Leading Virtual Meetings with Compassion and Flexibility

By now, many of us are likely experiencing “Zoom fatigue,” the mental exhaustion that comes from being on video calls as we continue to work remotely during the pandemic. Video meetings require us to stare at a screen the entire time, different from being in an in-person meeting where you can look away, look at the speaker, or look at your notebook. Whether you are a manager or department chair scheduling department meetings or you have been invited to a meeting, we can all take proactive steps to lessen the fatigue and burnout around virtual meetings.

In order to account for our own mental health and wellbeing and that of our teams, consider incorporating some new techniques for your meetings:

**Check in With Your Team**
Talk to your team individually to get a sense of what obstacles they are facing and how you can be supportive of their success. Remember that even employees without children need flexibility and compassion during these challenging times. Ask others if a 9:00 am meeting or a lunchtime meeting still works. Remember that many people have increased caregiving responsibilities, including self-care. An early morning meeting might be hard for a person that needs to get a child set up with remote school and a lunchtime meeting might conflict with other caregiving responsibilities. Don’t schedule meetings before or after normal work hours.

**Running Your Meetings**
Remember we are all human and want to connect, so start meetings welcoming everyone and consider asking an engaging question to get people to feel more relaxed.

Ask yourself what you are trying to accomplish and how long it will take. Not all meetings need to be an hour. Consider shortening meetings to 30-45 minutes. Make sure to tell everyone to use the remaining time to reflect on the
conversation, jot down some notes, or just take a refreshing pause before moving on to the next meeting.

Close each meeting by acknowledging great individual or team work or simply by thanking someone who did something special.

**Exercise Flexibility for How to Show Up**
At the start of every meeting, consider communicating that people should be comfortable turning off their cameras while still having an opportunity to fully participate in the meeting. Alternatively, you may want to host meetings where all videos are turned off. For a more regular break, join Work Life in their No-Camera Fridays initiative.

**Be an Example for Others**
Modeling behavior for leading virtual meetings demonstrates that you have an adaptable management style for what is needed today and that you can lead teams while having empathy and compassion.