

**DO PRESENT**  
**HOW TO GIVE A TALK AND BE HEARD**  
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**BONUS CHAPTER!**



**WHEN ZOOM IS THE ROOM**  
**HOW TO PRESENT VIRTUALLY**

**In the spring of 2020, we all went virtual. Covid-19 saw every event cancelled around the world. After the initial flurry of panic events started to move online. The most popular platform was Zoom. Other platforms exist: Microsoft Teams, Webex, GoToMeeting among others. They all present the same challenges.**

The main problem is how to appear human via a technology that removes personality, that flattens the tone of voices and makes smiles and facial gesticulation harder to read. These platforms are not meant for full presentation/conference events, but they *were* designed for group events and have been used really well by some. One great example is fellow Do Book author James Sills and his Sofa Singers initiative. There are a number of challenges that arise from the technology but on the whole these things make our lives better and, realistically, will continue to grow in popularity even when the current pandemic is over.

## 1. ZOOM IS YOUR ROOM

People will see you and they will see your environment. No matter how you live, what your home office is like, make sure what they see is the bit you want them to see. I detest plain. I genuinely like colour and personality. But remember that a little goes a long way. My studio is in the garden and I can show people whatever I want them to see. They don't need to know that I also use the space as a cycle studio too. So, I set the laptop or camera up to show image 1 or 2 below.



Just to the side of me or behind the laptop looks like image 3. They don't need to see that. I can choose what they see. Think about the frame that you are showing them. They are seeing inside your life, so make sure it's a side you'd like them to see. A good friend of mine is a herbalist in Portland, Oregon. He delivers his Zoom/Skype consultations from a yurt (of course he does). The top has a smoke hole in and it looks like a halo hovering above his head — not for everyone, perhaps, but perfect for him. You have the chance to set your own stage.

Be careful setting up your device. The temptation is to use your laptop, but this rarely gives the most flattering angle. It tends to be too low and helps make your chin look like chins. Very simply, you can perch your laptop on some books, use a laptop stand, or use an iPad with an iPad stand. But ensure that this is tightened-up. I started a live qi gong

session recently and the iPad slowly tipped forward until all you could see were my feet. Now, I think I've got okay feet, but they aren't for broadcast.

## 2. STANDING OR SITTING?

How do you want to present? How do you feel more comfortable? I much prefer standing to sitting so I would always choose to stand whenever possible. I spend ages framing myself when I'm standing for a presentation over Zoom. I move around and I use that movement to convey energy, enthusiasm and passion. It's important to see my head and feet, and to see a metre each side of me. So, spend time creating your frame. If you're seated this is easier, but think about including something intriguing or funny in the frame, an 'Easter egg' of sorts. Something for the audience to remember. Maybe a record on the shelf behind you, a great picture, something beautiful or intriguing. If you're standing then be aware that it will be really hard for you to see any questions that come rolling in via the chat box on-screen. More on this next ...

## 3. QUESTIONS

Depending on how you want to take questions, not being able to see them as they roll in is probably a good thing. Seeing them arrive can be distracting, indeed can completely bugger up your flow. So, whether standing or sitting, my advice is to have someone else review the questions, maybe one of the organisers or someone that works with you. Get them to pull out the best/most interesting ones. Multi-tasking is all fine and dandy but you need to focus on delivering the talk/pitch. You can always review the questions later, as long as the session has been filmed.

## 4. ENGAGEMENT

This is the hardest thing to do over a screen. In-person you can feel someone's charisma, their magnetism, their confidence. Over a screen these things can be misunderstood as arrogance. I'd start with something engaging, a joke — 'I'm naked from the waist down' (that line once got me a job in a video interview with an employer in New Zealand) — or something more suited to your own humour. Remember that you need to be yourself, not anyone else. But more than ever you need to be a *bigger* version of yourself through the screen. This doesn't mean being brash or overconfident, just slightly more animated than normal. But don't overdo it. We are looking for 10 per cent more you, not 100 per cent. Rapport is so much harder when presenting this way, so try and make it easier for people to like you.

If you normally ask questions of the audience during your presentations you can still do this, but think carefully about the phrasing. You really need yes/no or thumbs-up/thumbs-down responses. And you need someone else to be able to count those and let you know what the results are. Remember to mute everyone's microphone apart from the person managing the chat box and yourself.

## 5. SOUND

Nothing ruins a presentation more than shite sound. A presentation without a picture is better than one without sound. Help your audience out. Either get close to your laptop microphone, connect an external one, or use AirPods (other brands are available) to improve sound quality.

## 6. OTHER SOUNDS

Turn your email notification off. No one wants to hear your email arrive. In fact, to be on the safe side, shut down every program other than the one that you are using. Remove the temptation to email, buy some new shoes, or play minesweeper.

## 7. BREATHING

I cover this in detail elsewhere in the book but it's as important to think about here as when you are on-stage. Sit up straight or stand up. When you sit there is a tendency to curve a little and this restricts your lung capacity, and so restricts the amount that you can breathe in. When speaking there is a greater tendency to mouth-breathe, which can often result in over-breathing, in taking in too much oxygen. Our body gets used to this during the talk and sends messages to breathe faster, which can result in us gulping or snatching air in; in turn this can result in feeling out of breath as we've conditioned our bodies to take more air than we need. I over-breathe. I have had to work really hard to slow my breathing, to breathe through my nose. Not only does this sound less 'panty', it also has the effect of reducing our heart rate as we are breathing slower, and this has the effect of reducing panic and anxiety.

## 8. BE POSITIVE

Try and be upbeat. Presenting online/through a screen is already harder — harder to convey emotion, harder to build rapport — so make it easier for yourself. Smile. Be vulnerable but positive. Be a glass-half-full person (even if only for the duration of your talk — no one wants to hear from a grumpy-knickers). Smile, internally and externally.

## 9. APPEARANCE

OK, your room looks great, you've positioned some intriguing elements in-shot, or you've kept it all plain and simple. You take your position, turn on your camera and realise ...

- ... You have spinach in your teeth.
- ... You forgot to do your hair.
- ... You have a 'bat' in your 'cave'  
(aka something up your nose!)
- ... You have toothpaste in the corner of your mouth.

You are about to be screen-sized. This is much bigger than you ever are on-stage. This is massive. Spend a couple of minutes making sure that you look like you want to look — however that is.

## 10. ARE YOU ON THE RIGHT CHANNEL?

Make sure you have entered the correct code into the conferencing system. The last thing you want to do is to pop into someone else's meeting. Read the number twice, type it carefully.

## 11. PRE-BRIEFING

Depending on what you are doing you may need to spend more time pre-briefing. This really relates to pitches and meetings more than presentations, but think about the things that you can do to help people 'get it', to help them come with you. Do they need to receive any information in advance, or anything afterwards? Think about how you can set this up effectively.

## 12. LEAVE THEM WITH SOMETHING

How will people remember you? What can you leave them with that will help them understand your ideas, help them see your point of view more clearly? You have a unique opportunity to share something tangible with them. If you're using an ideas template (there's one in the back of the book) you can send a link in the chat to everyone watching. How can you use that to help embed your idea into their head, to embed you or your business into their thinking? What can you give them so that they come back?

Crises like Covid-19 will change the events industry forever. While nothing beats face-to-face experiences, sometimes travel, time or cost get in the way and hence it is likely that livestreaming of events will become de rigueur. Digital conferences will continue to grow and, while the core lessons of this book still apply, it is worth considering the additional elements in this chapter to help you fly and to ensure that events can continue — whatever the future throws at us.

'When Zoom is the Room' is a supplementary chapter to *Do Present: How to give a talk and make yourself heard* — a book that was published in the midst of the Covid-19 lockdown of April 2020. A time when most social interaction, including presentations, had to move online.