This one remote-work hack will make your virtual meetings more productive

Show your coworkers you’re ready to engage and contribute by coming out from behind your blank screen.
Over the past months, how you manage your work, connections, and careers has changed dramatically. You’re demonstrating value without being able to see your boss in person. You’re managing your projects despite no central war room, and you’re finding ways to get coaching from your mentor without the benefit of meeting for coffee. But in addition to figuring out all of that, there’s one surprising thing you must also do to be successful: Turn on the video during your virtual calls.

There are pros and cons to almost all virtual communication. For instance, it’s easier to connect and work from anywhere, but it’s tougher to build relationships. It’s pretty terrific to wear your sweatpants and fuzzy slippers to work, but it can be a challenge to network effectively and make strides toward your next career opportunity.

One surprising element, which can make a huge difference to your progression at your job, is your video camera. Using video every day for meetings is admittedly exhausting. It puts us under a microscope—forcing us to watch ourselves on camera with greater frequency than ever before. It can make us hypervigilant about our flaws, and it can exacerbate stress that comes from comparisons with others (“Her apartment looks so much cooler than mine”). But overall, video is here to stay. Even when we get back to the benefits of the office, people will likely still work remotely to a greater extent than they did before the pandemic, and this will make virtual communication—and video connections—a feature of the future as well as the present. However, there are reasons, for your workplace involvement and career development, to keep your camera on.

**WHY TURNING ON VIDEO IS IMPORTANT**

Love it or hate it, video is important to your career, and you’ll need to use it regularly and turn it on—perhaps more than you want to—for a number of reasons:

**Video demonstrates responsibility.** When you have your video on, you show not only that you’re camera-ready but ready for your day and your work. It is sad, but true, that we tend to judge others more harshly than ourselves. This is especially the case when we don’t know others well. If you choose not to turn on video, others may conclude you didn’t get up early enough to shower, do your hair, or change out of your pajamas. On the other hand, when you turn on your camera, you demonstrate you’re ready to go.
Video communicates confidence. Without video, you may unintentionally communicate you have something to hide or something you're unsure about—or something that's keeping you from being fully prepared to engage. By having your camera on, you show you're self-assured, transparent, and ready to move ahead.

**Video builds trust and rapport.** People don’t trust what they don’t understand, and when you’re on video, you’re providing plenty of information about yourself. People can see your nonverbal behaviors and get a sense of your mood, your manner, and your mindset. These factors all help to communicate a sense of openness. This, in turn, tends to encourage others to share, building a positive reinforcing loop. When you’re open and share, others talk about themselves as well. The entire process builds rapport and relationships.

**Video helps you engage.** When you’re on video, you’re more likely to engage in meetings. When your video is off, it’s more tempting to multitask or let your mind wander. Knowing others can see you will help you listen, pay attention, and contribute. This will make you more effective and put you in a better place to grow your career.

**Video makes you memorable.** To make progress in your career, your colleagues need to know who you are and appreciate your contributions. The brain remembers significantly better with both video and audio cues, and being off camera makes you little more than a voice. You may be brilliant, but you’ll be a forgettable audio wave, rather than a memorable contributor. Turning on your camera will help people get to know you and remember you better.

**Video sets the meeting’s tone.** When you turn on your video, it sets the tone for others to do the same and creates the conditions for more effective virtual communication. When others have their cameras on, you can read nonverbal signals and make comments targeted to the situation. You can see when others are about to speak, and therefore when you need to hold back. Or perhaps you can see that others are resistant, and you can find ways to make your points more persuasive. You can also see when others are struggling and when you need to demonstrate empathy or compassion. All of this helps make you more effective. Turning on your video sends an important signal for others to turn it on as well—and benefits not only you but everyone in the meeting.

Of course, video may not be appropriate all the time, but the situations in which it’s preferable have expanded. Err on the side of turning on your camera. It sends a powerful message about your responsibility and your confidence as well as your openness. It will help you build relationships and rapport and make you more memorable and effective—and all of these are very good for the trajectory of your career.

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