COMMUNICATING WITH THE FAMILY DURING COVID-19

Tips for Running Virtual Family Meetings Effectively

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Means of Communication

**IM’s**
Message, Whatsapp, and other apps allow for immediate interaction with individuals and groups.

Psychologically, triggers the expectation of a fast response.

Communication is short and addresses “to the point” topics that need response

Of limited use for communicating emotions (mix of text/emoji works better)

Whatsapp can lead people to tune out if overused.

Often preferred by introverted people

**E-mails**
Mostly used to inform, communicate formal & binding information

Used as a way to clarify commitments, plans, expectations, etc.

People will judge speed of response from the other party and interpret in context of the relationship.

Ease of distribution (especially, when Bcc is used) can create and broaden conflicts.

Not the best means to conduct negotiations or resolving differences.

Preferred by introverted people

**Phone Call**
Immediate mean for voice interaction.

More personal. Recommended for dealing with more sensitive issues

Captures the other party reaction/emotion better than text and email

Not as good as face-to-face but OK for dealing with negotiations, discussing emotionally loaded topics, etc.

Preferred by extroverted people

**Virtual meetings**
The “new normal”.

Conceived to substitute face-to-face meetings

Preferred by younger generations.

Challenge established leadership

Encourages diversity of opinions (vs. group thinking)

Helps introverted people participate more

Difficult to capture emotions, feelings

Better than phone calls but not as good as face-to-face to deal with conflict and emotionally loaded issues

**Face-to-Face meetings**
The quintessential way of people’s interaction.

Allows to capture the other party’s feelings, reactions, emotions & non-verbal language

Ideal for conflict resolution, negotiations, hot topics.

Helps build trust and leadership

Preferred by extroverted people
VIRTUAL IS NOT “ACTUAL” –RUNNING A VIRTUAL MEETING IS NOT THE SAME AS BEING THERE...

• Inoculate everyone at the front end of the meeting with the thought that virtual meetings require extra effort from participants to be successful

• Acknowledge the individuals on the call and invite participation (track who speaks and who doesn’t and gently invite those who remain quiet to participate to ensure they are tracking)

• Pay attention to “hybrid meetings” in which some people are together in person while others are connecting virtually – if possible, try to discourage side conversations among those meeting in person while the virtual meeting is in progress

• The more sensitive the issues to be addressed the more care that needs to be given to the design of the meeting

• The rule of thumb: if possible, buy time and postpone emotionally loaded issues for face to face meeting down the line

• If not possible to postpone, then consider breaking the system down into smaller units that may be more capable of processing and/or containing emotionally loaded issues: individuals, couples, sibs, nuclear families, branches, generations, etc.

• Prepare the smaller units to engage on the issues before the meeting – consider a round of individual meetings before the group meeting to ensure that everyone understands the ground rules and the agenda (this is particularly critical if you have a complicated personal relationship with the individuals who will be at the meeting)
MAKE AN EXTRA EFFORT TO FOCUS ATTENTION

Offer a clear agenda that builds up on the emotional load (starting with the easier items and building to the more difficult)

• Keep meetings short (2 hours max) – better to do several short (30min) sequential meetings than a long one...
• Make sure agenda is accomplishable in the time available
• Check IT connection before hand to ensure best possible links
• Ensure that cameras point in the right direction and frame everyone appropriately, check microphones and avoid background noise (encourage participants to mute their microphones when not speaking). If connection is not stable, turn video off.
• If there is no one formally appointed to run the meeting, appoint someone to lead
• Assume that virtual meetings will require stronger presence from whoever is leading
• Alert everyone about who will chair the meeting and empower them to manage the agenda, frame the issues, keep track of time, summarize what get decided and what needs to be followed up with
• Establish clear process norms (like a “yellow card” if conversation gets too heated and you need to intervene and take issues offline or postpone for when they can be dealt with in a face to face meeting)
• Protect time at the end of each meeting for a quick review of the meeting to move everyone up the learning curb – do a quick plus/delta on what worked well and what needs to change to improve virtual meetings
Virtual meetings are good for some things but not for others...

**KEY FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH**

- Research suggests that introverted people and individuals with divergent opinions feel more open to participate more in virtual meetings (VM’s) than in face-to-face (FTF). Can work as an antidote to “group-think”

- Pre-work, thorough meeting planning, expected outcomes and anticipated agenda sharing have been reported to be key to successful VM’s

- VM’s are perceived as a complement to FTF interactions, not a substitute.

- FTF meetings are more effective than VM’s in building trust and leadership, as well as managing conflict and difficult situations

- Formal leadership can be challenged by situational leadership during VM’s, apparently in part due to the dispersion of the group

- When planning VM’s with participants throughout the world, it as shown to be effective to rotate the hours of the meeting, acknowledging the inconveniences for some people connecting late in the day

- As expected, millennials are the generation more comfortable with holding VM’s as the standard way for meetings

- Meeting leader’s knowledge of the VM tools and ability to persuade people to participate is key for a productive & successful meeting, as VM’s flow less naturally than FTF
For Further Reading…

SUPPORTING RESEARCH USED FOR THIS DOCUMENT

- *A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Face-to-Face and Virtual Communication: Overcoming the Challenges*. Cornell University
- *Virtual Teams Research: 10 Years, 10 Themes, and 10 Opportunities*. Journal of Management. 2010. Gilson, Maynard, Jones, Vartiainen & Hakonen
- *From virtual teams to virtuality in teams*. The Tavistock Institute, UK. 2010. Dixon, Panteli
- *Emergent leadership in virtual teams: A multilevel investigation of individual communication and team dispersion antecedents* The Leadership Quarterly. 2015. Charlier, Stewart, Greco, Reeves
- *Team member selection decisions for virtual versus face-to-face teams* Computers in Human Behavior. 2010. D’Souza, Colarelli
- *The Relative Importance of Leadership Behaviors in Virtual and Face-to-Face Communication Settings*. University of Leiden. Zimmermann, Wit, Gill
- *Improving the Effectiveness of Virtual Teams by Adapting Team Processes*. Computer Supported Cooperative Work. Rice, Davidson, Dannenhoffer, Gay
- Korn Ferry: *How Quickly Do You Need to Reply?*
We would love to hear about your own response to the crisis so we can aggregate and share with other enterprising families around the world as we all brace for a few tough months ahead.

We would be happy to schedule a phone or video call to discuss.

Feel free to contact us at lga@lgassoc.com or +1.203.497.8855

Additional resources on Crisis and Risk Management for Enterprising Families and information about the rest of our services and global advisory team available at www.lgassoc.com
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