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Zoom meetings: If you don't 'skill up,' you'll be left behind

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Feeling **Zoom fatigue**? Employees who prefer face-to-face interactions and are tired of virtual meetings better buckle up and keep Zoom-ing because new research from Barclays indicates that business travel will remain severely limited for the foreseeable future.

"Hopes for a relatively swift start of international travel have been repeatedly dashed, and it is becoming clear that we may be facing a period of persistent pandemic, marked by semi-permanent restrictions such as testing requirements and vaccine passports," Barclays analysts wrote. "Global mobility will be less spontaneous and more expensive and bureaucratic, impacting both business and leisure travel."

"Business travel as we knew it is never fully coming back," Airbnb (**ABNB**) CEO Brian Chesky [recently told Yahoo Finance Live](#).

U.S. airline traffic is down about 40% this month compared to 2019 during the same period, according to [Jeffries senior research analyst Sheila Kahyaoglu](#).

Fortunately in the absence of business travel facilitating face-to-face meetings, there are concrete steps employees can take to improve their virtual meetings.



President-elect Joe Biden receives a briefing on national security in a Zoom meeting with advisors at the Queen Theater on November 17, 2020 in Wilmington, Delaware. (Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

"People often forget...in 2019 we hated meetings then, too. So you can't blame Zoom fatigue completely on the camera or on meeting in a virtual environment. We didn't like them then, we still don't like them, but there's lots of things we can do to make them better," Joe Allen, professor of psychology at the University of Utah, told Yahoo Finance.

Allen and Karin Reed are the co-authors of "Suddenly Virtual: Making Remote Meetings Work," a recently published book which serves as a guide for companies.

"Have we talked to CEOs, employees who were really flummoxed by this new situation? Yes, practically everyone," said Reed. Learning to own the room on Zoom is key to navigating the new normal of virtual business meetings, say Allen and Reed.

As an Emmy-winning former broadcaster, Reed has been teaching on-camera skills to business professionals for a decade. "Initially, whenever people went suddenly virtual they were looking for whatever worked, it wasn't necessarily whatever worked best. But now people understand that virtual meetings are not going away, and they need to make them more effective and more satisfying," she said.

'If people don't skill up when it comes to the virtual meetings, they'll be left behind'

Combating video call fatigue means keeping virtual meetings shorter and more purpose-driven, says Reed, because back-to-back meetings that are too long sap the energy of all those involved. "If people don't skill up when it comes to the virtual meetings, they'll be left behind in this process," says Allen.

While some companies like **HSBC** and **Citigroup** have announced Zoom-free Fridays to alleviate the number of employee meetings, many more companies still need to rely on them amid the pandemic and hybrid work schedules.

"If you do not participate as an attendee, you will get lost," Allen said. "Other people will be conversing and you will not get your opportunity to share. So you have to be willing to engage and participate."



Allen advises workers not to multitask while in a meeting and deliberately close the email and news feed tabs in order to focus on the colleagues on the call.

Most of us have been on a Zoom or Google Hangout call when a colleague, asked a question by someone else, couldn't answer because they weren't paying attention. Avoid being that person, says Allen.

It's important to own your own personal production value in virtual meetings, says Reed. "It's not a matter of vanity, it's a matter of showing respect for your conversation partners because you want to make sure that they are able to receive your message as easily as possible. Because we are at a deficit virtually vs. whenever we are in person with someone," she said.

Lighting, audio, background images, and where the camera is positioned all impact the value of that Zoom meeting, says Reed. She advises workers to light up their faces from the front, make sure their audio is coming across as crisp and clear, and remove any clutter in the background that might be distracting. Employees should make sure their camera is situated at eye level, says Reed.

"If you do those things...you're essentially increasing your interjection value," says Allen. "When you're prepared, when you're not multitasking so you know what's going on, when you participate, when you interject your ideas, they'll carry weight."

"If you are sitting in shadow, your interjection value will drop," added Reed.

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