



# HOW NOT TO BE A JERK ON ZOOM

**BY SUE-ELLA PRODONOVICH**

A year ago very few of us had heard of, let alone used, Zoom. And why should we have? We were happy catching up with colleagues in the office, meeting our clients in the cafe, and flying across the country or even the world for conferences and important face-to-faces without a second thought.

Now many of us can't (or won't) fly, there are no physical seminars being held, and we prefer working from home in our pyjamas or athleisure than ever going into the office if we can help it. This is the reality of being a professional in a post-COVID-19-world. The virus has fundamentally changed our working lives. And I think it's through remote working - or the newfound experience of rarely being with someone in the same place at the same time - where it has changed it most of all.

None of this would be possible without Zoom, or at least with Zoom and the other video conferencing software that's out there.

But, just as Zoom has changed - even saved our lives and our sanity - it has also introduced new headaches, new ways of offending, and new ways of being offended. From hijacking a meeting to forming an in-group and from failing to understand technology to failing to read the room, there are all new ways of being, well, a jerk, when it comes to Zoom.

With that in mind, here are my six tips on Zoom etiquette for lawyers, accountants and other professionals.

## 1. KEEP IT ENGAGING

I've been to a number of Zoom meetings and seminars recently where the main speaker has taken hold of the mic, or donned the headset, and has used their position in the centre of the screen to bore the living pants of everyone. For the first 15 minutes there was a detailed explanation of stuff no-one was interested in and no one really cared about. Most people probably got up and folded the laundry, started replying to email or just logged out altogether.

This kind of failure to engage an audience sometimes happened in face-to-face seminars. But usually when people start playing with their phones or nodding off, most speakers could tell they were starting to lose the room. That's not always the case with a Zoom meeting or seminar and so I'm seeing the boring meeting pop up far more frequently. (Or maybe it's just that our thresholds have lowered). Either way, if you're the host, respect your audience's time and keep it brief.

Remember those presentation skill tips for openers? Tell people what you'll cover, why it's important, how the meeting will run, and the outcome you'd like for them. And keep the intro to a minimum (no more than 10% of the meeting's time).

## 2. TURN OFF YOUR AUDIO AND VIDEO WHENEVER YOU CAN

On the other side of the equation, if you're in the audience of a Zoom seminar, remember that no matter how interesting you think you are, no one probably wants to hear from you. So don't be one of those people who comes in with the audio or video on and lets everyone hear or see what they're doing. Worse still, don't use the fact that you can speak through your webcam to interrupt the speaker with questions.

If you're using Zoom for a group meeting, say, it's a different story. Then you should be using your microphone and your video and participating fully in the discussion. Not being present is no longer an excuse to check out.

## 3. INCLUDE EVERYONE

Speaking of which, for that type of Zoom meeting, there's another rule for the host - remember that not everyone is present and run your Zoom call accordingly.

Increasingly, as my friend [Lynette Nixon of PwC notes](#), we're seeing a lot of hybrid meetings, where some people are physically with the meeting host in the office and others aren't.

We've all now been in several of these and, like me, you've probably noticed the propensity among some people to still treat these like the kind of pre-COVID conference calls, where someone would dial in from Perth or Auckland and would be sitting there in the middle of the desk on speakerphone, saying nothing. At the end of the meeting there would be the "are you still there, Jan?" followed by silence while everyone in the room laughed.

With most meetings now happening online, it's time to engage your audience through the meeting. In other words, don't treat your listeners as two separate audiences - those who you can see and those you can't.

## 4. STOP THE PUBLIC SIDE-CHATS

The in-meeting chat function on Zoom is great for quick messages to someone you haven't caught up with for a while, or as a way to ask questions without being intrusive. But I've sat through some recent Zoom meetings where people used the public chat function to conduct their own conversation while a seminar was going on. How disrespectful to the speaker and the audience.

We don't need to know what you think, what you're doing or what you're saying to each other. Keep it private. Or better still speak to each other after the meeting or seminar.

## 5. DON'T SHOW OFF

I've also seen people use the Zoom chat function as an excuse to throw shade over a speaker, to score points off them, or to upload links in the chat function to redirect the room's attention.

Zoom has encouraged a whole new breed of brain bullies. Again, show some respect. Treat a Zoom meeting like you are in an auditorium. Would you really stand up and argue with someone in front of everyone? I didn't think so.

## 6. APPLY THE PLATINUM RULE

Finally, a good guide in zoom (as in anything in life) is to apply the platinum rule. You may be fine with poor etiquette and interruptions but a lot of people aren't.

The platinum rule says to treat others the way they want to be treated and for most people that's with respect for them and their time. Don't use Zoom for personal chats, to interrupt, score points or show off and you'll be going a long way to doing just that.

## FURTHER READING

Nixon, L (2021) [The Rise and Rise of Hybrid Meetings](#)

And my article (2020) on [The Rules of Business Development During Covid-19](#)

## WANT MORE?

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