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Laurence Stybel, Ed.D., and Maryanne Peabody, MBA, founded Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

How to Hide from Yourself and Other Techniques to Improve Your Online Presence.

One of the long-term consequences of the [COVID-19](#) pandemic is the continued popularity of online meetings. We are going to show you

how to have a stronger impact using this medium. Our focus is on Zoom, but the strategies can also apply to other technologies.

How to Hide from Yourself.

In one-on-one in-person meetings, you need to focus only on the verbal and nonverbal stimuli of the other party. On a Zoom meeting, on the other hand, there is another person you will be focusing on—yourself.

You have become a source of online distraction:

Am I sitting up straight?

Is my double chin noticeable?

Is my head tilted?

Am I looking directly at the camera?

Once the meeting starts, look at the upper right-hand portion of your image. Do you see three white dots? Right-click the dots. The last option allows you to turn off your image on your screen. Other people on the Zoom call can still see you. But you cannot see yourself.

If using technology other than Zoom, is it possible to lean a book against your computer screen to block your image?

Offense vs Defense.

If you compare an interview with a tennis match, one party is serving questions. That party is in the offense role. The party responding to questions is in the defense role.

Your default online position might be defensive.

Stop it!

Be a leader by taking an offense role: Be the first to ask a question. Below are sample questions suitable for an online meeting interview. Our mission is to have you be both empathic and be the one on the offense:

“Before we begin, how has COVID-19 impacted your family?”

“I was looking at your profile on LinkedIn and noticed that you worked at XYZ Company two years after I left it. Perhaps there are people we both know. Did you work with Susan Smith?”

“I Googled your name on LinkedIn and noticed that you are a member of your town’s Board of Health. How did you get involved?”

“I saw an announcement that your company has recently acquired ABC Company. How is that working out?”

This technique is natural for any experienced interviewer when meeting strangers in person. It somehow gets lost when people enter a video room as a “guest” of someone else.

Effective Paraphrasing.

You certainly have had the experience of meeting people who do not listen. Silence is their way of waiting for their turn to speak.

You have met such people and dislike being with them.

Here is a technique to show online that you are not this type of person.

Paraphrasing is a wonderful technique to show the other person that you are not that type of person.

When responding to key questions, consider paraphrasing a key question in your own words. Below is an example:

“Thanks for your question. I am going to paraphrase your question. This position is responsible for making phone calls to wealthy donor prospects and quickly establishing rapport. You want to know about my success in this area. Is that correct?”

Notice that the phrasing uses the word “you” three times and the word “I”, “me”, or “my” only twice.

The word selection is deliberate. It conveys that the interview is not about “me.” It is about “you” and your company.

Paraphrasing with a focus on the word “you” symbolically shows that this meeting is about the company’s problems and how you or your product might help solve those problems.

Another value of paraphrasing is that it allows you to stall for time as you consider how to respond to the question.

Finally, paraphrasing makes it easy for the other person to allow you to make mid-course corrections in case you did not fully comprehend the question.

Say Something!

During live in-person meetings, a good team leader notices who is NOT talking and will try to ensure full participation. That dynamic does not happen with online team meetings.

One of the dysfunctions of online meetings: it is too easy to hide in full sight by simply remaining quiet. And team leaders often do not notice.

Force yourself to speak out if you do not agree with the direction of the meeting. On Zoom, look at the lower part of your screen and click “Participants.” Use the “Raise Your Hand” button on the dialog screen.

But the “Raise Your Hand” button works only if the Team Leader is looking at the Participant panel of Zoom. If you are not called on by

the leader, speak out. As soon as someone has finished a thought, speak up!

Ever heard this cliché: “Silence is Golden?” In the online world, forget about it.

Silence is not golden.

Your online silence presumes you agree with the direction of the conversation.

Silence means you are failing to make an impact on others.

Force yourself to speak out at every meeting, even if it is only to say you agree with the last speaker and why you agree.

Summary and Conclusions.

One of the consequences of COVID-19 is that you can expect to see a continuing expansion of virtual meetings at the expense of traditional face-to-face forums.

A video meeting has its own dynamics. And one of those dynamics is you.

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About the Authors



[Dr. Laurence J. Stybel and Maryanne Peabody are co-founders of the Boston-based B:B firm, Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc. They provide corporations with retained search for Board members, CEOs, COOs, and CFOs; 1:1 leadership coaching; and executive outplacement.](#)

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Stybel Peabody provides companies with “leadership and career success” for valued senior level talent. Core services include retained search for leaders on Boards or whose jobs touch Boards (Board members, CEOs, COOs, CFOs), leadership coaching, and executive-level outplacement for leaders who should be networking with Board members.

The readers of *Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly* voted Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc. “Best Outplacement Firm” of 2020, 2019, 2018, and 2017.

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