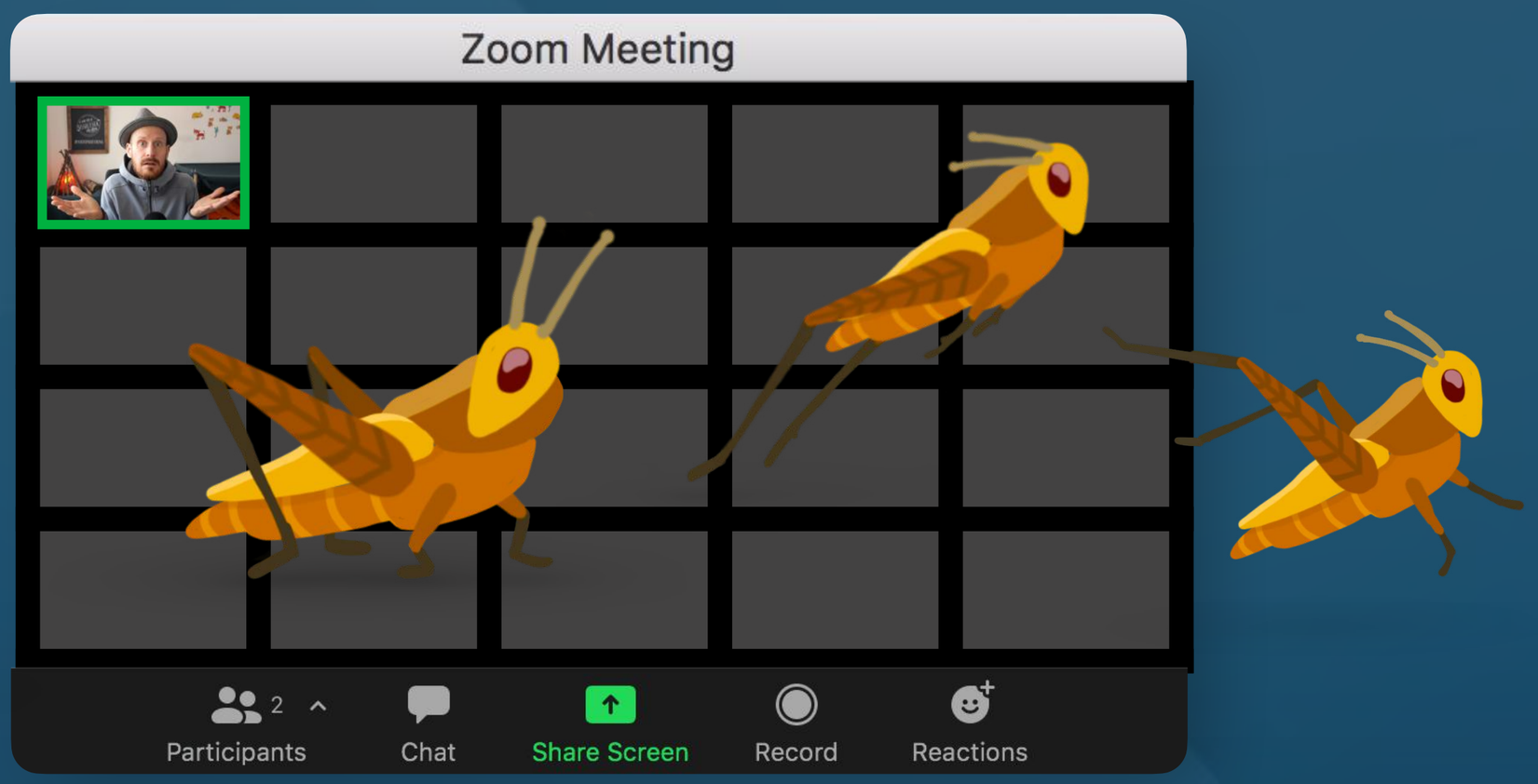

THE SECRET TO AVOIDING CRICKETS IN ONLINE MEETINGS

A LEADER'S GUIDE TO TURNING QUIET OBSERVERS INTO HIGHLY ENGAGED PARTICIPANTS

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TAKE A MOMENT AND IMAGINE...

You're starting your session and:

- *Your participants show up on time, **eager to participate** and actively engage in the session*
- ***All cameras are on** and the **chat is buzzing** with excitement when you invite questions and discussion*
- *When you invite participants to unmute, several **people eagerly raise their hands**, wanting to be the first to respond and share their thoughts*
- *Their enthusiasm is infectious and you can **feel the energy in the room** as everyone prepares to dive into the discussion. You can't help but feel grateful for the opportunity to facilitate such an **engaging and dynamic conversation***

How does it feel reading this?

A lot of my sessions look like this now, but that's not how they started.

I totally remember those **awkward moments** when I was starting virtual meetings and it felt super **uncomfortable**. Most people had their **cameras off** and as soon as I asked a question, the **silence was deafening**.

*All I heard were **crickets** ...*

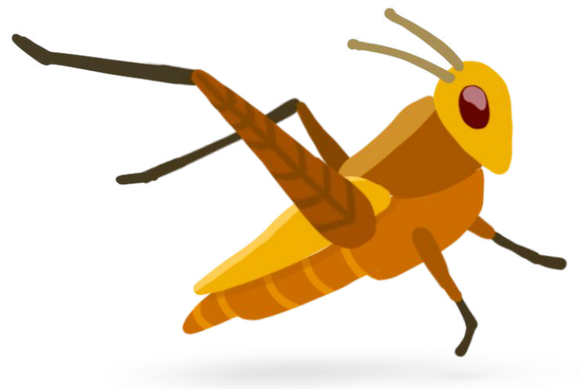
The few people who do had their cameras on were just sitting there, fidgeting, and the longer went goes on, the **more awkward** it got.

It was so **frustrating** and **disappointing** when that happened and made me feel like **I failed as a facilitator**.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE PROBLEM WAS?

Feel free to journal some thoughts here before continuing to the next page:

WHY DO WE GET CRICKETS IN OUR SESSIONS?



When you ask your participants a question and receive no response, you may be facing one of these issues:

1. **Unclear Instructions** - they don't understand the question
2. **Lack of knowledge** - they simply don't know the answer
3. **Absence of *Psychological Safety*** - they don't feel safe to speak up (yet)

According to a study by Google, one of the key components of a high performing team is *Psychological Safety*:

Which means that everyone should feel comfortable to express their ideas **without fear of ridicule or repercussions**. This encourages inclusion and respect, and helps groups make better decisions by considering everyone's input.

IF YOU FAIL AT CREATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN YOUR SESSION, YOU'LL RISK:

- Making participants feel **unsafe, unwelcome and invisible**
- Participants **being passive, disengaged, even checking out**
- **Getting anything done** that requires participants stepping out of their comfort zone (including creativity, collaboration and generating new ideas)

The New York Times

What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team

“The #1 indicator of a high-performing, innovative team is ***Psychological Safety*** *and* ***Trust.***”

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

To encourage your participants to become *highly engaged*, rather than remaining as *quiet observers*, you should ensure that:

1. They trust you as the **leader**
2. They trust **themselves**
3. And they trust **each other**

Once you achieve that, I can assure you that comments like these, which I often hear from leaders in my community, will become a thing of the past:

- *"I have a feeling that my participants check emails, pay bills, or even order groceries during my session. How do I make them pay attention?"*
- *"My participants have exponentially become unresponsive and disengaged on Zoom."*
- *"When I send people to the first breakout room I see a sudden drop in numbers!"*
- *"When I ask questions ... I get no response. No raised hands. Nothing in the chat."*

If these comments resonate and you've experienced something similar, know that **you're not alone** - and it's something that can be fixed.

For the past few years, I have facilitated workshops and trainings for more than 1,000 trainers, facilitators, educators, and team leaders, teaching them the skills needed to design online experiences that are **engaging**, **inclusive**, **memorable**, and **transformative** for groups of up to 100 participants.

Now, I'm on a mission to share my secrets with others.

Whether you're leading a small team meeting or a large workshop, in this guide I'll share **3 simple strategies to make your online workshops and meetings engaging, productive, and most importantly, crickets-free**.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

If we met at a networking event and you asked me: “So, what do you do?”, I might say “*I am on a small talk detox*.”

A few years ago, I created a deck of Connection Cards to help my friends bond on a camping trip, and now they're being used to **turn shallow conversations into deep connections** on every continent around the globe.

Since then, I have been running countless experiences that promote **trust**, embrace **vulnerability** and create a **sense of belonging**. I love to turn a group of strangers into friends with playful activities and meaningful conversations.

In the past few years, I have run hundreds of workshops and trainings with over 1,000 trainers, facilitators, educators, and team leaders, teaching them my secrets to create highly **engaging, purposeful, inclusive and connecting learning experiences**.

Let’s Connect:

Recently, I relocated from Canada to Germany to be closer to family and I am continuing to build a **global community of trainers, facilitators and creators that create *Magical Human Moments*.**

I hope you’ll join me on my mission to **help people feel less alone** and fuel the movement for **deeper human connection.**

MY WORK HAS BEEN FEATURED ON

CBC · BREAKFAST TELEVISION · Cityline · HUFFPOST CANADA

Tip #1

SET EXPECTATIONS EARLY ON

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#1 SET EXPECTATIONS EARLY ON

If you start engaging people at the official start time, it's too late. Nobody wants to be caught off guard and find out they have to be on camera and join Breakout Rooms while still in their pyjamas, hoping to just "listen in".

If your group has a culture of delivering lectures and participants have their cameras off, give them a heads-up and set expectations as early as possible.

When working with a new group, it's important to use the invitation to the meeting as an opportunity to introduce yourself. This is their first encounter with you, and all they may have is the title of the meeting. So, make sure to make a good impression.

SEND A PERSONALIZED VIDEO MESSAGE

This is my secret weapon for building rapport and trust with a new group. By sending a video instead of an email, they get a much better sense of who you are. As a result, when they meet you in person, you don't feel like a complete stranger.

Here are some tips to make your video message a success:

- ✓ Don't address the group, **address individuals**: “I can’t wait to meet you!”
- ✓ Look straight into the lens of the camera so participants feel like you’re **making eye contact** with them
- ✓ Make sure **your camera is on eye level**, so you’re not talking down at them or making yourself less confident and small
- ✓ **Showcase your personality**: avoid virtual backgrounds, avoid scripting the whole message and speak from the heart
- ✓ **Remind participants about important details**, the agenda and items they should bring and what to expect
- ✓ **Build excitement** and maybe even a bit of mystery by mentioning what part of the agenda you’re most excited about
- ✓ **Have a manager from within the organization send out the link to your video**, but leave your contact details, so individuals can get in touch with you directly

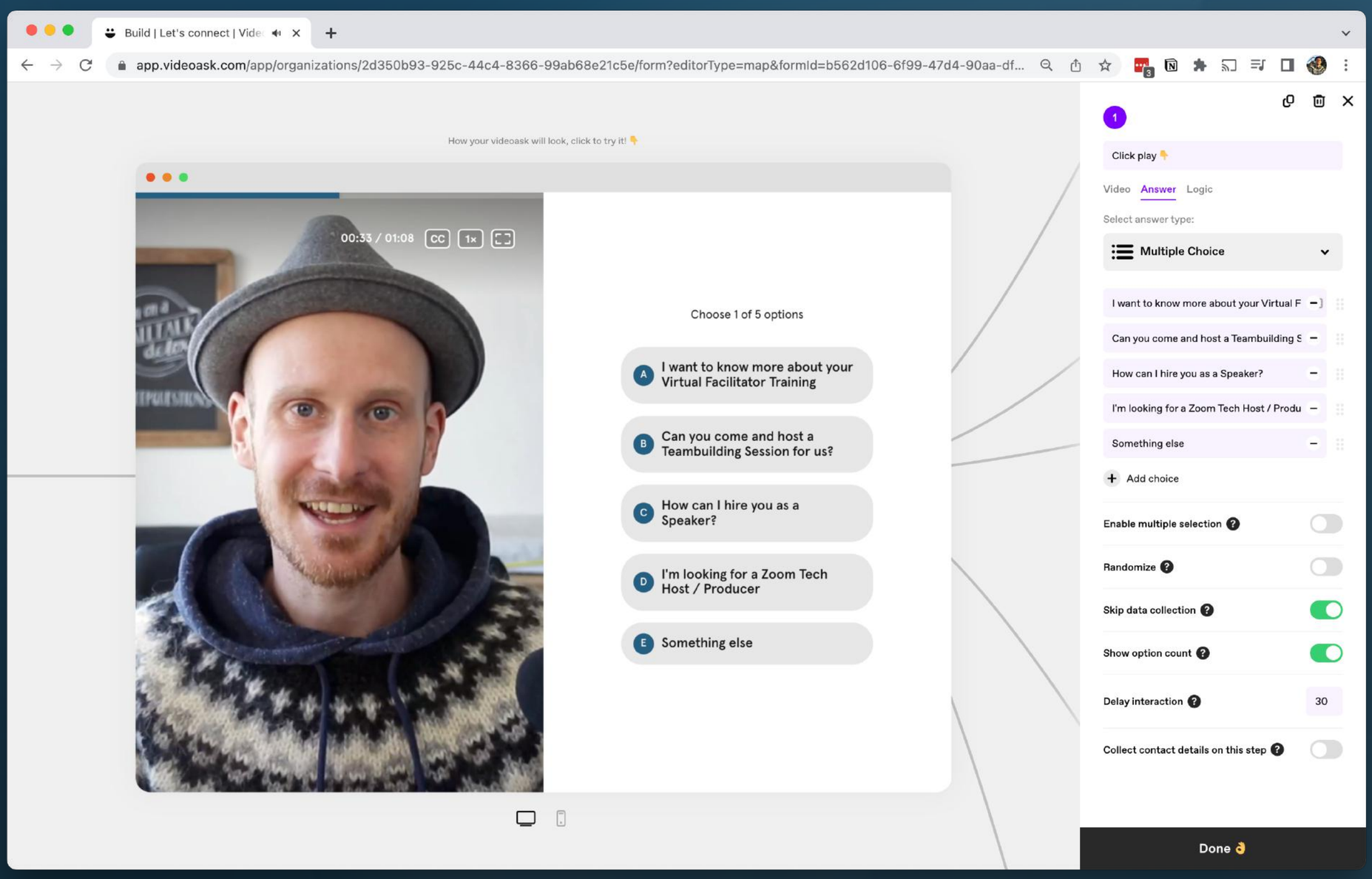
PRO TIP: MAKE YOUR VIDEO MESSAGES INTERACTIVE

When I send out a personalized video message to a group that I am working with for the first time, I always use VideoAsk. It's a interactive polling tool that allows you to record yourself on video.

Click here for an example of how I am using it on my contact form (You're welcome to leave me a message if you like and I'll promise to respond).

I use it to share my message, but then end with a few questions that participants can respond via text, audio message or video. I ask, for example:

- *What is currently your biggest challenge with [SESSION TOPIC]?*
- *What is one question you hope to get answered during our session?*
- *What else do you need to fully participate in this session (in terms of accessibility)?*



videoask by Typeform

If you want to try out VideoAsk, use my affiliate code **CYnHrwlE** and get 10% off

JANKECK.COM/VIDEOASK

CUSTOMIZE THE WAITING ROOM

Not everyone will watch your personalized video message, but if you're using a video platform that has a "waiting room", this is your second chance of making a great first impression.

Participants who show up a bit too early might spend a few minutes in the waiting room before you're ready to admit them, so let's make this a meaningful experience for them.

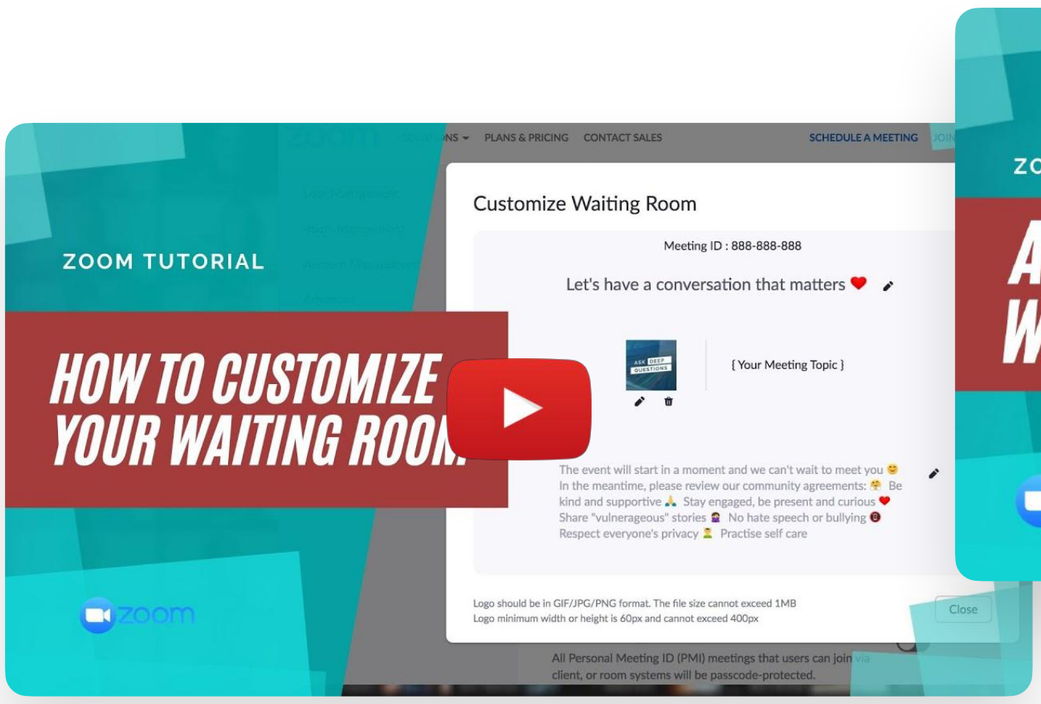
Here are some ideas for customizing the default text in your Waiting Room:

- ✓ **Add your logo**, if you want it to be more professional or add your headshot if you want it to be more personal (I use my headshot usually)
- ✓ **Add a short welcome message** to reiterate the key points from your personalized video message: the things needed to participate fully, heads up about Breakout Rooms, etc
- ✓ I also like to share my "**Community Agreements**" that set out how we'll work together which I want groups to follow in the session

PRO TIP: ADD A VIDEO ON ZOOM

If you are using Zoom, you can even add a video to the waiting room (see the video tutorial below) which can delight participants - or be annoying. So here are some guidelines if you use video:

- ✓ Make sure the video works without sound as participants need to turn it on manually and most won't.
- ✓ Keep it short. Most participants won't spend more than 20 seconds in the waiting room before you admit them.



Tip #2

ENGAGE PARTICIPANTS RIGHT AWAY

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#2 ENGAGE PARTICIPANTS RIGHT AWAY

I've heard from many leaders that the first few minutes of an online meeting can be really uncomfortable. From trying to make small talk that feels like pulling teeth to awkward silence.

But the worst thing you can say when participants login to your meeting is this: *"Let's just wait until everyone has arrived"*

In this one sentence we are:

1) **Penalizing the people who arrive on time** and communicating that we don't value their time
2) **Setting expectations that we don't start on time**, so people will keep coming five minutes later than the "real" start time
3) You're enacting the norm that "in this group, **we do not always keep our commitments** in the ways we say we will"
4) And most importantly, we're **allowing participants to disengage**, before the meeting even starts. This is when you see participants turning off their cameras, replying to emails or browsing social media on their phones

So instead, you want to invite your participants to **engage in an activity right from the moment they login.**

This sets the tone for your event by making everyone feel welcome until the last person has arrived, and avoids participants feeling anxious, ignored, uncertain or confused.

These activities are called **Unofficial Start Activities** and I'll share some examples and guidelines on the next page.

If you start do this, you will get testimonials like this one from one of my workshop participants:

> I was told by my boss to come (last minute), so I was not super excited about joining.
>
> However, within the first few minutes, I realized this was not going to be another stuffy "how to" Zoom call. I did not feel confident in my ability to lead an engaging virtual experience when we first set out for our training, but I felt welcomed and inspired to want to create a better experience for the sake of those I would lead. If Jan can make a "Virtual facilitator training" fun and engaging, then certainly I can, too!

CHELSEA VAN ECK
Study Abroad Advisor
InterVarsity

HOW TO DESIGN AN UNOFFICIAL START ACTIVITY

If you welcome participants with an engaging activity at the exact moment they arrive at your online session (when they get admitted from the waiting room or enter the meeting), you'll set the tone for how the meeting will run.

It's important to facilitate activities **from the very beginning** for the early arrivals, because:

- ✓ It **engages everyone right away** to make participation later on easier
- ✓ It **creates a welcoming atmosphere** and builds psychological safety
- ✓ It **invites your participants to be present** and ready to interact
- ✓ It **rewards those who arrive early or on time** instead of rewarding those who arrive late

Here are some activity ideas to engage from the get-go:

1. **Play upbeat music in the background** to create a welcoming mood (the same way you would at a birthday party)
2. **Invite participants to introduce themselves** in the chat with "curious" question prompts projected on the screen. Some of my go-to questions are:
   - ✓ *What is your favourite part of your home?*
   - ✓ *What would you like to be the best in the world at?*
   - ✓ *If you didn't have to sleep, what would you do with the extra time?*
   - ✓ *What would you do without electricity for 3 days?*
   - ✓ *What could you give a 30-minute presentation on with ZERO preparation?*
3. **Use the poll feature** to ask participants questions and learn about them (this is great if your group is larger and chat might get too busy). I love to **create word clouds** by asking what participants associate with the topic of the session
4. **Play "Guess that Tune":** play different songs from movies and TV shows and ask your participants to guess in the chat
5. **Invite participants to rename themselves** by adding their favourite meal, their most used emoji or locations (I like to use the flag emojis and invite them to share where they grew up, where they live now, where they want to travel to next)
6. **Share a page of a colouring book**, and ask participants to use the annotation feature to colour in the details

Start your sessions by using one of the ***thoughtful questions*** *that go below the surface to create* ***meaningful connections.***

GET THE FREE APP AT
APP.ASKDEEPQUESTIONS.COM

Tip #3

STACK ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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#3 STACK ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Ok, so now we're getting closer to the moment where you'll invite your participants to unmute and share their thoughts or answer your question.

As a leader, you know it's important to ensure that **all members of your team or group are fully engaged and participating** in discussions and activities. But sometimes, despite your best efforts, you may find that you have a few **quiet observers who seem hesitant to speak up or contribute.**

If you're tired of having to constantly bribe your Zoom participants to speak up and are struggling to turn those quiet participants into active, engaged members of your team, then I encourage you to think of **stacking the ways you ask your participants to engage.**

THINK-PAIR-SHARE-PLUS

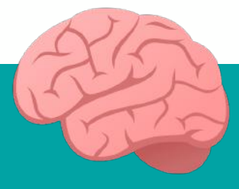
The *Think-Pair-Share* strategy is designed to give participants **time and a framework** to think about a topic, form individual ideas, and share them with a peer **before** sharing with the whole group.

On the next page, you'll find my own framework that evolved from Think-Pair-Share into multiple steps that can be combined in any way you choose.

Using a process of engagement that stacks on top of each step is going to allow your participants:

- ✓ To **take time to reflect before responding** (or structure their grammar if they speak in a non-native language) and therefore the people that **rarely raise their hand** in a session are more likely to contribute
- ✓ To **engage in different modalities** that might be more suited for their learning preference. This also means the session **stays interesting because you're adding contrast** (switching from lecture to writing to small group conversations keeps people's attention for much longer)

THINK-PAIR-SHARE-PLUS FRAMEWORK



THINK

Give participants a moment to think about their answer

JOURNAL

Invite them to write down their answer for themselves

DRAW

Doodle or draw your answer on a paper or shared whiteboard

PARTNER

Turn to your neighbour: Invite participants to share with a partner in a Breakout Room

GROUP

Create groups of 2-3 in a Breakout Room and have them share their answer

NOMINATE

Participants can nominate their partners that shared something interesting in a Breakout Room

CHAT

Invite everyone to share a take-away from their conversation in the chat

UNMUTE

Invite participants to comment by unmuting themselves

PRO TIP: Acknowledge and appreciate: Make sure to recognize the value of each person's contribution to create a more cohesive and supportive environment for everyone to work in.

SOURCE: How to turn a group of strangers into a team (TED Talk)

Bonus Tip

UNLEASH THE CRICKET

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UNLEASH THE CRICKET

If all else fails… I usually unleash the *cricket*.

If I have followed all the tips in this guide and am still met with **deafening silence after inviting participants to unmute**, I play this short animation I created of a cricket being chased by a tumbleweed on my screen or on my slide:

Click here to watch my cricket in action

GET MY CRICKET ANIMATION FOR FREE

I am a huge believer that the best way to learn something is to take action, so I thought about ways I can incentivize you to apply the tips you've learned in this guide right away.

So, if you send me a message on my Contact Form with some feedback after applying one of the tips I will respond with a link to download my secret tool 🙂

CONTINUE LEARNING...

FROM CRICKETS TO CONNECTED

in 20 minutes

In this mini course you'll learn how to turn your virtual workshop participants from passive observers to active contributors in 20 minutes.

LEARN HOW I AM CONSISTENTLY ABLE TO:

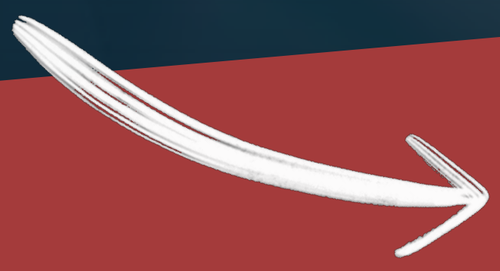
Engage your Participants even if they suffer from ***Zoom Fatigue***

Get close to 100% of attendees to **turn ON their video** (without begging)

Blow up your chat with "OMG!", "This was EPIC!" and other **raving testimonials**

HERE IS EVERYTHING THAT'S INCLUDED:

- ✓ 6 digestible video lessons you can binge-watch in less than 2 hours
- ✓ Copy of the slides and PDF checklists
- ✓ 2x Q&A recordings
- ✓ Bonus Video Lesson on engaging participants on a Webinar
- ✓ Access to the Deep Connectors Community



USE THE CODE CRICKETSGUIDE
AT JANKECK.COM/CRICKETS

THANK YOU 🙏🙏🙏

THANK YOU FOR CHECKING OUT MY GUIDE

If you'd like to go deeper with any of the content I shared here, you can find out about my upcoming workshops or courses here.

And to stay in touch with my free content, make sure to follow me on LinkedIn and subscribe to my YouTube channel.

JAN KECK 🔥

TRAINER | FACILITATOR
EXPERIENCE DESIGNER

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