

7 Proven Tips for More Impactful Conference Calls

By Dr. Heather Johnson

Conference calls can be an effective way to conduct meetings, or they can be a complete waste of time. The majority fall somewhere in between.

You make an impression in every meeting, including conference calls. What someone hears - or doesn't hear - creates a lasting impression that can mean the difference between success or failure. For instance:

Are you the person who doesn't contribute because you're too busy multi-tasking? Or the reliable one others can count on to come prepared and make concise, valuable comments?

Are you the disinterested person who shuffles papers or munches on snacks? Or the thoughtful one who selects quiet locations and avoids noises that cause distractions?

Your preparation, conduct, method of handling questions and even your body language are as likely to impact the outcome, just as if you were in a room full of people. Here are some proven guidelines that can give you a big advantage.

You can increase the impact of your conference calls by doing these 7 essential things.

1. Determine the purpose of the call and what the call needs to accomplish. Then send out a scheduled invitation with the purpose, an agenda and call-in details. The purpose should be clear and concise. Try to state it in just one or two sentences. The agenda should be prioritized with the most important items first. Send out an additional email 24 hours before the call, reminding everyone of the call-in details, purpose and agenda.
2. Invite and encourage participation. If you're the facilitator, select people throughout the call to get their input. Doing this randomly helps increase engagement so everyone contributes to the conversation. When you invite someone to participate, avoid generalities like: "Are there any questions?" Instead, be specific, such as: "Jeff, what do you think of this phase of the plan?"

3. Don't dominate the call. If you're the facilitator, keep track of who's contributing and make sure everyone has equal time, with no one person taking over. (If you're a participant, make sure that person isn't you.) On the other hand, try to avoid silence. Silence for more than a few seconds can be awkward and unpleasant for everyone.
4. Choose your location carefully to minimize background noise. You don't want your message distorted by unnecessary sounds. Use your mute button when not speaking to minimize any background noise. (Be sure not to use a hold button, or you may inadvertently play background music.) Make sure others know you cannot be disturbed. If alerted by your call waiting service, ignore it. Remember to shut off your cell phone.
5. Speak clearly and directly and try not to rush answers. Your sincerity, tone of voice, and method of delivery (including gestures, which naturally add emphasis and energy to one's voice) will substantially impact how you are perceived. Listen carefully to what others say, and if you don't fully understand a question, then ask for a clarification.
6. When finished, thank everyone for their time and contributions. Express enthusiasm about the next steps in the process.
7. Summarize key points and action items if you're the facilitator. Send out a brief written summary to everyone within 24 hours

We spend hours on conference calls every week. If you would like to learn more about how you can make that time more impactful, call Klassen Performance Group at 651-322-7821 or email heather@klassenperformancegroup.com