

## **The 9 Easiest Tips To Ensure Effective Conference Call Meetings**

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According to a survey conducted by LoopUp Group Ltd, the need for virtual meetings in the digital workplace is an unavoidable reality—but comes with a high cost. Businesses in the U.S. spent a total of 96.6 billion minutes, and those in the U.K. another 17.4 billion, on conference calls. With an average call length of 38 minutes, about 13 of those minutes (more than 33% of every call) is wasted, on average, dealing with distractions and interruptions. While conferencing has become an essential part of conducting day-to-day business, these frustrations have remained the same for decades.

But there is always a way for productivity. Despite background noise, not knowing who is on or who joined, people's lack of focus or spontaneous interruptions, some basic but extremely efficient tips can help to keep conference calls productive.

### 1. Start on time and finish on time

Respondents of the LoopUp Group survey reported wasting around 8 minutes getting meetings started. Besides, further distractions derail the meeting once things get started, leading to another 1-10 minutes of lost time per call. This can demoralize those who are already there, losing the initial energy and focus brought to the meeting. According to the research, after any distraction, it can take the brain nearly 20 minutes to get back to where it was before you were pulled off track.

So connect and ask if everybody is there—but also, do not wait for everybody to arrive. Reward instead of punishing those who are ready for it, and take advantage

of the benefits of a fresh start. Our attention spans are 10-18 minutes, so these first moments of the conference are invaluable for productive results.

Also, finish on time. If there are points that have not been addressed, postpone them for a new meeting. Finishing on time will help your team understand that they really need to go straight to the point because whatever does not fit, will not fit!

It will also help people feel like their time, priorities and obligations are respected, which is vital to keep them engaged and motivated.

## 2. Go straight to the point

During conference calls, people may become more personal, fun or enthusiastic to replace the missing face-to-face element. One may ask for the specifics of everybody's time zone, weather or holiday plans to kill time until everybody is on.

But spending the first 15 minutes talking about trifles will just make people feel more tired and less productive when coming down to the real stuff. There are more efficient ways to break the ice.

## 3. Ask everybody who isn't talking to put themselves on mute and always ask who is speaking

Background noise during conference calls negatively affects our productivity, even when we do not notice it is happening. A study done by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln indicates that the perception of noise impacts people's performance in mental work. Clearly ask everybody to mute themselves whenever they are not talking, and to repeat their names each time they intervene.

## 4. Make sure everybody has a very detailed and clear agenda in advance

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The last and final version of the call agenda should be distributed to all participants at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. The only way to make it productive is to ensure that the call's main points and objectives are clear enough to everybody.

This forces people to prepare, so no excuses can be used. Also, deciding how much time can be spent on each point helps to keep track of time and it ensures that everybody is on the same page.

#### 5. Try cutting-edge technology first

It is absolutely great to embrace innovation, but if you are planning to try out a new channel or tool for communication, maybe a conference call is not the best time to do so. Make sure to first test the latest software internally, and that you are fully familiar with it.

Also, give people enough time ahead of the meeting to get acquaintance with the new technology. Technical problems and drop-offs just discontented people and force a loss of focus and interest.

#### 6. Use positive language

Use positive reinforcements such as "that's right," "okay" and "good idea." Since nobody can be seen nodding, there is a need for reaffirmation that reassures people on the suitability of the ideas discussed and provides a feeling of moving forward. People are always much more prone to focus when they feel things are going the right way. So keeping it positive is especially important when the issues discussed are tough or tedious.

#### 7. Instant message with the leading figures/ideas/points

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More than 80% of workers are willing to use or increase their use of screen sharing during calls. Whenever this is not possible or efficient due to the lack of appropriate software, instant messages can offer great support and replacement. Make sure that the main ideas and figures are directly shared in real time with all participants. Seeing the main points in writing will help participants to easily retain and remember them. Sending quick instant messages to others during the meeting can also be an interest-redirection technique.

#### 8. Follow-up by email

At the end of any conference call, people are simply tired. They don't want questions, because all the energy is already drowned. If questions are needed, just leave them for a follow-up email—fresh air and brains are required for useful answers.

#### 9. Take things offline when needed

More often than we think a simple eye-to-eye contact is all that was needed to close the deal.

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