



How to Use Humor to Conquer Zoom Fatigue

By Angela DeFinis

Working remotely is no longer something reserved for freelancers or those on special assignment. Many major companies have said they plan to accommodate remote work indefinitely. In fact, following the pandemic, more than half of Americans say they want to continue working remotely, while two-thirds of companies say they may make their current work-from-home policies permanent. What does this mean for millions of employees? Namely, that virtual meetings are here to stay, and that a new phenomenon, known as Zoom fatigue, will become more prevalent.

Hop onto any virtual meeting these days and there is little doubt that Zoom fatigue has set in; even the most well-intentioned remote team is facing lower work standards, missed deadlines, rampant interruptions by those on the call, and numerous home office interruptions. There is an acceptance of lower standards, often with a shrug. *"What can I or anyone else do about it? It's all so exhausting!"* That's Zoom fatigue.

But it doesn't have to be this way. There is a secret weapon you can easily employ: Humor!

From the old knock-knock jokes we told as kids to amusing stories that make light of the workplace, everyone loves a good joke. Using humor is one of the best ways to build rapport and get people engaged. As Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done."

When you add a witty quip or funny story to your virtual presentations, you let listeners know your meeting won't be entirely dry and serious. Humor connects us and influences others. It helps us get our point across and adds perspective to even the most critical challenges.

In your quest to battle Zoom fatigue, a little humor can go a long way. Here are 7 tips to help you create and deliver office-appropriate jokes that tickle the funny

bone, bring people together, and work well on any virtual platform.

- 1. Know your audience:** Analyzing your audience is important for any presentation, but you have to be especially tuned in when using humor. In other words, tell the right joke to the right crowd at the right time. For example, you may have a funny story about your kids, but if your younger audience doesn't have children, it will fall flat. Likewise, if you make a joke about a meme, the older crowd might not get it.
- 2. Explore a variety of humor formats:** Once you know your audience you can select the right format. Your "joke" doesn't have to begin with "A lawyer, an accountant, and a banker walk into a bar..." In fact, forget the typical joke structure. You can be funny in numerous ways. Sharing an anecdote, using a quip, making an observation, and giving a witty response can bring a smile to even the most serious group and help chip away at Zoom fatigue.
- 3. Use the classic joke-telling formula:** Once you decide what kind of humor to use, begin to craft your words. This is a two-part structure that includes the set up and the punchline. Be specific in developing the set up—name the characters, describe the place, use colorful imagery, and develop an action sequence. These details help us envision the elements of the story you are telling: "My friend Anne went for a hike in the woods yesterday and ran into a mountain lion strolling along with her cubs." Yeah? And then what happened?
- 4. Put punch in the punchline:** The ending is why people listen, so make sure to craft the punchline with care. The funniest punchlines are completely unexpected—they disrupt expectations with the "I didn't see that one coming" twist. And while they seem spontaneous, they are tightly scripted and rehearsed.
- 5. Build your "timing" muscle:** Timing is knowing when to stop speaking so you can allow your

audience time to react. All appropriate audience responses are determined by timing. Practice your timing in various ways: How does a 2 second pause differ from a 3 second pause? What happens when the audience doesn't respond right away? Then, when you land the punchline and end the joke, take it all in. You might not be able to immediately hear the laughter across the screen (especially if people are muted), but you will see smiling faces, nodding heads, and mouths wide open with delight. That's what a Zoom laugh looks like. It's physical. And that's when you know you nailed it.

- 6. Practice your vocal delivery:** For most comedians, this is the fun part of being funny. Speak, revise, and repeat until your delivery is perfect. Be deliberate with your word choice, enunciate clearly, use inflection and pitch, speak in short sentences, and pause often. Intentional practice is the best way to internalize the timing of your vocal delivery. And make sure to pause 1-2 seconds before delivering the punchline. Those few seconds of anticipation can result in the biggest laughs of all.
- 7. Polish your physical delivery:** When giving a virtual presentation, it's vital that you make your physical skills match the story you are telling. Practice your eye contact, (look at the camera), facial expression (smile), posture (sit up straight), gesture (use small gestures sparingly), and appearance (look professional from the waist up). Those are the skills that will help you project energy and confidence. Finally, if you think your joke is funny, laugh at it! That's right. Your response gives listeners permission to respond. It tells them it's okay to enjoy the moment even if they don't think your joke is hilarious.

Humor is a powerful addition to almost any meeting, but it's a lifesaver on Zoom and one of the best ways to combat Zoom fatigue. People expect to be bored during virtual meetings, so surprise them. Make them laugh ... and then watch as their energy picks up, they come together, and they get things done.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Angela DeFinis is President of DeFinis Communications. The company offers live and virtual executive speech coaching, presentation skills group training, and coaching for keynote and breakout speakers. Through corporate sponsored and open-enrollment programs, the firm's unique skill building approach helps business professionals become poised, polished, and powerful communicators capable of leading effective meetings and delivering compelling presentations. To learn more about the firm's programs and services, please go to www.definiscommunications.com