Best Practices

FOR VIRTUAL PANEL INTERVIEWS

Conducting panel interviews virtually does add some additional layers of complexity to the process for both host and participants. As a host you want to create an experience that gives candidates a true sense of your culture and helps your leaders shine. Participants want to engage and begin to develop a connection, while also putting their best foot forward. More than 20 years ago we began utilizing video conferencing tools. Here are some tips and best practices we've learned along the way that we hope you'll find helpful.

SETUP AND LOGISTICS

Hosts

Avoid hosting the meeting with everyone around a conference room table. When you have multiple participants, it's best for each person to attend from his/her own office on their own computer. This allows participants to see everyone on their screen at once in a gallery view.

If a group meeting in a conference room is the only option, have all participants sit as close to the camera as possible, and ensure everyone in the room is visible and their audio can be heard.

Interviewees

Take time ahead of the interview to visualize yourself in an in-person panel interview. Think about the various ways you create connections and apply that same approach to this virtual platform.

Know who will be on the video conference and plan a few questions to ask the various leaders, and anticipate questions they may ask you.

Be sure to set aside time before the interview begins to prepare yourself and get into the right mindset for the interview.

Everyone

Use a plain background with a light color and full lighting to prevent awkward shadows or highlights on your face.

Avoid using the digital backdrops offered in some video conferencing tools. As well as appearing unprofessional, they can put extra stress on your internet bandwidth and degrade the quality of your live video.

Frame the shot. Make sure to find a stationary, solid background, like a plain wall or a bookshelf, free from clutter and distractions.
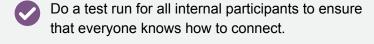
Place yourself appropriately in the video frame to allow participants to see your head, shoulders, and a portion of your upper torso.
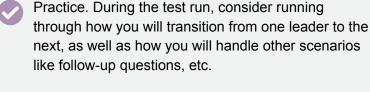
Avoid being too close or too far from the camera. Close the door to the room or office you are using to make certain disruptions are mitigated.

TECH CHECK AND PRACTICE

Hosts

Do a test run for all internal participants to ensure that everyone knows how to connect.

Practice. During the test run, consider running through how you will transition from one leader to the next, as well as how you will handle other scenarios like follow-up questions, etc.
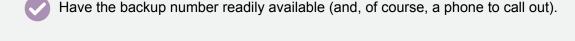
Before the meeting, do a pre-check of audio and video. If possible, connect via hard-line cable to the internet.

Set up a backup conference line that can host all participants and share it with all everyone in advance of the event.

Interviewees

Before the meeting, do a pre-check of audio and video. Most programs allow for this without actually signing into the video conference. If possible, connect via cable to the internet.

Have the backup number readily available (and, of course, a phone to call out).

HOST: FACILITATING THE MEETING

Have a plan. One person should host the meeting and lead the conversation. Establish an internal agenda and goals for the interview ahead of time to help you keep things on track.

Keep the microphone audio muted for everyone until the meeting begins.

Start on time.

Introduce yourself and anyone else from your organization who is on the call. Make sure everyone knows how to mute audio and pause video. This is important because unexpected interruptions, such as a cough, or a sneeze, can occur.

Provide a brief overview of how participants can change the view inside the video conferencing tool you are using. In some cases, it may be better to spotlight the active speaker – like when someone is explaining something at length. Other times it may be more beneficial to see a gallery of all attendees, for instance, when the interviewee is answering a question for the group. As the facilitator it will be important to manage this as best as possible depending on the features of video conferencing tool you are using and the format of your meeting.

Interruptions and distractions should be avoided, but they do inevitably happen. Prepare some tactics for pausing or moving the conversation along as needed.

INTERVIEWEE: ENGAGING WITH THE PANEL

Be attentive, and don't multi-task. Refrain from side conversations, whispering, instant messaging, or checking your phone or email.

It is tough to read body language on video. Don't make assumptions based on what you see on camera.

Look at the camera, not at the person on the screen. This gives the appearance of maintaining direct eye contact.

Call out off-camera actions. If you are taking notes, verbally acknowledge that you'll be doing so. This will avoid any misreading of your actions.

Speak naturally, clearly, slowly, and at a normal volume.

Act naturally. Avoid too much gesturing, which can distract from what you are saying.

Don't forget that you are on camera at all times, even if you can't see others or the meeting hasn't officially begun. Mute and disable the camera, but assume you are always on regardless.

Focus on being yourself. Smile and engage, just like you do in person. Making a good first impression on video can a bit more challenging than it is face to face, but it can be done.