

## **Teleconferences that make you SNOOooore - the Italian Smoke Break**

Meeting by phone fantastic, you can work from anywhere, connect across the globe and share ideas with words and voice. But if you're like me it's tough to sit through just about any meeting and teleconferences make it that much harder to stay engaged. Sure an amazing facilitator makes a difference but come on, we can do better!

After I facilitated a recent teleconference, I decided it was about time to search out effective, creative techniques. I couldn't find much other than the usual tips. Here's our chance to revolutionize this communication tool. Instead of checking emails, eating lunch and playing Sudoku, here are a few of my ideas:

### **Bingo** (to stay focused on outcomes)

Create a bingo card agenda. In each square write an outcome for the meeting.

Write actions to be taken in each square as you address the outcome.

Have participants 'dab' their squares along the way with highlighters, pictures or items on their desk (erasers, paperclips).

Once a row or card is complete meeting's over.

Variation: Visit [http://www.keithandcompany.com/fg\\_telconfbingo.html](http://www.keithandcompany.com/fg_telconfbingo.html) the idea is to slip in as many words on the card as possible into the conversation, just in case you need a break!

### **On and Off** AKA **Interval Training** or my favourite **The Italian Smoke Break** (to explore creatively and creativity)

Brain-based research reports that after 15-20 minutes our minds wander.

So build your agenda in 15 minute intervals.

An idea on how to use this principle:

For a one hour session have 5 intervals.

The first & third are online participation and discussion (15 minutes each).

The second & forth are off (10 minutes each).

The last is a 10 minute wrap up.

15 minutes sharing, 10 minutes off, 15 sharing, 10 minutes off, 10 minutes wrap up.

During the 'off' intervals participants stay on the line (difficult to get everyone hooked up if you disconnect) but are not interacting with each other.

People may opt to mute themselves during the 'off' time.

Off time may include: Giving participants focused assignments or tasks such as having them surf the net for new information, talk with others in their workplace, go for a walk and clear their heads, read an article, etc.

You may also want to play elevator music for their listening pleasure.

### **Exer-Size** (to get people off their chairs)

Choose one exercise as an analogy for each agenda item.

When you move to each item, have participants **DO** the exercise together.

For example if you are discussing work/life balance, have participants stand up, close their eyes, lift one foot, hold for 30 seconds, then switch sides. Talk them through the feeling of imbalance, awareness, use of proprioceptors, etc.

Research the exercise or talk to a kinesiologist for more ideas.

**Stretch** (to explore creativity, stretch your thinking)

Have everyone introduce themselves with their favourite stretch (if time permits, have them lead others in the stretch).

Use the analogy, and the stretches during the teleconference.

**Imagine** (exploring possibilities, feelings, create energy and fun, more)

Ask participants to close their eyes and lead them through a visioning exercise.

They can travel to a safe place, explore new opportunities, laugh, depending on the journey you create for them based on the outcomes of the session.

After the journey is over debrief as a group.

Variation: have them share one word that describes the experience. Or have them write down their immediate reactions, what they've learned, how they can use it.

**Play Dates** (building group cohesion)

Each person briefly shares their weirdest, funniest, strangest past job or work related experience (I was a llama groomer).

Each participant makes note of who they'd like to set a play date with.

As a wrap up participants can say who they're going to connect with.

Variation: May want to alter the play date connection so as not to hurt anyone's feelings if they're not chosen, instead have them email or call each other to set up play dates.

**WordsWorth** (marketing brainstorm)

Each participant is asked for a random word (potato, car, movie).

Use the random words to generate tag lines, branding ideas, etc.

Variation: give the group 5-10 random words. All words need to be used in a trailer for promotion.

Variation: (as a brainstorming warm up) choose a random word, play word association around the virtual room. Could also be used in relation to a service or product.

**Music to my ears** (brainstorming)

Introduce the topic, 5 minutes maximum.

Field questions, 5 minutes maximum.

Have each person generate as long a list of ideas as possible for 5 minutes.

Play music (Jeopardy theme song for example) while they're storming.

Ask how many ideas each person came up with and tally the total.

Ask for 'best ideas'.

Do a second round if time permits, asking them either to beat their tallied number of ideas if nothing is jumping out or encourage participants to integrate the best ideas they've heard, building creatively.

Discuss 'best ideas' again.

**Clock** (to increase participation from everyone and deter conversation domination)

Have participants draw a clock.

Put names of participants at each time (1:00 Karen, 1:30 Sam, 2:00 Gina, etc.)

Once you speak you must wait until everyone else has air time before you clock in again.  
Variations: Each person has a time limit for sharing. Use to help recognize voices and link with names.

**Use your senses** (introductions and more)

Look around: For a great introduction have participants look out the window and describe what they see (thanks Carolyn!)

Smell, imagine, touch, listen, smile, walk, draw, write something down, eat? Use senses to create meaningful participation connected to the outcomes of your session.

Love to hear your revolutionizing tips and techniques that not only will keep everyone awake but stimulate their participation.

fourward ~ Karen Driedger 2009 ©