5 SECRETS
OF EXPERT VIRTUAL FACILITATORS

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ADVANCE PREPARATION

Plan early for every virtual event

2

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Keep virtual attendees interested and active

3

MASTER MULTI-TASKING

Master the fast-paced online environment

4

SMOOTH AUDIO & VIDEO

Ensure crystal-clear audio and authentic video

5

TAME THE TECHNOLOGY

Seamlessly manage unexpected technology issues

Have you wondered what the best virtual facilitators do for successful online events? What techniques do they use? What skills do they have? Apply these 5 techniques to become an expert virtual facilitator!

ADVANCE PREPARATION

1

By taking a few extra steps to ensure they are fully prepared, expert virtual facilitators are completely ready for every virtual event.

Think of how an Olympic athlete prepares for the games. They go to extreme measures to get ready for their main event. Through disciplined measures of diet, exercise, and sport-specific routines, they prepare themselves to win a medal and stand upon the podium.

In the same way, expert virtual facilitators prepare relentlessly for their online events. Some may even think they go to extreme measures to ensure success. However, the saying "proper preparation prevents poor performance" is just as true in a virtual event as it is in the athletic arena.

Expert virtual facilitators not only prepare to deliver content, they also prepare for contingencies and unusual situations.

They divide their preparation into three distinct parts:

1. **Standard** - follow the same advance preparation as any presentation or training class. Get to know the audience, studying notes, and tailoring content for relevancy. These tasks are just as important for virtual events as they are for any event.

2. **Technical** - know the software and all of its features, including what every menu and every button does, from both the host and the participant view. Expert virtual facilitators have studied the software so they can make the most of the available tools

3. **Extra** - create redundancies and backup plans for a "just in case." For example, having a mobile device logged in to the event as a participant in case of emergency. By taking the extra step to think about and prepare a back-up plan, any unforeseen challenges will just be a temporary disruption.

Use live events as an opportunity for connection, collaboration, and dialogue. Expert virtual facilitators always involve and include the audience.

The best virtual facilitators engage attendees from the moment they log in to the event by having a welcome activity on screen. Each attendee gets involved by clicking, typing and talking. The group gets engaged with the content and with each other. If it's a small group, they get them talking to each other right away, and ideally the webcams are ON. If it's a larger group, then the Chat window is active with conversation. This immediate invitation for conversation sets the tone for an engaging online event.

At the start time, instead of shifting to presentation-mode, expert facilitators keep the discussion going by inviting input and interaction throughout the event. It's not activity for the sake of activity, instead it's creating space for questions and conversations. Even if they are teaching content, their mindset is to connect with the audience. They creatively use all of the platform tools to keep the audience involved. Their goal is to have a social experience, from the moment everyone joins together.

The key to creating this type of engaging environment is to:

1. Set expectations with everyone in advance
2. Start the interaction, as soon as they log in
3. Create a social experience
4. Seek input, discussion, and dialogue throughout

2

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

MASTER MULTI-TASKING

3

Giving full attention to the remote audience as well as the technology platform requires multi-tasking mastery. The best virtual facilitators are able to juggle multiple tasks with ease.

While most experts say that multi-tasking cannot be done well by anyone, it's a necessary skill for virtual facilitators. There's a lot going on at once, and facilitators must pay attention to content, activities, timing, attendee comments, and everything going on in the software platform. Effective multi-tasking is a form of task-switching, which comes from a combination of preparation and speed. Virtual facilitators who do this well are both prepared and practiced.

* **Prepared** - by eliminating their own distractions, master facilitators can give sole attention to the screen and more importantly, to the attendees on the other side of it. They have fully prepared for the event so they are not using extra energy to remember what comes next or where to find things.

* **Practiced** - by using all of the platform tools regularly, and practicing their facilitation techniques, master facilitators naturally become better multi-taskers. Just like a world-class musician who plays a song over and over again until it sounds perfect, an effective virtual facilitator practices as much as possible to improve their skills. This practice leads to proficiency, which makes it easier to multi-task.

Tips for multi-tasking:

1. Be prepared
2. Know the platform tools
3. Use a producer or co-facilitator
4. Be a proficient typist
5. Practice, practice, practice

Skilled virtual facilitators use their voice and video to capture attention and present themselves authentically.

Ensuring a crystal-clear audio connection is one of the most important things that master virtual facilitators do. To make the most of their audio, they use a noise-canceling headset and avoid speakerphones to have a clear sound. They keep audience attention with their energetic, active voice. They've eliminated their filler words (like "um") and gotten rid of other distracting habits (like lip smacking).

Expert virtual facilitators also realize that streaming video adds an important social dimension to virtual events. They will - at minimum - turn on their webcam at the start of each event for introductions, and keep it on as bandwidth allows. They have practiced speaking to the camera lens so that it feels natural. They also check their camera angle and lighting so they can be clearly seen.

Tips for Using Webcams:

1. **Get the camera at eye level**
2. **Place lighting in front**
3. **Check (or blur) your background**
4. **Position yourself the correct distance**

4

SMOOTH AUDIO & VIDEO

TAME THE TECHNOLOGY

5

Technology should be the means for the virtual event, not the essence of the virtual event. Expert virtual facilitators recognize this subtle yet significant difference.

Expert virtual facilitators know that technology challenges will occur during virtual events, and they stay calm when that happens. If they use a producer, they'll partner together to manage the issues. If they're flying solo, then they'll gracefully communicate, troubleshoot and take care of the issue, and then return their focus to the event as quickly as possible.

Proper preparation will prevent many technology issues from ever arising. For example, preparing remote attendees with software test links and job aids will assist with many login issues. In addition, having backup technology (see #1 Advance Preparation) allows for a quick switch to an alternate option.

When unexpected technical issues do occur, the best virtual facilitators quickly respond in order to maintain the best possible audience experience.

When unexpected tech challenges arise...

1. **Stay calm and take a deep breath**
2. **Let participants know what's going on (if appropriate)**
3. **Use backup plans**
4. **Spend just a moment or two troubleshooting**
5. **Take a short break to deal with the situation**

FOLLOW THE KEYS TO ONLINE CLASSROOM SUCCESS

The difference between a good virtual facilitator and an expert virtual facilitator are found in the small actions they take before and during each online event. The best virtual facilitators show up prepared and polished, ready for a smooth performance. They authentically connect with their audience and strive to create an atmosphere of trust and respect. They share airtime with attendees by creating space for dialogue and discussion. And they manage the technology by staying focused on outcomes.

These deliberate, intentional actions focus on preparation and engagement. They take precaution to have clear audio, and smooth video. And they practice multi-tasking and learning new technology skills, so that they can easily have authentic conversations in the virtual classroom. The type of conversations that can and should take place online.

These five secrets have been adapted and combined from Cindy's previously published works, including Virtual Training Tools and Templates: An Action Guide to Live Online Learning, ATD Press 2017. Used with permission.

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