Conducting Professional Zoom Meetings

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Introduction

This article is a practical and quick dive into the basic cinematography of the Zoom experience. The COVID-19 pandemic thrust us into the spotlight after spending our entire careers on the phone, at our computers, or driving to see our clients in person. The reality check is we need to be ready to go on camera instantly, and we are trying to get on the front side of the wave to achieve professional Zoom proficiency.

Backgrounds

Let's talk about the background first. In our Zoom infancy, we struggled to find our background zen space. We dabbled with funny backgrounds, vacation photos, memes, and courtroom scenes. But after the amusement wore off, we were left to find out what would be the professional standard moving forward.

So what do we do now? I was involved in a recent Zoom discussion which made much ado about making certain one's background was free of sensitive or confidential material that could expose a client's information to prying eyes. This was a valuable discussion, but I tend to search a background more to see what is interesting and unique about the individual rather than a covert discovery mission. A background is an excellent opportunity to be authentic to your viewer. Show your team colors, dogs, family photos, hobbies, etc. Using a cheap screen makes viewers think you're trying to hide your dirty laundry in the background. Some of my favorite off Zoom discussions have been

about unique objects in the backgrounds of a professor's office, such as plants or a statue that keeps moving every week. Using the blurred background option is a safe choice that can alleviate many of the concerns I've mentioned.

Lighting

The elephant in the Zoom room is the foreground. We spend so much time on backgrounds that we overlook how we present ourselves on camera. I don't mean just wearing a professional outfit. If we don't use appropriate lightning, nobody will see the outfit, or even our face, for that matter. My first attempt at upgraded lighting was taking off a lampshade and using a bare bulb. My social media savvy girlfriend had to show me the light literally. I now possess and use a reasonably priced ring light for my desktop. It doubles as a reading lamp sometimes and is very functional. The benefits of the ring light are that it can change the color of the light depending on how much light is in the room. It is also helpful to adjust for lighter or darker skin tones to help present a more natural look. Computer lights, table lamps, or simple camera lights won't do the job of a ring light and leave many presenters looking tired or pale. Investing in a good ring light should be on every professional's list of office accessories.

Camera Placement

Camera placement is another issue. Your viewer will probably not mention it, but looking up your nose is not the best angle. Elevate your camera to eye level or higher to prevent this from happening. Placing your laptop on law school casebooks is an excellent alternative in a pinch. Also, putting the camera as close to where you are predominantly looking is essential to ensure you don't look distracted and can maintain the appearance of eye contact with your video partner. Some tricks to achieving this are to center the view of the Zoom call in the upper middle portion of your screen if that's where the camera is. If not, place the speaker view directly below where the camera is positioned. I learned a trick to move my camera off to one side and use the other half of the screen for notes to prop my meeting outlines on.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pandemic forced us into a world of cinematography many of us were unprepared for. Hopefully, the lessons I have learned and shared will bring value to your Zoom experience. I hope they also help create a more professional and polished experience for your viewers.