BRIDGING THE DIFFERENCE®

Cameras on, or cameras off? How to Decide on Your Team's Norms

If you like seeing others' reactions through their facial expressions and body language, you're not alone. When other people have their cameras off, maybe you feel less connected, more isolated, and anxious. But roughly a third of remote workers say they are exhausted by expectations to have their cameras on. And exhausted workers are less productive, less engaged.

What's the answer to this dilemma? Have a team conversation. Enlist your team in creating camera norms the team needs.

Use this guide, so together, you come to a decision everyone will support.

Best For

Leaders who:

- Conduct video meetings with three or more people.
- Want to energize and engage their teams in purposeful work.
- Are dissatisfied with how team members use or don't use cameras.

Contents

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Before the meeting

Step One: Get Real, Get Focused.

A conversation is a meeting, no matter how you slice it. So, make your conversation about camera use collaborative, inclusive, efficient, and productive. Here's how to get started.

Get clear on the purpose and outcome of the conversation and get real about the amount of time it takes reach a decision everyone will support.

Step Two: Prepare Your Agenda.

Your role as leader is to help the team prepare for an inclusive conversation, facilitate good turn-taking, generate consensus, and support the team in adhering to the decision in future meetings.

An agenda in the form of questions is one of the ways you help them prepare.

Step Three: Engage and Empower Your Team Before the Meeting.

Even if you don't use cameras for this meeting, schedule it in a video-conferencing platform, so you can use screen-sharing, polling, and chat for efficient conversation and inclusive decision-making. Then, collect some data ahead of time, and give the team everything they need to make efficient and productive contributions to the discussion.

You'll find an example purpose and agenda on the next page.

Guide to Creating Team Norms for Camera Use
by Betty Johnson, Ph.D.

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Create Team Camera-Use Norms: Meeting Agenda

Purpose: Create team camera-use norms

Intended Outcome:
Team consensus about camera use in our remote meetings (to be piloted over the next four weeks)

Duration: 60 minutes

1. **Small talk:** Let's catch up! (10 min)

2. **Interests:** What do you hope to gain from camera use norms? (10 min)

3. **Data**: Which survey results do you think best point us toward a good norm for the team? (10 min)

4. **Options**: Which norms might best meet the needs of most of our team members most of the time? (10 min)

5. **Poll**: Which recommendation do you feel has the most merit for a four-week pilot? (5 min)

6. **Consensus**: Can you support this norm in all our team meetings for the next four weeks? (5 min)

7. **Closing**: Are there other remote-work issues you'd like to discuss at a future meeting? (5 min)

When you prepare, they can too.

Here are your preparations, in sequence. When you take the time to prepare, your meetings require less time, the conversation is more focused, and you help your people feel more confident in contributing their value.

Send a Calendar Invite.

Two weeks before the meeting, send a calendar invitation to the team. Put the meeting purpose in the subject line: "Create Team Camera-Use Norms—Details Below."

In the body of the invitation, state a camera-use rule for this meeting. Carefully consider whether to have cameras on for this meeting. Research shows:

- Many workers can process information better when cameras are off.
- Cameras-off may help people make more authentic contributions due to reduced social pressure to put on an act while on-camera.
- Some may make more succinct contributions if not distracted by others' glitchy, low bandwidth facial expressions.

Example:

> "For this meeting, camera use is optional because we don't need to see faces to achieve our goal."

To enable efficient conversation, also give microphone-use guidance.

Example:

> "Please be ready to have your microphone unmuted for most of the meeting, so we can eliminate time drag."

Below these details, embed the agenda so the team can prepare.

Create an Online Survey and Email the Link to Your Team.

Two weeks before the meeting, email the survey link to the team. Send it separately from the calendar invitation so it gets noticed.

Provide the team with three to four days to complete the survey. Send a reminder 24 hours before the survey closes.

(Sending the survey link two weeks before the meeting allows sufficient time for team members and you to complete the survey, for you to compile and distribute the results, and for everyone to review the results before the meeting.)

Sample Online Survey

Title: Camera Use in Our Team Meetings: Your Perspectives

Please complete this anonymous survey by (DEADLINE). I will send the team aggregated results to help us see our varied perspectives.

1. When the team leader expects everyone's cameras to be on for the entirety of a meeting, what is the experience like for you? (text-box response)

2. When you can see only some team members on camera but not others, or when people come on and off camera throughout a meeting, what is that experience like for you? (text-box response)

3. Which norm would you prefer our team adopt? (multiple choice, choose one)

    a. Everyone has their cameras on during all remote team meetings.

    b. When people are remote, we use voice only – never use cameras.

    c. Everyone has their camera on only when the meeting leader states it is necessary to see all faces to achieve the goal of the meeting; otherwise, camera use is optional.

    d. Other. (text-box response)

4. Anything else you'd like to say about camera use in our team meetings? (text-box response)

Sample Email

Please complete this two-minute anonymous survey (link) by (DEADLINE). I will send the survey results to you on (DEADLINE) for review.

Send Preparation Instructions to the Team

Compile the survey results report showing aggregate responses. Distribute it **no later than three days before the meeting date** with preparation instructions to help ensure an efficient, collaborative conversation.

Sample Email

Please review the attached survey results BEFORE OUR (DATE) MEETING. Also, consider the RESPONSES YOU WILL MAKE to the questions in our agenda. These questions are in the body of the calendar invite.

Doing these two things will prepare you to be efficient when making helpful and informed contributions to our decision-making.

Note: This preparation is a team expectation. Meeting time will not be used to walk through the survey results, and conversation times are structured for brevity so that all voices can be heard.

What else should you do?

This meeting is to focus on conversational turn-taking, not leader presentation. So, use slides that help people recall the question associated with each agenda item. Slide examples are included in the instructions that follow.

You can be a more effective facilitator when someone else manages the technology. **Enlist someone on the team to create the poll for agenda item 5 during the meeting.** Ensure you set up co-hosting to make this technically possible.

Who should you ask to create the poll? It may help facilitate good turn-taking if you ask the most talkative person in your team to create the poll.

Do not record the meeting discussion. Some employees feel surveilled when they see the recording light, thus reluctant to openly state their views.

During the meeting

Just as with an orchestra, your role is to conduct so that everyone's contributions make a meaningful whole. But that doesn't mean you don't add your thoughts. A conductor sets the tone, determines the pace, and adds comments along the way.

Here's how to conduct the camera-use conversation like a maestro, using your agenda.

1 ### Small Talk

Purpose	Informal, unstructured chit-chat, over time, creates a unified spirit with shared beliefs and aspirations.
Outcomes	Small talk eases emotional strain (yes, even for introverts!) and unleashes out-of-the-box ideas.
Duration	10 minutes

Instructions

Start the meeting on time: do not wait for late-comers. Do not share your screen yet.

Say (example):

> "Hi everyone. Before we launch into the business conversation, let's have some social connection. Let's all unmute so we can talk easily. What's going on?"

Wait five beats. If silence, say, "I'll get us started." Then share something positive from your life that you think might be interesting to them (e.g., child accepted at university, anniversary event, enjoyable friend or family time, an assignment completed.) Set the tone and the pace - speak for less than a minute. Then say (example), "What else is going on?"

After eight minutes, say: "We have a couple more minutes. Anyone else?"

At ten minutes say, (example):

> "It's good to be together and hear what's going on. Let's jump into the purpose of our meeting, which is to create camera use norms for this team."

You'll find a sample slide deck in the ZIP packet for this guide.

1 Then share your screen. Show a slide with the purpose, outcome, and agenda.

> **Meeting Purpose:** Create team camera-use norms
>
> **Desired Outcome:** Team consensus about camera use in our remote meetings (4-week pilot)
>
> **Agenda:** In the calendar invite

Say (example):

> "Here's what we'll accomplish. Our goal is to reach a consensus decision about camera use norms in our team within this hour.

Interests

Purpose	Connect team members to the significance of the meeting task and goal.
Outcomes	Team members see and can relate to the underlying needs of the team.
Duration	10 minutes

Instructions

Share your screen with the agenda question and the phrase to use during turn-taking.

> What do you hope to gain from camera use norms?
>
> *"Whatever we decide, I want…"*
>
> Be brief: 1 minute

Say (example):

> "Each of us probably has different wants and needs, and we'll each advocate for a decision later in the meeting. But, for consensus to work, we need to start by understanding each other's interests.
>
> The way we do this is by responding to the agenda question with,

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'Whatever we decide, I want...' followed by what we hope to gain from camera use norms.

I'll get us started. Whatever we decide, I want all of us to be focused in our meetings on two things: accomplishing the task of the meeting and connecting with each other authentically. Let's hear from each of you. In just a minute or less, please tell us what you want, no matter what decision we come up with. While we are talking, let's all refrain from using chat so we can be fully present to hear each other's hopes.

Note: Focusing on interests versus whether cameras should be on or off will help you and the team reach a decision that best meets everyone's needs. Discouraging the use of chat encourages listening.

3 ## Data

Purpose	Make meaning about the survey responses.
Outcomes	A shared understanding of varied perspectives will help the team identify options for camera use norms.
Duration	10 minutes

Instructions

Upload the survey results report into chat for team member convenience.

Note: Reviewing the survey results data was a pre-meeting assignment, so the 10 minutes' duration should focus on discussing the data, not reviewing it.

Share your screen with the agenda question and a reminder to be brief so that everyone has a chance to contribute their thoughts.

> Which survey results do you think
> best point us toward a good norm for the team?
>
> Be brief: 1 minute
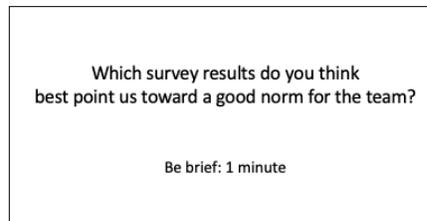
Say (example):

"You had time to review the survey results to see the different perspectives in our team about camera use. I've put the survey results in chat, so you can easily reference them.

But these 10 minutes are about what you saw in the data that you think holds promise.

Let's hear a minute from each person here: Which of the survey results do you think best point us toward a norm that would be good for the team?"

4 **Options**

Purpose	Brainstorm options for new norms.
Outcomes	A list of options upon which the team can vote.
Duration	10 minutes

Instructions

Share your screen with the agenda question and instructions.

> **Brainstorm:**
> What camera use norms (or ground rules) might best meet the needs of most of our team members most of the time?
>
> Enter your recommendation in Chat.
> No recommendation is bad or good, right or wrong.

Say (example):

> "I am muting everyone's microphones so we can use chat for our brainstorm. Here's the question for you to consider: Based on the survey data and today's conversation, what camera use norms (or ground rules) might best meet the needs of most of our team members most of the time?
>
> *(Name)* agreed to create a poll using our chat entries, so please help by being brief, and please do not repeat a recommendation that has already been made by someone else.
>
> These 10 minutes are for brainstorming only, not for saying whether we agree or disagree or think someone has a right or wrong answer. After 10 minutes of brainstorming and putting recommendations in chat, we will vote on which recommendation we prefer."

5 **Poll**

Purpose	Gauge the relative desirability of each recommendation proposed by those on the team.
Outcomes	A top vote-getter to be ratified through consensus.
Duration	5 minutes to finalize the poll, launch it and complete it, then share the results on-screen.

Instructions

Share your screen with the agenda question and instruction.

> Which recommendation do you feel has the most merit for a four-week pilot?
>
> One vote per team member.

Say (example):

> "We're going to make a decision here that we will implement, effective tomorrow. When voting, I encourage each of us to consider what is best for the team, even if it might not be what we most prefer for ourselves. After four weeks, we'll evaluate whether the decision we have made serves us well for a future period.
>
> *(Name)*, when you're ready, please launch the poll and vote with the rest of us: Which recommendation has the most merit for a four-week pilot?
>
> *(Name)*, when everyone has voted, please share the poll results with us all."

When the poll results appear, take a screenshot to add to your record of the meeting.

Then say, "There are many good ideas here. The top-ranked solution for how we use cameras for the next four weeks is…" and read the recommendation out loud, verbatim. Do not paraphrase.

6 **Consensus**

Purpose	Gain support and create accountability for implementation.
Outcomes	Consensus.
Duration	10 minutes

Instructions

Share your screen with the agenda question.

> Can you support this
> camera-use norm
> in all our team meetings for the next four weeks?

Say (example):

> "We have five minutes for this conversation, and I encourage each of us to consider what is best for the team, even if it might not be our most preferred solution.
>
> Please unmute yourself and let's hear from everybody on the team: Can you support this as our norm for how we use cameras in our team meetings for the next four weeks?"

What if someone says no?

Ask, **"What would have to change so you can support it for the next four weeks?"**

If someone *requires* accommodation for their situation, ask the team (example):

> "Does anyone have questions to ask (name), so we more fully understand (name's) circumstance? Allow 5 to 10 beats for questions to arise.

After further discussion (if any), ask the group (example):

> "Does anyone object if we modify our top-ranked recommendation to accommodate (name's) circumstance? If you do object, please speak now and provide your recommendation for moving forward."

If someone *wants* (but does not seem to require) accommodation for their situation, say (example):

> "It sounds like this is a preference, not a requirement. Do I understand correctly?"

If the response is yes, say (example):

> "I suspect others on the team are compromising some of what they prefer, too. Would you be willing to compromise for four weeks so we can try to improve the situation for the team?"

If the answer is still no, there are bigger issues than camera use that can benefit from one-on-one coaching. Rather than derailing the meeting, say (example):

> "I understand, and want to hear more. Can we talk one on one after the meeting about your circumstances while proceeding with this process to reach a decision that most of the team can support?"
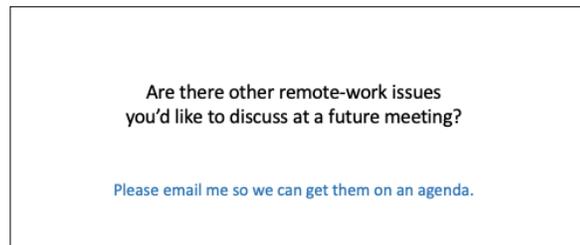
7 Closing

Purpose	Empower team members to bring other issues to the surface for inclusive team resolution.
Outcomes	Identification of issues for a future meeting agenda.
Duration	5 minutes

Instructions

Share your screen with the agenda question.

Are there other remote-work issues
you'd like to discuss at a future meeting?

Please email me so we can get them on an agenda.

Camera use is just one of the many norms that need a redesign for today's remote and hybrid teams. So, ask what else your team may want to discuss and give them time (after the meeting) to think about it.

Say (example):

> "I'm pleased we've come to a consensus on the camera-use norms we will pilot. I'll record the decision we've come to in an email to support everyone in upholding the agreement we've made. Thank you for your contributions. If compromised some of your wants, thank you for doing that for the good of the team."

After the Meeting

Send an email to everyone on the team confirming the decision made in the meeting. Tell your team where to access the screenshot of the recommendations included in the poll. And ask for feedback on the decision-making process of this meeting so you know if your team has a desire to collaborate similarly in the future.

Sample Email

Thanks again for your contributions and compromises on behalf of the team. We decided that we will (restate camera use norm verbatim for the next four weeks – do not rephrase or summarize.) You can access a screenshot of our poll here (provide a link to where you typically store meeting notes.)

I'm pleased that we now have shared expectations for how we'll use cameras. We'll revisit this topic in four weeks to see if the team needs to adjust our decision. The aim is that, as a team, how we use cameras supports contributing our best in meetings.

I'd like to know how this decision-making process went for you since I expect we will make other decisions similarly. If you have thoughts to share, please let me hear from you in the next few days.

You might have other issues on your mind related to how our team works together remotely. If so, please email those issues to me so we can work together to resolve them in a future team meeting.

Meeting Record

The records for this meeting are the screenshot of the poll and the email you send. Save these records wherever you usually save meeting notes, so your team can refer to them when re-evaluating camera use after the four-week pilot.
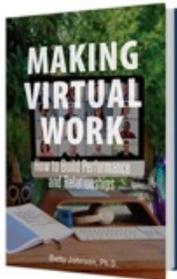
References and Resources

The Backing Research

This tips in this guide come from the author's academic research conducted in 2020 and published in 2021, *Video Meetings in a Pandemic Era: Emotional Exhaustion, Stressors, and Coping.*

To read the entire 275-page study and all findings, download the study here: https://aura.antioch.edu/etds/623/

The Book

This guide reflects one of the 11 ingredients in the author's highly-endorsed 2021 business book, *Making Virtual Work: How to Build Performance and Relationships.*

A one-hour read, the book boils the research down into everyday practices, in plain language, that busy leaders can do to build stronger remote-work cultures, starting today. Get the book here:
https://www.amazon.com/Making-Virtual-Work-Performance-Relationships/dp/1737530902

Related Meeting Templates

These templates provide guidance for creating other types of agreements with your team.

- How to Create a Working Team Agreement by Lucid
- How to Run a New Leader Introduction Meeting by Paul Axtell
- How to Create a Remote Team Working Agreement by Lisette Sutherland
- How to Establish Decision-Making Criteria with a Group by Beatrice Briggs

About the Author

This template was designed by Betty Johnson, PhD.

Betty Johnson, Ph.D., has 30 years' leadership and change consulting experience.

The firm she founded in 2010, Bridging the Difference® LLC, serves clients that include private, public, and non-profit leaders and their teams.

As president of the firm, Betty helps leaders recognize the behavior-goal misalignments that impede their success and shows them how to bridge the difference to get extraordinary results. Her company's proprietary methods are grounded in scientific research, and all demonstrate measurable results.

Betty is in high demand as a facilitator, executive coach, and speaker, particularly in the areas of team effectiveness, influence, and DE&I. She is also a professor at NYU. Her current research addresses how dignity at work influences business outcomes. Click here for more about Betty Johnson.

To get regular insights on building performance and relationships, follow Betty on LinkedIn, check out her blog, and subscribe to her monthly *Get It Done Together* newsletter.

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Additional Resources Available from Lucid Meetings

- **60+ Sample Agendas with Facilitator's Guides**
- The 16 Types of Business Meetings
- The Meeting Performance Maturity Model
- 200+ Technologies for Meetings
- Glossary of Meeting Terms
- *Where the Action Is: The Meetings That Make or Break Your Organization*
- Meeting Management Software
- Meeting School: On-Demand Meeting Skills Training
- The Meeting Innovation Community

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