

Skills 360 - Teleconferences (Part 2)

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had to lead a teleconference meeting?
2. What do you think are the challenges of leading a meeting over the phone?
3. How is having a meeting over the phone different from having a meeting in-person?

Vocabulary

Teleconference: a meeting among people in different locations, using electronic communications such as telephone or videoconferencing software; "Instead of flying everyone to our office for a meeting, why don't we just do a teleconference?"

Diverse: including many different types; "The staff at our European headquarters is a diverse group made up of people from around the world."

To shut out: to stop yourself from hearing, seeing, or thinking about something; "When I need to write a report, I close my door to shut out all the noise from our busy office."

Marvel: something amazing; "The new 300-story Torino Tower is a real marvel of modern engineering."

To facilitate: to lead or direct a meeting or group discussion; "I think our meeting would be more productive if we brought in someone from outside to facilitate and take notes."

"All the more": even more than normal or expected; "This vacation is all the more exciting because I've been working 60-hour weeks for the past four months."

Layer: a sheet, element, or aspect of something; "Communication is difficult to begin with, but when people don't speak the same first language it adds a new layer of challenge."

Well before: a long time before; "Please let your supervisor know well before you want to take your vacation so he can plan accordingly."

Call-in: related to telephone meetings or phoning in to meetings; "To join the meeting, you'll need to press the 8-digit call-in code and the password."

To make it: to be able to attend; "I'm sorry Tom but I won't be able to make it to the meeting on the 4th, but can you send me the notes?"

To go on: to base an opinion or understanding on something; "The person who called to complain didn't have much to go on, just a salesperson's first name."

Roll call: reading out names on a list to find out who is present; "Okay, let's do a little roll call at the start of our meeting here to find out who all is here."

To associate: to mentally connect; "We need to change our branding because I feel that people associate our current logo and colors with the past century."

Traffic controller: someone who controls or manages the flow of traffic; "As the Master of Ceremonies, you will act as a kind of traffic controller, deciding who will speak and when."

Free-flowing: happening freely, without interference or control; "Rather than giving a presentation, why not host a free-flowing discussion among staff people about their own ideas for improving morale?"

To signal: to show or make a sign; "In North American restaurants, it is not polite to signal to a waiter that you need something by snapping your fingers."

Turn-taking: a situation where people speak in turns, one by one; "Does Jonas understand the normal turn-taking rule of discussion? He just jumps in whenever he wants and interrupts people."

Orderly: organized and following a polite order, especially for social or group situations; "In the event of fire, all employees should proceed in orderly fashion down the stairs and to the gathering point behind the building."

To flow: to move or happen continuously; "We need to organize the conference space so that people can flow naturally past the vendors to the food and the workshop rooms."

To feel free to do something: to feel comfortable and not hesitate to do something; "If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call or email me."

To call on: to ask a specific person for input, comment, or opinion; "At this point, I'd like to call on Ron to update us on what's been happening in the Midwest region."

To cut in: to join a conversation or situation in progress, suddenly; "I apologize for cutting in on your fun here, but I have a serious work question for you."

To cut someone off: to interrupt someone; "Every time I try to speak Ian cuts me off; I don't even think he hears what I'm saying."

To instill: to create an impression, mood, or sense; "Marketing thinks that we'll sell more insurance policies if we instill a sense of fear in our potential customers."

Frown: a facial expression that shows worry, disappointment, or concern; "Okay Tanis, I can tell from your frown that you're not too happy with this proposal."

Furrowed brow: wrinkles in the forehead that show worry or disappointment; "If you notice that your listener has a furrowed brow, you might want to ask whether he understands."

Lost: confused or unable to understand; "The speaker used so many strange terms that I was totally lost during his presentation."

To conduct: to do or make happen, especially research, surveys, investigations, or studies; "At the end of our session, I'd like to conduct a little evaluation to see what participants thought."

Check-in: when you do a "check-in," you ask someone or a group how they feel, whether they understand, or how they are progressing; "Before we go on to the next topic, I just want to do a little check-in to make sure everyone understands."

To speak up: to speak louder or to voice an opinion; "I'm sorry Nina but I didn't hear that last idea... could you speak up a little for us please?"

To drive someone bonkers: to make someone crazy, or to irritate or annoy someone; "I'm sorry, but Hal is really driving me bonkers with all his little questions about the code behind this program."

To suss out: to investigate to find out information or whether something is true; "I think you should talk to Gerry to just suss out how he feels about his current position and whether he wants a change."

To summarize: to give a brief statement explaining the main ideas of something; "At the end of my presentation, I'll summarize my points and give you a one-page handout explaining things."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look at how to lead a [teleconference](#).

Leading a meeting is rarely easy. You've got to manage time, an agenda, and – most importantly – a [diverse](#) group of people. Now, what about if the meeting happens by phone, with each person or small group calling in from a different location? Nobody can see each other, and there may be a variety of distractions that you, as the leader, can't [shut out](#) simply by closing the door. Sure, teleconferencing is a [marvel](#) of modern technology, but it can be challenging.

If you're leading a teleconference, the usual advice about [facilitating](#) meetings becomes [all the more](#) important. That includes having a clear agenda and starting on time, which is sometimes difficult because of an added [layer](#) of technical complexity. So [well before](#) the meeting, make sure everyone has the correct [call-in](#) instructions and that everyone knows what time the meeting starts in their local time. Then sign in early so you can deal with any technical problems as people join.

And what should you do as people join? As the leader, you need to welcome them, by saying things like: "Oh hi Dave. Glad you could [make it](#)," and "Welcome Janet from Miami." Take the time right at the beginning of the meeting to introduce everyone, or have everyone introduce themselves, saying their name and where they're calling in from. Remember, people can't see each other, so they only have voices to [go on](#). Doing a [roll call](#) at the beginning let's people [associate](#) names with voices.

Now, during the meeting, your job is similar to that of a [traffic controller](#). You need to help the discussion flow around each point on the agenda and lead the group to destinations, or decisions. A [free-flowing](#) discussion is somewhat easier in-person, when everyone can see each other and [signal](#) that they want to say something. But on a teleconference, this is more difficult. You might want to try more formal [turn-taking](#) – or "go around the circle" – at certain points because it's more [orderly](#). For example, you could say: "Okay I'd like to hear what everyone has to say on the CFO's announcement. Let's hear from Susan first, then Sam, then Nick and finally Brenda."

If you do let the discussion [flow](#), you may have to encourage participation from everyone. It's pretty easy on a conference call, especially with lots of people, to hide in the background. [Feel free to call on](#) people by name, like "Tanis, do you have any thoughts on this?" As you manage the discussion, you may also need to help people understand. For example, you might say "Just so everyone's clear, Tanis just said..." Managing the flow also means responding when people want to [cut in](#) or [cut people off](#), like this: "Okay Roger, if you can just wait a sec and let Tanis finish please." Or if two people begin talking at the same time, you might have to say something like "Okay, let's have Wendy first, then Frank."

The whole point of this traffic control is to **instill** order and improve understanding. But how do you know if people understand? You don't have **frowns** and **furrowed brows** to tell you that people are **lost**. So **conduct** regular **check-ins**, like this: "Okay, is everyone clear on this so far? Any questions?"

Difficulties with understanding are not only due to a lack of visual clues. Sometimes it's about how people are speaking. If they are too fast or too soft, ask them to slow down or **speak up**. And if there's background noise that's **driving everyone bonkers**, **suss out** the cause and resolve the problem. Remember, people are relying on you as facilitator.

We've talked about starting and managing the meeting, but what happens at the end? Just as with an in-person meeting, it's good to **summarize** action points before thanking everyone and giving some kind of closing statement. That might sound like "All right, thanks for taking the time today everyone. Have a great day and I'll send the minutes around later."

And there you have it. If you follow these tips, you should have a great teleconference. That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the **BusinessEnglishPod.com** website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. What should you do well before a teleconference meeting?
 - A Confirm who is attending.
 - B Send out the call-in information.
 - C Ask for input on the agenda.
 - D Clear your schedule.
2. Why is it a good idea to do a roll call at the start of a teleconference?
 - A Because people expect it.
 - B Because it will help you learn everyone's names.
 - C Because it helps people associate names with voices.
 - D Because it helps establish a formal mood.
3. Which of the following is an example of establishing turn-taking during a teleconference?
 - A "Okay, I'd like to hear from Harry first, then Tim."
 - B "I'm sorry Janet but could you speak a bit louder?"
 - C "That's interesting Iris, but we need to move on now."
 - D "Well John, what do you think about this?"
4. Which of the following should you do when managing the flow of discussion during a teleconference?
 - A Ask vague questions.
 - B Encourage participation from everyone.
 - C Control the conversation when two people want to talk.
 - D Make sure you have the most talking time.
 - E Cut people off when they speak.
 - F Limit the time each person is allowed to speak.
 - G Call on people by name.
5. How can you make sure people understand what is being discussed?
 - A Read their body language.
 - B Send a follow-up email.
 - C Ask if everyone understands.
 - D Consult with their colleagues.
6. Which of the following should you do as the facilitator at the end of a teleconference?
 - A Summarize what has been discussed.
 - B Give a quick good-bye.
 - C Offer to continue the discussion.
 - D Give a closing statement.

Review Answers

1. What should you do well before a teleconference meeting?
B Send out the call-in information.
2. Why is it a good idea to do a roll call at the start of a teleconference?
C Because it helps people associate names with voices.
3. Which of the following is an example of establishing turn-taking during a teleconference?
A "Okay, I'd like to hear from Harry first, then Tim."
4. Which of the following should you do when managing the flow of discussion during a teleconference?
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C Ask if everyone understands.
6. Which of the following should you do as the facilitator at the end of a teleconference?
A Summarize what has been discussed.
D Give a closing statement.

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

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