication is directing your posts and keeping it light.
- When working in a multicultural team, make sure you respect and consider the cultural differences.
- Doodling can improve collaboration by helping your team see the big picture.

CONCLUSION

Surviving the Future of Work

This book has been a labor of love and necessity. We live in a world where everyone needs to be fluent in how to work remotely and run or participate in virtual meetings.

But teaching people these skills is not what I usually do.

My mission is to help people
see what others miss.

That's what I have spoken about to hundreds of thousands of people over the past few years. It's also what I have been doing for the past decade by researching trends.

I have often written that I believe that trends are simply curated observations of the accelerating present. And our present is certainly accelerating.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone wants to know what to expect for the future. In a time of uncertainty, we need help to make sense of everything.

After a decade of studying patterns to isolate and identify emerging trends – there is one principle that has helped me to stay flexible enough to adapt when changes come ... no matter how disruptive they are:

Always be curious.

I have become a collector of what sometimes seems like useless knowledge. It has become my secret of success.

The first time I heard about the emerging field of cloud seeding – the science of controlling the rain – I spent an entire afternoon reading about it. To prepare for a talk last year, I attended a 90-minute seminar on how to sell a diamond engagement ring.

The more narrowly you define your expertise or your beliefs, the harder it is to adapt when confronted by serious change.

And serious change is already here. In fact, it is likely that the way you are working right now will be vastly different ten years from now. For some people, that is a terrifying thought. For others, it's exciting. I'm choosing to be excited.

I hope you do too.



About the Author

Rohit Bhargava is on a mission to help the world be more open-minded by teaching others how to be non-obvious thinkers. He is the founder of the Non-Obvious Company and an entertaining, original and “non-boring” keynote speaker on innovation and trust. He previously spent 15 years in leadership roles at two renowned ad agencies: Leo Burnett and Ogilvy. Rohit is the *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of six books and has been invited to deliver keynote presentations in 32 countries around the world. His insights have been used by the World Bank, NASA, Intel, Disney, Colgate Swisshotel, Coca-Cola, Schwab, Under Armour, NBC Universal, American Express and hundreds of others to win the future. Rohit is a popular Adjunct Professor of Marketing and Storytelling at Georgetown University and also writes a monthly column for GQ magazine in Brazil. He believes in listening before talking, is a life-long lover of the Olympics and lives with his wife and two boys in the Washington DC area.



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