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Make virtual happy hours effective for networking

Virtual happy hour networking events are growing in popularity as people seek to connect with new contacts and maintain rapport with existing colleagues while maintaining social distancing. The following are tips on effective networking in the virtual world.

Don't get too happy

Just because the name includes "happy hour," does not mean that's an invitation to drink alcohol. By all means have some kind of drink at hand to fit in but go alcohol-free so you can present yourself professionally and gain the most benefit. Save the true virtual happy hours for friends and family.

Set goals

Soon after getting the invitation, think about goals: What do you want to get out of this event? More connections? Feelers for a new job or a new career? Help from others? Offering help to others? Ease your loneliness/boredom?

Know people before you meet them

At least a day before the event, check out the other participants. Look people up on LinkedIn

to find out what interests, talents and contacts you have in common. Make a list of people you definitely want to talk to. Jot down some questions or conversation starters.

Know yourself

Prepare your 90-second elevator speech to answer when people ask what you do. Prepare a longer version to hold in reserve. Practice so it sounds smooth—and not like a speech.

Put your best face forward

This is the time to break your makeup out of storage. If you are among the blessed few who have not had to do video meetings as part of work, congratulations! Well before the happy hour is the time to try out your on-camera look. This advice goes for women and men; increasingly men are wearing light makeup to look their best on camera.

Experiment with your camera

Speaking of camera, adjust your settings to present yourself in the most flattering way. A good camera angle can eliminate or minimize the hint of a double chin. Experiment with lighting and consider investing in one of the lights designed just for video meetings.

If you are thinking of ditching the camera, don't. Of course, it's not unusual to not like video meetings, but the whole point of video meetings is to connect. For that people need to see your face.

Know your technology

Even if you're a pro at whatever video conferencing software your company uses, don't assume you know all the ins and outs of the tech used for your networking event. Plan to log on, or at least start logging on, 10 to 15 minutes early to come up to speed. Take even



more time if tech is not your sweet spot yet.

Take advantage of private chat functions

If you see someone from your list of people to meet, start a private chat to make a deeper connection. Ask questions and take cues from their answers.

Ask to have a private meetup later

Just like in-person networking happy hours, the main goal at a virtual networking event is to meet new people. Feel free, though, to ask for contact information to schedule a follow-up call later.

As the happy hour ends

Do not be the first one to leave. And do

not exit the meeting right after you finish saying something; the video lag may cut your words short.

After the happy hour

Thank the host for organizing the meeting. Follow up with people you met; ask to connect on LinkedIn and send a brief message with your connection request, reminding them of what you talked about. Review your goals. Did you achieve them? Good for you. Move you can grab a drink.

This special advertising section was prepared by independent writer K. H. Queen. The production of this section did not involve the news or editorial staff of The Washington Post.