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12 Zoom Best Practices to Ensure You Look and Sound Your Best and Are Distraction-Free

By Ron Weissman, Band of Angels

- **Use the latest version of Zoom**. Make sure you have downloaded the latest version of Zoom (5.0.1) with improved stability, new features and security updates.

- **Practice Zoom screen sharing and chat**. If you haven't used Zoom before, launch a Zoom meeting (it can be with just yourself) and practice, particularly using the "share screen" functionality and the chat window.

- Lights make you **look great.** Make sure you are well-lit. Position two small lights slightly above eye level, one at the left corner of your screen and one on the right corner both facing you for classic, flattering studio lighting. Downlighting will create deep shadows and direct lighting aimed at your face, straight on, is very unflattering. Both Litra and Lume Cube make very small, cheap lights for laptop or desktop computer conferencing—and both have kits with suction cups to attach to the back of your monitor or laptop.

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- **Experiment before letting Zoom touch up your appearance.** Zoom has a user-selectable "touch up my appearance" feature in the video preference panel. Experiment with this. Depending on your lighting, your video camera, your background and your bandwidth, this setting can make you look great or it can make you like like a blurry, plastic mannequin. So experiment. I've turned it off.

- **Turn off computer notifications and close your browser tabs**. If your computer notifies you of emails, text messages, news or other events, please turn notifications OFF as notification chimes and or messages flashing across the screen will be distracting—or embarrassing, especially when you're sharing your screen. Similarly, if you are using Zoom in a browser, make sure all other tabs are closed so that you don't accidentally lose your Zoom audience and screen view.

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- **Sound great.** Unless you have a recent model computer, consider using an inexpensive external USB microphone (attached to headphones, or a lavalier mic or a desktop microphone with a built in stand) designed to be plugged into your computer's USB port. If you walk around during your talk, please wear a lavalier microphone. The sound quality of the session will improve dramatically in clarity, richness and the removal of background noise like computer fan hum. Rode, Amazon Basics, Audio-Technica (ATI) and Blue are all popular makers of inexpensive desktop microphones. Make sure you choose your external microphone as your input source via the Zoom preference panel audio settings. Otherwise, Zoom will continue to use your computer's microphone. I use a Rode USB NT- mini.

- **Simple virtual background**. Use a simple virtual background that is not distracting. The virtual background will hide clutter, other people in the room and similar distractions. Use a colored background or a simple photograph or your company logo. (Zoom also allows you to use a video as a background. Don't—as this is very distracting.) To set a virtual background, including your own favorite image, go to the Zoom preference panel and click "Virtual Background" to select your image. The + in the corner allows you to upload your own image.

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- **Dress right**. Wear clothes that contrast with your virtual background (e.g., if you wear a white shirt and are positioned against a white background you may become invisible below the neck). Fine garment patterns such as very fine embroidery, thin stripes or metallic fabric can cause your image to shimmer (called moiré), so stick to simple, solid colors.

- **Look at the camera!** When using the "speaker view" with the filmstrip view of other participants, place that view at the top of the screen (rather than on the side). This will keep you looking at your camera and connecting with the audience, rather than looking away, at the right side of the screen. Simply drag the filmstrip view to the top of your screen.

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- **Be a Zoom bandwidth hog**. To maximize bandwidth, don't run unnecessary applications during your Zoom session and ask other members of your household or office not to use bandwidth-heavy internet resources (like other conference sessions, videos or bandwidth heavy games) while you're on Zoom. Weak internet connections can cause Zoom to freeze; too weak a connection can cause it to crash. Our service providers are struggling to provide us with bandwidth now that we're all conducing our lives using video-centric Internet applications. So have your family and colleagues do their part to make your Zoom session a success.

- **Turn your mobile phone off.** Even if it is on silent, if you have your phone set to route calls to your computer, you can accidentally interrupt or disrupt your Zoom session.

- **Ask to speak**. Rather than speaking randomly and talking over others, raise your hand if you want to speak or ask a question, OR use the chat window to ask a question. Let's all keep our chat windows open, particularly session moderators. And, when possible, direct chat questions to specific individuals or moderators rather than the whole group, unless your comment is of general interest.