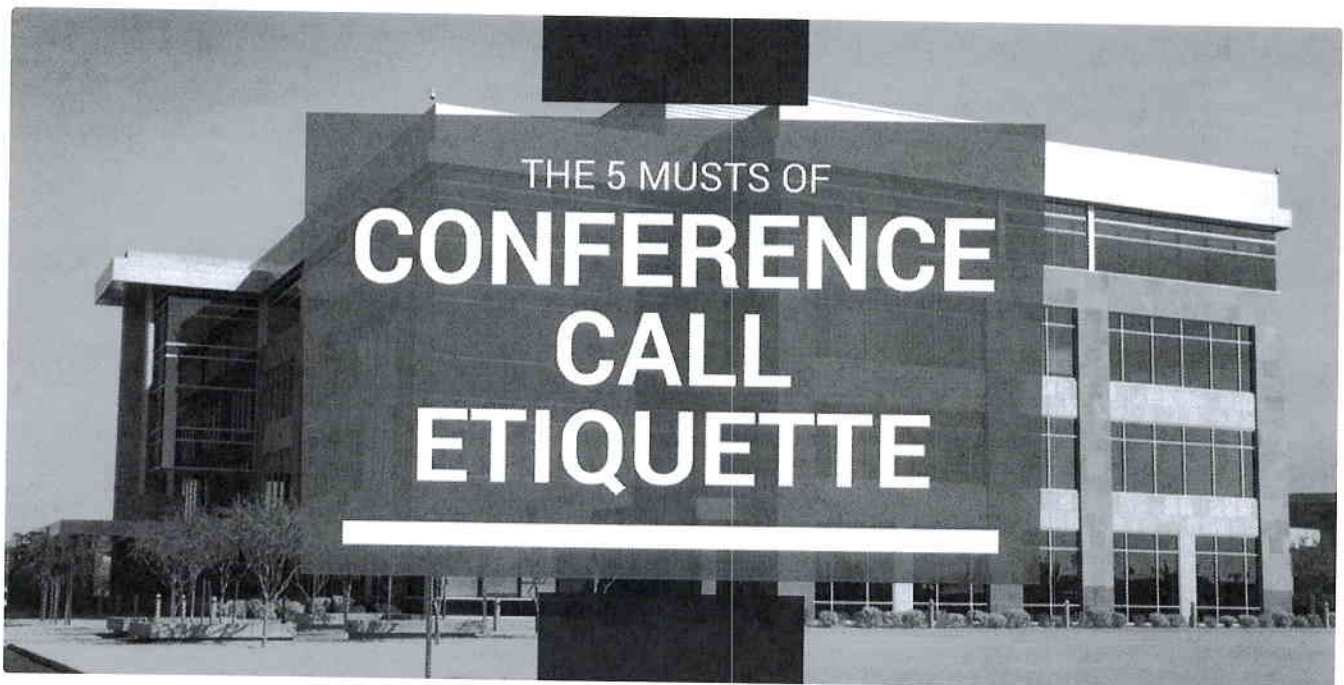


The 5 Musts Of Conference Call Etiquette



A conference call is like running slightly uphill. You can still get where you're going, you just have to put in a little bit more effort to get there.

“We’re losing over half of our communications skills when we’re not in person,” says Kerri Garbis, President & Co-Founder of Ovation Communications. The interest we show with eye contact, the sympathy we display with head nods and smiles, the emphasis we add with our hands—we don’t have them on conference calls.



1) Have Good Body Language

Dianna Booher, author of the forthcoming book *Communicate Like A Leader*, does a simple test at her communications seminars. She brings two volunteers to the stage, and has the audience turn their back on them. She has one of the people stand and smile. The other sits, with no expression.

“I then ask them to each say the same sentence,” says Booher. “The entire audience can always tell who was standing and who was sitting. It never fails.”

Even though you can't be seen, your body language comes through when you speak. “You can hear a smile,” says Booher.

If you really want to get your point across, Booher recommends standing while you talk. Most people sound more energetic and enthusiastic when they're standing.

The lack of visuals on a conference call means that your voice must communicate what your body normally would. Positive body language will help.

2) Be Sure Your Phone/Internet Connection Is Strong

A poor connection can cause two problems—it can create feedback that disrupts other people on the call, and it can make you more difficult to hear.



connection—ideally, your home or office.

3) Identify Yourself Whenever You Speak

Nothing's more frustrating on a conference call than when you don't know who's speaking.

The same statement can require a completely different response if it's an executive talking, rather than a vendor. Even a voice you know well can be difficult to identify if your connection isn't good.

The solution is to identify yourself before speaking. You don't need to make a big entrance. Keep it simple: "This is Joanne speaking, and in my opinion..."

"It feels weird to introduce yourself at first, but practice," says Garbis. "If you don't, people on the call aren't listening to what you're saying, they're trying to figure out who you are."

If someone doesn't identify themselves, don't interrupt them. Wait until they are finished speaking and then politely ask them to say their name.

4) If You're Late, Don't Announce Yourself

When you join a call late, you're a disruption. The "ding" signifying your presence interrupts whoever is talking. Often someone else will stop the call to ask who just joined.



A good conference call moderator knows to move forward with the call when a new person joins, rather than interrupting it. Don't spoil their efforts by announcing yourself.

The call moderator should be able to see on their call dashboard who has called in. If they need to announce you, they will. Better yet, use a conference calling service where the moderator can adjust the settings of the call on the fly so that late entrants to the call don't make the dreaded "ding" and disrupt the call.

5) Use Your Mute Button

Nothing ruins a conference call faster than the hungry dog, fussy baby, or blaring television of the person who forgot to mute themselves.

One person's bad connection or background noise can ruin the call for everyone. You don't always know exactly what the folks on the other end of the call are hearing. So if you aren't talking, keep yourself on mute.

That's the "mute" button—*not* the "hold" button. If you put the call on hold to do something else, the hold music for your office may come on, and all of a sudden the entire call is listening to the local radio station.

If you need to participate in the call but can't stop the background noise, your best move is to communicate some other way. "I've often told people to go completely on mute and email any questions they have," says Kyle Golding, a frequent

If you have a recurring conference call that feels like a long, uphill trek, take action—share these rules with colleagues and get everyone running in step.

CONFERENCE CALL TIPS

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AUTHOR

Kurt

Kurt Birkenhagen heads up sales and marketing efforts for conferencing and collaboration company - Vast Conference. As an enthusiastic client advocate, Kurt is focused on design and product development working to deliver useful new features to our conferencing services.