

Body Language 85

Zoom Boom 2- Lighting

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



This is the second of four short articles highlighting the differences from in-person body language and body language when using a virtual platform.

The topic of this article is the lighting and background that is evident in the picture when you are using your video camera.

A common mistake is to sit between the camera and a window, especially on a sunny day.

You will show up as a dark blob in the foreground, and no facial detail will be available to the other participants.

If you have too much light in front of you, either from a window or the computer screen, it can reflect off your glasses and make it hard for people to see your eyes. The cure for this is to screen out the excess light or purchase anti-glare glasses. Another solution to this problem is to wear contact lenses.

I have made videos using the rims of glasses with no lenses in them. That is a good solution when you are alone and just talking at a screen, but when you want to participate with other people in a meeting, you need to be able to see them clearly.

If you have an overhead light, it can be overpowering and make you look washed out or reflect off a bald head so you look like a light bulb. Here again, the solution is some form of light screen so you are surrounded by indirect, but adequate light.

It is important to experiment with the lighting so that other people in the meeting can see your face. Try to create a professional looking environment rather than an obvious bedroom, basement, or attic when working from home. The same rules apply when you are working in an office setting.

Work on setting the scene to reflect a professional environment. Avoid overly complex or messy backgrounds that distract attention from the facial area. Whether at work or at home, try to avoid having the camera pointing toward a high traffic area behind you.

Sometimes having other people in the background is unavoidable, because you are supporting a meeting while in a coffee shop or at the airport. In these situations, people will understand your dilemma.

Many people choose a virtual background, but these do not work particularly well unless you are using a green screen behind you. The picture you input will show as a still or moving image, but when you move, the shape of your head will be grossly distorted until you remain motionless for a few seconds. This movement can be very distracting, although it sometimes provides some comic relief.

What to do

The best approach is to spend time and energy on your setup so that it shows you in the kind of way that reflects professionalism. Have an area set up with the camera and proper lighting and background. Make provision for having meetings in the morning or the afternoon where the challenge of sunlight can be dealt with easily.

For example, I have a window above my work table. If a meeting is in the morning, the shade I use provides just the right amount of light. In the afternoon, if it is a sunny day, there is too much light, so I have a sheet of feather board I can quickly place in front of the window to block the excess light.

Recognize that not all participants may have access to good quality bandwidth where they are located. Expect that some members of the group will need to call in. In these cases, you will have to go by tone of voice and the words that are used to determine the mental state of the individual. There is no video image.

Consider also your attire. You want to dress as you would if you were at work in a meeting. If you would not wear a colored polo shirt to a meeting in your office, then don't show up in one for a virtual meeting. If you dress down just because you are working from home, it does not reflect well on you for business discussions.

Even though the Zoom environment seems more informal, you always want to look your best and display a professional demeanor.

This is a part in a series of articles on "Body Language" by Bob Whipple "The Trust Ambassador."