SparkPath
LEADING YOUR BIGGEST + BRIGHTEST IDEAS

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Being Authentic Always Wins

Now that we have settled into remote work environments, you may find yourself missing the casual and impromptu conversations that often occur in the office. I've been experimenting with different ways to engage people (and myself!) through video conferencing and found the best tactics always come back to the richness of asking genuine inquiries to learn about others.

- Spark up a conversation before a meeting starts.
- Bring humanity into stuffy meetings.
- Change up your meeting approach.

Spark Up Conversation

There's no better way to get to know your clients or colleagues than to spark up a conversation! Verbal and nonverbal cues reflect one's personality and teach you how to best work with them and build a working relationship. You will quickly learn who likes to talk by their eagerness to participate in a conversation and share their experiences. Then, you simply rely on insightful inquiry and ask a follow-up question to learn more about what was just shared. You'll be pleasantly surprised by what you unearth from these discussions.

Although small talk can be annoying to some, it allows you to know who you're working with, gauge their character and temperament, and mold your approach to connect with them

Bring Humanity into Meeting

How many times have you asked or been asked, "how was your weekend?" as you wait for attendees to join a meeting? Right. Enough said. I found for a new and established group of people; I like to ask safe but genuine questions such as:

1. Describe an uplifting thing that happened to you today.
2. Name something on your bucket list.
3. What do you appreciate about the work you do?
4. What is a new skill or hobby you are learning or practicing?

I found by asking genuine and pointed questions - you get far higher engagement and learn fascinating things about people. Then here's the kicker...you will remember those things! The next time you meet, you have rich material to work with and can easily ask follow up questions like what project they are working on with their new skill.

The positivity and joyfulness of that 5-minute conversation may be just what you and the group need to carry that energy through the day. It also allows you and the group to connect in new, personal ways - beyond the role they play or how they 'show up' for work.

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Change Your Meeting Approach

Sometimes you need to turn things on their head to through people off and truly spur engagement. Consider a team challenge that connects group members in a new way. Perhaps challenge the team to try something new during non-screen time - i.e., read a book, walk a mile a day, call a loved one, etc. Or challenge the team to do unexpected acts of kindness. Then consider adding a standing topic to the meeting agenda for people to share their experiences.

Or perhaps you enhance your typical meeting structure and add a group messaging channel for #random or #fun for team members to contribute and/or have 1-to-1 or 1-to-several conversations as needed. Sometimes those impromptu messages raise the group's overall mental state while also allowing a place to deepen connections made through authentic conversations.

Work is a significant part of your life. Make time in your day for short meaningful conversations and watch how things open like a blooming blossom!

A passionate organizer of people and initiatives, Erica Smigielski brings over twenty years of experience in project leadership to financial software and SaaS companies who want to launch their next big idea. She leads large-scale, complex projects like product launches and company mergers and acquisitions as well as focused efforts to bring structure and process to fast-track businesses. Erica holds certifications as a Stanford Advanced Project Manager as well as a Certified Group Facilitator, making her a master orchestrator of strategic planning, as well as a skillful communicator who can expertly navigate complex group dynamics.