

## BUILDING EXECUTIVE PRESENCE IN VIDEO COMMUNICATION

We are all used to virtual meetings in our day to day working life; however, the current circumstances are stretching our use of technology to other communication settings where this would not normally be the case. As recruitment continues during social distancing, organisations are having to conduct interviews via video conferencing platforms and this presents different challenges for candidates to consider.

Working with Chrissie Smith, an Executive Communications Performance coach, we have asked her to share her recommendations on giving a successful digital performance. We hope that these recommendations will help to support you as you prepare for your next virtual interview.

### CONVEYING POWER THROUGH THE COMPUTER'S CAMERA

#### PERFORMING ON-LINE – An understanding of the medium:

- Presenting to a computer camera may feel easy, but if it is not done well you can come across as uncertain, stiff and unconvincing;
- You are actually talking to the computer *lens*, not the computer screen and the trick is to make it look like you are talking to the audience “through that lens”;
- *Where* you look is crucial – eye movement can convey nervousness, uncertainty of your message and distract the audience if you get it wrong and your audience misses your most important points;
- *Staying still and using your eyes and facial animation only* will give you authority. You may be in your home office or at your kitchen table, but remember, it’s your “virtual office” and behave as if you were presenting in your “real office”;
- *Leaning into the lens slightly* also conveys your seriousness and concern about the others person’s needs; and
- Laptops are particularly difficult as *the angle and height of the screen must be set correctly* so that you are not looking up or down at the person or people at the other end.

## GENERAL CHECKLIST

To achieve a confident performance you need to:

- Practice out loud beforehand; maybe video-call a friend who can give you an honest assessment;
- Check your posture - sit up and lean forward slightly into the lens. Keep your head and back up and steady;
- Check what you are wearing – is it professional? (it can be casual but be smart and tidy);
- Check the background. Make sure the background is not “fussy” or untidy as it will distract the viewer from seeing you;
- Check the eye line with the computer camera lens (in or on the top of your computer) and the angle of the screen;
- Check the volume of your microphone. Microphones are not as “astute” at picking up sound through the internet. So, voice performance as well as visual performance must be practiced; and
- Check the lighting – are you in shadow or full view? Never do an on-line exchange with the light behind you as you will be impossible for others to see you.

## SOUND

- Your tone, intonation and pace also need to be adjusted to allow for the slower transfer of sound via the internet;
- If you mute your microphone when others are speaking, remember to turn it back on when you want to say something;
- Be careful that there are no other “sounds” around you that could distract the viewer. Dogs barking in the background and children playing come to mind! Turn off the sound on your mobile phone or it will keep beeping;
- Vary your pace to add emphasis and urgency when needed. This helps the audience to remember the key elements of your message;
- Unlike a panel when you are taught to look at the person speaking, stay focused on the computer lens – don’t look away or appear distracted while the other people or person is talking as this can look as if you are not interested; and
- Don’t pull faces and disagree visually as this will also distract the audience and you look impolite. You can disagree when you are asked for your view thereafter.

## BODY LANGUAGE

When we talk to people normally, 70% of the communication is done visually - when you are working with the computer/camera lens you must do a bit of extra work with your energy levels to get those subliminal messages across through the lens.

To compensate for the level of reduction in communication understanding, you need to enhance the delivery both verbally - in tone and intonation- and visually with animation on your face. Your energy levels, passion and personality must shine through the lens and reach

## POSTURE & POSITION OF YOUR BODY

Stand or sit still and anchor yourself. Do not wobble or shift from side to side or forwards and backwards or even shift your weight from either foot. Your feet should be shoulder width apart and you only move from the waist up

If you are seated then ensure you are sitting upright, leaning forward and engaged throughout the whole session.

## EYE LINE IS CRUCIAL TO GRAVITAS

Your eye line must be steady and constant with the lens. If you look 'off the computer camera' for a fraction of a second, you will lose all authority and uncertain of your information.

## PSYCHOLOGY OF THE EXCHANGE

Imagine you are talking to one person. When you look at the lens of a camera it looks just like that – looking at it, you need to look through it to the person you are addressing and lean into the lens with a warm “presence” as if you are talking to someone special in your life.

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**Chrissie Smith** has 30 years of international broadcast media and business communications experience with ITN, Sky News, Reuters Television, Breakfast television and ABC Television (Australia) as well as corporate client communications. She understands the public perception as well as the media's perspective. She has spent her entire career either in front of the lens or the microphone or supporting ambitious entrepreneurs, charities and public figures.

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