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LISTSERV

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Virtual Realities-Avoiding Mishaps While the Camera is On

We are living in unusual times and relying even more on technology than we ever did before. Virtual meetings are increasingly taking the place of meetings we were accustomed to having in person. Most of the time this can be quite convenient, economical, and productive: A college education can be obtained at an out of state institution without leaving home, and us lawyers can attend hearings all over the state without leaving our office. Executive Board Meetings can take place with members around the country and nobody has to travel. These are a great substitute for face-to-face encounters – certainly more convenient than cancellation altogether.

But folks, please remember where you are and what you are doing during these virtual meetings. Since it is still relatively new to many of us, here are a few tips for helping to assure a successful and productive video call or conference.

If you are not home alone, make sure everyone knows you are on the call. Close the door to the room to prevent inadvertent sounds and pictures from reaching the video. Make sure your worksite is inaccessible by pets as well.

Make sure you have finished "getting ready for work," have done your business, have eaten breakfast and for goodness sake, make sure you are familiar with your mute button.

Act as though you are ***always*** on camera and always being heard on speaker during such meetings.

Make sure you are familiar with all functions of the group format you are using. On some formats, everyone can see your chat messages. Don't type or say anything you wouldn't want in the minutes. Be sure to have conducted a "test run" if possible before your meeting begins.

Dress like you would if you were physically attending the type of meeting which is the subject of the call or conference. Don't let your attire become distracting or a subject of conversation.

Use a neutral background without too many shelves or fixtures behind you. These often gather items you do not need to have appear on a video. In addition, make sure the lighting is good so everyone can clearly tell who you are.

Turn off notifications on your computer that may ring or make other noises during the meeting.

Make sure your video is appropriately positioned at eye level so other viewers do not see you from an awkward or even embarrassing position and look at the camera and not the screen when you are talking.

Avoid answering emails, sending texts, or playing games during the calls. These can be distracting and can make noises which interrupt the call.

Overall, just use common sense and act like everything you are doing and everything in your environment can be seen and heard by everyone participating in the call or conference.

While the convenience of these meetings is fascinating, they are also the source of "interesting" moments. By now, we have probably seen the viral video of the attorney whose daughter had installed the "cat face" on her dad's computer. He "showed up" for a court hearing with the cat face on, and well, everyone is likely familiar with the rest of the story. "I'm Not a Cat!" has become a household joke across the country. A recent local virtual meeting opened with the moderator's question of "Everyone got your cat filters off?"

Through all the convenience we really need to remember that whoever is on that computer chat with you can hear and see whatever you are doing. Just like when you hear that person talking on the cell phone very loudly in the grocery store. They seem to think nobody can hear them except for the person on the phone. Please remember this isn't so!

Humor can be important in times of stress like these. I have polled my colleagues and read a few articles to come up with a series of light-hearted moments that brought a few laughs during this time of uncertainty and virtual communication.

Our series starts locally with the lawyer who was "working" from home and received a notice of a virtual court hearing in Circuit Court. Apparently, the Counselor wasn't in the practice of "dressing for work' as she worked from home. As the court

session began, she appeared in a bathrobe and curlers, much to the dismay of the Judge. Apparently, it just didn't register that everyone on the call could see her current status. Opposing counsel found it humorous, but the Judge did not. Contempt of court was threatened but did not occur.

Another colleague reports a video hearing where the lawyer indeed dressed the part but forgot to remove a bottle of Jack Daniels from the shelf behind him. The booze was clearly visible throughout the hearing.

Yet another colleague reports an associate attending a City Council meeting virtually from home. During the meeting, on several occasions, the associate could be seen lifting a Bud Light can for a periodic taste of suds.

Then there was the colleague with the persistent pre-teen in the house who wondered into the background several times to waive at the camera while wearing his Spiderman pajamas. The same meeting had a Council member sporting an "I'm With Stupid" T-shirt.

There was the lady in a western state who had set up her computer for a pending video conference call with her boss. Her two-year-old entered the room and apparently triggered the call prematurely while wearing only a diaper.

A man reports his daughter walking into the room during a conference call singing "I like bananas" at the top of her lungs.

Several folks report detecting a conference call participant using the bathroom during a teleconference.

A business executive reports her husband, unaware of the video conference taking place as his wife worked from home, prepares to take a shower and walks through the background of the video call naked in an effort to retrieve a towel from the linen closet.

A lawyer with a spouse and three children at home provided for a very noisy background in a video settlement conference. A colleague quipped "Now I know why you prefer to work from the office."

A video-recorded Municipal Zoning Board meeting was "adjourned" but the video had not yet ceased recording. A Board member could clearly be seen and heard calling the applicant an "***hole" after the meeting had adjourned and the applicant had left.

An executive reports that, during a meeting another conference participant asked him a question, and his automated Google assistant tried to answer it before he could say anything.

A conference call member participates while driving an automobile. Another driver pulls out in front of the person, and the entire 35 person call gets to hear him exclaim "SOB" at the top of his lungs.

A video participant's cat walks onto the desk, and proceeds to "moon" the rest of the video conference for about 30 seconds while the video conference continues.

A colleague reports a virtual meeting where a participant fell asleep and began to snore with his microphone on. The facilitator was unable to communicate to the gentleman and the meeting ended prematurely. The sleeper did not know the meeting had even ended and maintained a connection for several more minutes as the facilitator tried to communicate to him so the meeting could resume.

So much for levity. Changing tracks, now is the time to use the IMLA Listserve even more than ever before. If you can't be in that CLE or can't attend that conference, place questions and learn from the Listserve. It's been said before that being an IMLA member and participating in the Listserve is like having a one thousand member law firm at your fingertips.

Also, please don't forget the Water Cooler. Our need for relief from mental stress and our need for down time is at an all-time high. The Water Cooler emphasizes the "human" side of our profession, and often is a go-to place for stimulating discussions that cannot take place on the main listserve. It is all done in a civil and congenial atmosphere and is the virtual water cooler where we can discuss things like Covid shots, the weather, our kid's soccer match and our favorite quiche recipe. It can be quite popular at times, and provides a short but much needed virtual "coffee break" during our stressful day. Please be sure to take advantage of this useful resource. To join, please email me at bcunningham@lexsc.com or Don Knight at don.knight86@gmail.com.

Kudos to the IMLA Staff and Board for being able to shift the 2021 Mid-Year Seminar into a virtual format. Their job isn't easy, and they deserve our support in this effort. Remember that attendees are from many different states at various levels of travel warning, and very many of us haven't been able to obtain a Covid shot at this point. Additionally, most of the IMLA staff members have been unable to obtain the vaccination. This may not be what many of us wanted to happen, but the IMLA Staff deserves our support for being able to continue to bring us the top-notch programming to which we have become accustomed. Well done ladies and gentlemen!

Closing with a little bit of humor and a true story. A man walked into a gun shop and attempted to commit armed robbery. He pulled a gun on a clerk and demanded money. But before the clerk could even move, the man dropped his gun because four other customers had pulled a gun on him.

The prosecution rests, your honor… ML