Going Virtual in the COVID-19 Era 2.0

EVENT SUMMARY

Online via Zoom
When: Friday, May 8, 2020 | 12:00 PM - 1:30 PM

Speakers
Arianna Montero-Colbert | Account Manager and Scrum Master, Education Team, TechChange
Beth Skorochod | Director of Practice, CollaborateUp
Mike Shanley | Founder and CEO, Konektid International

Event Description

On April 6th, SID-W hosted an event to discuss fundamental techniques and platforms that we can use to adjust to a work-from-home lifestyle in the COVID-19 era. Building off of our April 6th conversation, SID-W was happy to host a second "Going Virtual" event that discussed the following:

• Executing meetings with high-level executives and officials
• Developing advanced techniques for humanizing virtual meetings
• Making virtual events more enjoyable
**Key Takeaways**

1. **Tips for Exploring Virtual Platforms**

   Beth Skorochod (CollaborateUp) introduced this session by highlighting a variety of tips that she has found useful since making the switch to working completely virtually. Ms. Skorochod finds it helpful when a meeting is categorized beforehand as one of the following meeting archetypes: sharing, brainstorming, planning, decision-making, or team building meetings. By making this distinction, Ms. Skorochod feels virtual meetings tend to be more productive, as the participants join feeling more prepared and in the correct headspace for discussion. Ms. Skorochod feels strongly that during this time of telework, everyone should explore as many platforms as possible. There are a variety of programs that are suited to different needs for each company, and Ms. Skorochod shared that she and her team at CollaborateUp frequently use Zoom, Google Hangouts, and Skype as their preferred methods of virtual connection. Ms. Skorochod explained the need for platforms that allow for large bandwidth and have the ability to share multiple presentations and videos, which enhances the meeting experience.

2. **Difficulties in Remote Work**

   Mike Shanley (Konektid International) shared the triumphs and difficulties his organization has faced since transitioning to remote work. Mr. Shanley explained that much of Konektid International’s work involves overseas communication with consultants and USAID project managers, so the idea of remote conferencing is not new to Konektid. However, Mr. Shanley shared that the main challenges in remote work for Konektid have surfaced through connectivity and platform security. When working with an overseas client, it is important to consider: (1) if the software intended for use is compatible with their technological capacities, and (2) if they can withstand the bandwidth of a large call, particularly those working in developing countries. Additionally, Mr. Shanley highlighted the importance of researching which countries allow the use of which platforms before creating overseas conferences, as some countries do not allow Zoom or other conferencing services to be used widely. Mr. Shanley suggested strategies when choosing virtual platforms in terms of affordability and feasibility. If a service has been working consistently, Mr. Shanley feels there may not be a need to introduce another pending any client or partner organization requests.
The New Normal: When Home and Work Collide

Arianna Montero-Colbert (TechChange) has found that some meeting attendees prefer to join without video and keep themselves muted due to possible distractions (i.e. family members speaking in the background or stepping into the frame, pets creating unnecessary noise, etc.). Ms. Montero-Colbert believes that criticizing those whose personal lives accidentally interfere with work during this time is the wrong approach, as this intersection of work and life may be healthier in the long run. Instead of trying to hide life outside of work, employees should be celebrating it. Showing living spaces on video conferences adds a personal dimension to work. Ms. Montero-Colbert also highlighted mothers and fathers in the workforce and applauded their demonstrated ability to efficiently multitask. Many mothers, fathers, and caretakers are now responsible for providing all day care for their children and assisting in their learning experience from home while trying to balance their professional careers.

Making Virtual Meetings and Events Manageable

Ms. Skorochod stated that she uses breakout rooms frequently to create focus groups and to foster productive, smaller discussions during meetings and other events. Additionally, Mr. Shanley and Ms. Montero-Colbert shared their opinions on breakout rooms and smaller conference tools, stressing how they were invaluable resources in creating productive discussion during larger events. Ms. Montero-Colbert added that frequent check-ins and info-sharing sessions during the day should be taking the place of informal, constructive criticism that happens naturally in an office setting. To make virtual events comfortable, Ms. Skorochod noted that virtual breaks are instrumental in making meetings, conferences, and events feel exciting. In this new era, taking breaks during and after these events to mentally prepare for what comes next in the workday helps ensure that employees are working productively.