



In the virtual, hybrid world we are working in, we have choices. Will we go live? Will we record the event? We have choices to either let our team members drudge on and through their work and their changing roles, or we can choose to engage them, start conversations, and improve team behaviors.

Speaking of engaging your team members, my latest book, "[123 Ways to Add Pizazz to a Panel Discussion](#)" launches on January 7, 2021. And while you may think it is only relevant to panels, the information is equally applicable to keeping your team engaged throughout your virtual meeting. I've packed it with lots of ideas and virtual variations to add a little "vitality and glamour" to your next meeting and/or panel.

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RE-ENGAGE YOUR TEAM IN THE "HYBRID" WORKPLACE

In today's "hybrid" workplace, where some employees are working remotely, others are in the office and may be switching their locations from home to office on a periodic basis, it may be difficult to re-engage your team. Perhaps it has always been that way or team members don't know how to engage in this new and different work environment. Perhaps they tried to participate virtually and were unsuccessful, or they simply choose not to. Keep in mind that whatever happened in the past is history.

What you can do is to start a conversation to change that behavior.

What to Do to Re-Engage Your Team

Be Frank. Start your next meeting with a frank conversation about how you feel about their engagement. Give them specific observations about their participation at your meetings. While you do this, don't criticize, question, or make them feel bad about their behavior.

Seek First to Understand. Ask some open-ended questions to understand where they are coming from. For example: "What do you think about what I am saying?" Listen to what they have to say — you might be surprised at what you hear.

Discuss Possible Strategies. Discuss the following strategies for increasing their engagement:

- Volunteer ideas, suggestions, and information willingly and without finality.
- Use a round-robin technique to gain input from all participants – whether they are in the office or working remotely.
- Encourage all team members to be “present” and not multi-task during the meeting.
- Encourage all remote team members to turn their cameras “on” – and keep the gallery view open for the office team to see.
- Seek input from quieter team members. Ask if anyone else has a comment or question.
- Ask for and listen to all points of view.
- Listen to one another without interrupting or completing others’ sentences.
- Make positive remarks about other team members and their contributions.
- Refer to team members by name.
- Break the team into smaller groups. Then have the groups report to the larger team.
- Encourage and reinforce new and creative ideas.
- Do not tolerate side-tracking, hidden agendas, or domination.
- Summarize your understanding of what others have said.

Agree on New Ground Rules. As a team, identify the top three strategies to increase your team’s engagement. Add these three strategies to your team ground rules. Reassure them that you want to emphasize these three strategies, and then encourage the behavior.

For the Team Leader: After you have discussed these strategies, let team members know that it is not just your responsibility as “boss” to do all these things...but that it is every team member’s responsibility. As the leader, make the extra effort to “do” the three strategies. Your employees will be looking to you as a role model, and to see if you really want their participation.

Keep in mind, however, that talking is not necessarily a measure of engagement. We all know people who talk a lot and say nothing. Look for opportunities to create an environment where each individual contributes when appropriate.

LIVE VIRTUAL PANEL DISCUSSION VS. A RECORDED PANEL DISCUSSION: PITFALLS, RISKS, PROS, CONS

This week, I was producing a virtual event that had two different types of panel discussions: a live panel discussion with the moderator and panelists in remote locations and a recorded panel discussion where the moderator and panelists in remote locations were recorded and then edited to be shown “live” during the event.

While neither format is better than another, they are different – and I think it is helpful to understand the pros and cons of each format:

Pros & Cons of a Live Virtual Panel Discussion

A live virtual panel discussion has the spontaneity you want from a face-to-face, in-person panel discussion – it is just being held in the digital world with the moderator, panelists, and audience all in different locations – and experiencing the event at the same time. The audience knows that it is live, unscripted, and real. They are leaning into the juicy bits of conversation they can’t get from Google or YouTube. The moderator can pick up on the chat, solicit questions from the question box, or bring audience members in live to pose a question.

It is in this live environment, that you can experience the typical pitfalls of a live panel: a panelist doesn’t show up, the discussion falls flat, a panelist dominates the conversation or goes off-topic, they launch into a commercial promoting their products...and the list goes on.

You also have the technical risks of a virtual panel where the internet connection is unstable, audio or visual won't work with a panelist, or the presets don't work as planned. (Pre-sets are the frames that the A/V company sets up to put the panelists in so it makes for a cohesive visual experience).

One final potential downfall is that audience attendance could be lower due to the live, scheduled time of the event. In our wild new world of work, schedules can be packed with other virtual appointments. Unless of course, you record the live event for later viewing.

Pros & Cons of a Recorded Panel Discussion

A recorded panel discussion is a more risk-averse option. It is NOT live, but pre-recorded. The good news is that you can edit out the fluff and awkwardness into a tight (and potentially shorter) conversation – which is good news in these days of Zoom fatigue, shorter and more concise is a blessing. A shorter, scheduled production could increase audience attendance, especially if they can listen to the recording at any time.

The technical risks are much smaller as you have time to record and edit the panel discussion, and your biggest worry is about streaming it out to the audience. A side benefit of having a recorded panel discussion is that you can access panelists who might not be able to make the “live” event due to a scheduling conflict.

But here's the downside: The audience will know that it is pre-recorded. That element of spontaneity is gone. Poof! This can be mitigated somewhat with the moderator and panelists making comments in the chatbox, but it just isn't the same as live.

Your choice on the type of panel discussion depends on your desire for spontaneity and your tolerance for risk. You decide!

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: 123 WAYS TO ADD PIZAZZ TO A PANEL DISCUSSION

Add some pizzazz to the traditional panel discussion format with these tips and techniques. In [my new book](#), I'm providing 123 different ways to transform a traditional panel discussion into the hit of your conference!

In this 200+ page reference guide, you will discover myriad ideas to punch up your panels including how to:

- Design an inspiring panel format
- Find and prepare your panelists
- Curate fabulous questions
- Set the stage and A/V tips
- Open with pizzazz!
- Inspire spontaneous and informative conversations
- Intervene firmly but tactfully
- Finish with panache
- Keep the audience at the edge of their seats
- Shift gears periodically
- Engage & involve the audience
- Moderate lively audience Q&A
- PLUS, tons of tips on how to adapt these techniques to the virtual environment!

Just pull out this quick reference guide to provide a little inspiration for your live, face-to-face, virtual, and hybrid panel discussions!

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