Mastering Video Interviews and Meetings
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Like it or not, video interactions are here to stay. At my executive search firm, Koya Leadership Partners, we leverage video interviews as a standard part of our candidate evaluation process, and more and more clients are building them into their own processes in order to save time and money. As organizations become more virtual, video is also an increasingly common tool for meetings, face-to-face interactions, and building relationships.

But as most of us have experienced at some point, video can go bad very quickly. Below are a few tips for ensuring that your video presence is effective and professional, whether you’re on a team meeting or a job interview.

If You’re Interviewing by Video

Make sure you have a strong internet connection. Video and audio can suck up a lot of bandwidth. If you're working from home, make sure your system can handle it, so you don't freeze during a video call. Some systems also allow you to call in over the phone while doing video, to ensure that if you do lose the connection you will still be on the call.

Do a test run. Download the software used by your recruiting agency or the employer you hope to be working for and test it with a friend for the things like volume levels and lighting. If you’re using Skype, make sure your profile image and ID are professional and appropriate. You may need to adjust the height of your screen in order to ensure that your face appears in the middle of the screen. Try propping your laptop or monitor up with books if you need more height.

Pay attention to the background and your appearance. Make sure the physical space immediately around and behind you is neat and professional looking. The ideal location has a plain background (move that giant movie poster or funky piece of art!) and a chair at a desk or table that puts you at the right height for the camera to frame your upper body and face. Don't forget about your attire! Dress as you would if you were going into an office.

Don’t forget about lighting. A bright light behind your head will cast a dark shadow on your face.

Use headphones. Headphones with a built-in microphone can drastically improve sound quality for you and the people at the other end by cutting down on audio distractions such as keyboard clicking, paper shuffling, or ambient noise like the traffic outside your window.

Eliminate distractions. Close any open windows on your screen, including your email and notification services. Mute your cell phone and desk phone. Make sure pets, children, or any people in your vicinity are kept out of the room and let everyone know you're doing an interview and they need to be quiet.

Make eye contact. Address your attention to the camera when you’re talking, not the image of the person or people you’re talking to. It’s not unusual for people to get distracted by their own image on the screen—if this is an issue for you, minimize the screen so you can’t see yourself.

Take notes with pen and paper rather than typing them. It’s fine to take notes during the interview, and you should let the interviewer(s) know you plan to do so. But don’t use a keyboard, as the noise of it can be distracting.
Let the other party sign off first. Don't rush to click on the button that ends the video session. Your interviewer may have a last-minute addition or thought she wants to get in, and you never want to appear eager to end an interview.

Take it seriously. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, treat the interview as seriously as you would an in-person interview. It’s increasingly common for hiring managers to use video interviews as a tool for deciding which candidates are worth a bigger investment of their in-person time, and the video interview could be your only chance to advance to the next stage of the process. Do your homework, take a little time to get the details right, and don't forget to follow up with a thank you.

An Additional Note for Video Meetings

Master the mute button. If you use video regularly for team meetings or interactions with colleagues or clients, the tips above are equally useful. But perhaps the most important thing to master for day-to-day video interactions is using your mute button! If you are on a team meeting and aren't talking, put yourself on mute so other people don't have to hear you shuffling papers, typing, or airport or car noises in the background. Equally important is taking yourself off mute when you want to speak.

Video interactions can be a powerful way to interact with people in a geographically dispersed world. By taking the time to make sure that you are using video effectively, you can ensure that your virtual interactions are respective and productive.