

Tips for Successful Virtual Facilitation



You probably already know that converting regular activities into virtual activities isn't as simple as just finding an online meeting room to use. There are many additional things to consider and it requires some creativity, reimagining and redesigning, all while keeping the integrity of the program intact. We have to think about ways to increase engagement in an easily distractible environment as well. As the need for online deliver intensifies, here's a few tips on how to convert your in-person meeting or programs to virtual sessions, as well as some best practices for virtual facilitation. There are a few bonus virtual connection activities included as well.

1. Adapting/Creating Visual Aids

- Review your regular content and determine what your learning objectives are. What is essential for learners to walk away with? Determine what needs to be done in the live meeting and what could possibly be done as independent work.
- Your slide deck should cover the basics and not be too distracting. Make sure you are using at least 20pt font keeping in mind that some people may be watching on smaller screens.
- People's attention spans are smaller for virtual classrooms. Try to keep the content in 30-, 45- or 60-minute segments. Longer than that will be a struggle to hold everyone's attention and they will likely not retain much.
- Email note-taking handouts with check-in prompts ahead of time. This will help learners stay engaged and will increase retention. If they're listening and writing, they're paying attention.

2. Choose an Online Platform and Know its Capabilities

- There are many platforms to choose from, each with many options. Here are a few we know work well: Zoom, GoToMeeting/GoToWebinar, WebEx, AdobeConnect, and MS Teams. Know what their maximum capacities are and what costs are associated with each. Some are free, some are not. The free ones usually have more limited capabilities. Research what kind of interactivity tools they have, such as breakout rooms, video sharing, polls and whiteboard capabilities.
- If possible, enlist a colleague or assistant to help you with the technical side. Then if you run into glitches, they can be troubleshooting while you are still delivering content.

3. Connection Before Content

- In this time of forced isolation, it's more important than ever to make sure you make time for connection. Here are a few ideas for [Virtual Icebreakers and Connection Activities](#).

4. Keep the Learning Personal

- Use people's names as much as you can. Respond to as many questions as you can. Make their participation count.
- Be visible to the learners. Appear on camera as much as you can. Script out your responses or remarks if you tend to get super nervous when presenting to a crowd of people. Dress the same way as you would in the classroom. Smile! If you don't have the option for live streaming or video, put a headshot of you up on the slide when you introduce yourself so learners have a face to put with your voice. Your expertise and professionalism will come across! Even virtually!

5. Include Movement of Some Kind

- There is a lot of brain research out there that supports the need for movement while learning. My personal favorite is Sit and Get Won't Grow Dendrites by Dr Marcia Tate. Inject frequent interactivity into your session like polls, surveys, status check emojis (thumbs up/thumbs down) or the chat feature. Invite participants to stand and do a quick stretch. Even little things like this can help keep the brain engaged and help to keep people focused.
- Incorporate Brain Breaks. There are several quick, 2-3 minute activities you can do that will re-energize the brain. Here's a link for a few [Brain Break Ideas](#).

6. Debrief the Experience.

- Make sure you leave time at the end for questions and a quick debriefing session. This is where the magic happens, and many are tempted to omit it because it feels like a time filler. This is where the skills and lessons they just learned get put into practice. They need to reflect and acknowledge what they learned so they are equipped to incorporate their learning back in the real world. Here is a link to [10 Effective Debriefing Tools and Techniques](#), many of which can be adapted to the virtual world. Continue reading for a few simple ideas. Here's a link to a longer article on Virtual Reflection and Debriefing Activities.
- Use Online Polling platforms for instant answers to debriefing questions. My favorite online platform is www.PollingEverywhere.com. You can download your poll right into your slide deck and get instant responses populate on your screen. I have enjoyed using this with both live and virtual audiences. Create questions that will give you a barometer of how people are feeling. Here's an example:

Respond at [PollEv.com/michellec499](https://www.poll-ev.com/michellec499)

Text **MICHELLEEC499** to **22333** once to join, then text your message

What did you learn in today's listening module?

"I learned that I need to focus more when listening to others."

"I learned the importance of effective listening."

"I need to be more open to other people's ideas."

"I learned I get distracted easily and sometimes unintentionally ignore others."

"How to be more engaged when listening to my staff."

- For small groups you can create a slide with specific debriefing questions. Here's an example from one of our favorites, [The Body Part Debrief™](#).

Body Part Debrief

Select one of the following metaphors and share your response with the group.



- Brain:** What is something you learned today?



- Heart:** Describe a feeling you experienced. What did you take to heart?



- Hand:** Give a hand to someone for a job well done.

- Lungs:** How was this experience a breath of fresh air?



- Foot:** Identify a step in a new direction for your self.

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Conclusion: It takes some creativity, reimagining, extra planning and a different type of preparation, but following some of these tips can help your virtual sessions be just as impactful as your classroom experiences. Best wishes! ~ Michelle Cummings, Training Wheels



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Michelle Cummings M.S. is the Big Wheel and founder of Training Wheels, a known leader in the Team Development industry. She is an accomplished author and sought-after speaker and consultant on leadership, teambuilding, and experiential learning. Michelle has created a wide variety of facilitation, debriefing and teambuilding activities that have collectively changed the way trainers and educators work. Michelle is also the co-founder and Chief Creative Officer for Personify Leadership, a leadership development company.

Michelle has delivered innovative leadership programs for hundreds of camps and non-profit organizations. Michelle works with professional associations, corporations, universities, and non-profit organizations throughout the world. Her [online teambuilding gear](#) site has over 350 different books, activities and kits dedicated to the teambuilding field.

Michelle speaks at more than 15 local, national, and international conferences each year and authors a monthly teambuilding newsletter called [The Spokesperson](#) that has over 18,000 subscribers in 65 countries. Michelle Cummings has authored six books, 1. [A Teachable Moment](#) 2. [Bouldering Games for Kids](#) 3. [Playing With a Full Deck](#) 4. [Setting the Conflict Compass](#) 5. [Facilitated Growth](#) and 6. [Tag, You're It](#). She has three new books coming out this year, 1. [Team Building From the Toy Aisle](#) 2. [Table Top Team Building](#) and 3. [Storytelling as Experiential Education: Building Resilience, Leadership and Community](#). She also designed a unique course for teaching new facilitators called [Experiential Facilitation 101](#). Her [Online Experiential Facilitation Course](#) has been taken by hundreds of facilitators around the world.

Michelle also write a novel called [The Reel Sisters](#), a story about a group of women fly fishers that was released November 4, 2017.

Michelle received her Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Kansas State University and her Masters degree in Experiential Education from Minnesota State University at Mankato. Michelle currently lives in Littleton, CO with her husband, Paul, and two sons.

For more teambuilding ideas, visit her [Tips for Trainers Blog](#) at www.training-wheels.com.