HOW TO BE CHURCH ONLINE

1   **Know your audience and your goals.** One of the things this rapid switch has taught us already is that not every meeting needs to be a meeting. Some are better as emails (say for an update) or even a recorded presentation that can be watched whenever it is convenient. Your audience may love to connect, and want to chat, or they may be slammed with work. Certain goals – strategy, innovation sessions, problem solving, and weekly team connection meetings need people live to do them. Some goals may be more flexible and may work with a shared document (dividing tasks) or a series of phone calls (updates). This sounds so basic, but often we get blinded by how we did things last week or last month, and that's not necessarily how it will work now. It's also a good idea to have set roles for meetings, so that you get some help from your participants in meeting your goals. A sample of meeting roles is below in the resources.

2   **Start every meeting by connecting like humans first. Pray.** Teach a tool like HeartMath. If you want to go around and have everyone share what they are cooking at home, or what their kids are up to, or what the weather is like where they are, or even how they are doing, you will increase engagement in what is to follow. We are tempted to jump into the work when we are stressed or worried.

3   **Use technology wisely and without fear because it will always fail you.** We know this because we try to make Skype and Zoom and our other platforms do all sorts of things, and sometimes it works. Having people put their cameras on increases human connection. You can also use polls, the whiteboard, or the chat function in new ways. The chat can be a repository for links, resources, or even group work on a single document. Don't be afraid to try it, because it does often work. If you want advice or help, we are here and have tried just about everything.

4   **Try collaborative agendas to engage your team.** This means you go in with an agenda – that is key. Meetings with no agenda are painful and less productive. However, collaborative agendas – where you either ask in advance for topics from your team and assign leading them to different members or even do it at the start of the meeting, are more successful even that a well-planned one-person agenda. And, that brings us to meeting norms. It works better if you collaboratively create a set of norms or rules for your team meetings and post them with your agenda. A sample set are in the resources below.

Modaka
communications

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5 **You have to pause more.** Peter Drucker, a very famous Organizational Development researcher once said, "Woe betide the leader who mistakes silence for assent." You have to be careful to pause, and leave it quiet so people talk. Sometimes cultural differences will cause people to respond differently to silence, questions, and open conversation. Sometimes people are multi-tasking. In any case, you need to stop and say "What do you think?" or "Does everyone agree to this?" and then wait and make sure you get verbal assent. It will also make the multi-taskers have to stop multi-tasking. By often we mean, every five minutes or every time you finish a section of your agenda. People need to feel safe.

6 **For brainstorming, meeting planning, or strategy sessions try using a platform that has whiteboard features, polling, or shared document functions.** You can combine platforms to make this work using say Google Docs and the phone. Skype has polling, chat, and a few other bells and whistles. Some teams are moving to Zoom for meetings that need more participation. We have some outside resources we will list at the end to check out, like Stormz, which is a platform for creating real brainstorming, voting, and visual boards that feel like you are in person. It is possible to re-create a lot of the work you do around a table with the right combination of technology.

7 **Breakout sessions are vital to getting more done.** You may need to get off of Skype, and have people call each other and get back on Skype in a set amount of time. If you have Zoom or Webex, use the breakout function. Small groups get more done, are more satisfying, and usually are quicker than the whole group commenting on something that really only concerns a few people. It takes fresh thinking to re-structure a meeting, but it is possible. You may pass through many kinds of platforms in a single successful meeting. That means you need to plan more, but you will be glad you did.

8 **Celebrate when you succeed.** You will succeed, and you deserve to take a moment in your meeting and say thank you, or applaud, or just give each other virtual high fives. Our work culture assumes success. We succeed so much of the time we forget to take a minute and enjoy. There is so much right now that is hard to handle, feels hopeless, or that confounds us. Celebration does great things for future engagement and a sense of possibility.

9 **Laugh a little when you flop.** You will flop a lot for a while. We all will. This is a time that takes ingenuity, innovation, and some risk taking. We learn more when we have a sense of humor about what does not work, and we are more motivated to share our knowledge so other people can learn and we can all win. Taking risks becomes more appealing when there is the safety knowing what is important is resilience, not success or perfection all the time. The crucial thing is to change your future meetings based on what you learn. Continuous improvement redeems flops and makes them into wins.

10 **End meetings by checking in again, having people say what they will be doing next and when it will be done.** First check in on what was accomplished. We call this what, by whom, and when. It is a natural meeting function, but when things get stressful, ambiguous, or complex we often forget to do this. Go around again. Have people share – I am going to do X by Y date, and I will send it to Z list of people. If you are leading the meeting, tell the person "Thank you." It goes a long way to appreciate even the most basic work people do. Then Pray again, and make sure everyone leaves with their buckets filled and their hearts softened.

RESOURCES FOR VIRTUAL SUCCESS

Slack is one way of keeping track of what people are up to WITHOUT having a meeting:
https://slack.com/

We mentioned Google Docs as a way to all work on the same
https://www.google.com/drive/

What's App is encrypted messaging that can be global and it has the virtue of being searchable and stores photos and documents. If you are working simultaneously and messaging is not working because you need to find conversations later:
https://www.whatsapp.com/

Virtual sticky note apps for brainstorming can be free or cheap:
- https://ideaflip.com/
- http://en.linoit.com/
- http://note.ly/
- https://mural.co/

If you want to get really creative, we can help you with Stormz, which is an advanced facilitation tool that creates meetings virtually that feel similar to what we do in GRA Story meetings.
https://stormz.me/en

Here is a list that calls itself the Ultimate List of Virtual Team Technology and is actually pretty good:
https://www.thecouchmanager.com/the-ultimate-list-of-virtual-team-technology-tools/

This is a very large list of collaboration tools online:
https://online-collaboration-tools.zeef.com/robin.good

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SAMPLE MEETING NORMS

- **We will use the technology that most accessible to everyone on our team.**
- **Test your technology before the meeting and resolve any technical issues.**
- **Use a phone line with audio clarity and stability.**
- **Do not multi-task (do other work) during the meeting.**
- **Follow an organized line-up to ensure each person has a chance to respond.**
- **Find a quiet space to participate.**
- **Use the mute button at your site to prevent transmitting background noise.**
- **Speak up to get attention if you have something to say.**
- **Turn on your video whenever possible and be camera-ready.**

If you want some help to create your norms for this time of accelerated change and new ways of working, we can come and to a 15-20 minute GRA Story workshop at the beginning of your next meeting and get you some norms. Alternately, you can use a process.

SAMPLE MEETING ROLES:

- **Facilitator: Designs and facilitates meeting and can be the leader or the person best at doing it**
- **Note taker: Takes action notes/takeaways and emails them to everyone right after meeting**
- **Technical support: Helps with technical troubleshooting which will come up and needs to be part of the planning process**
- **Bridge moderator: Someone who can assist remote participants in a face-to-face meeting or those unable to use a video conference platform or facilitates in the chat**
- **Time keeper: Keeps time for sections of the meeting**
- **Yoda: Keeps human connection and calls out when the norms are not being followed.**