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Even Virtual Meetings Can Have Powerful Lessons

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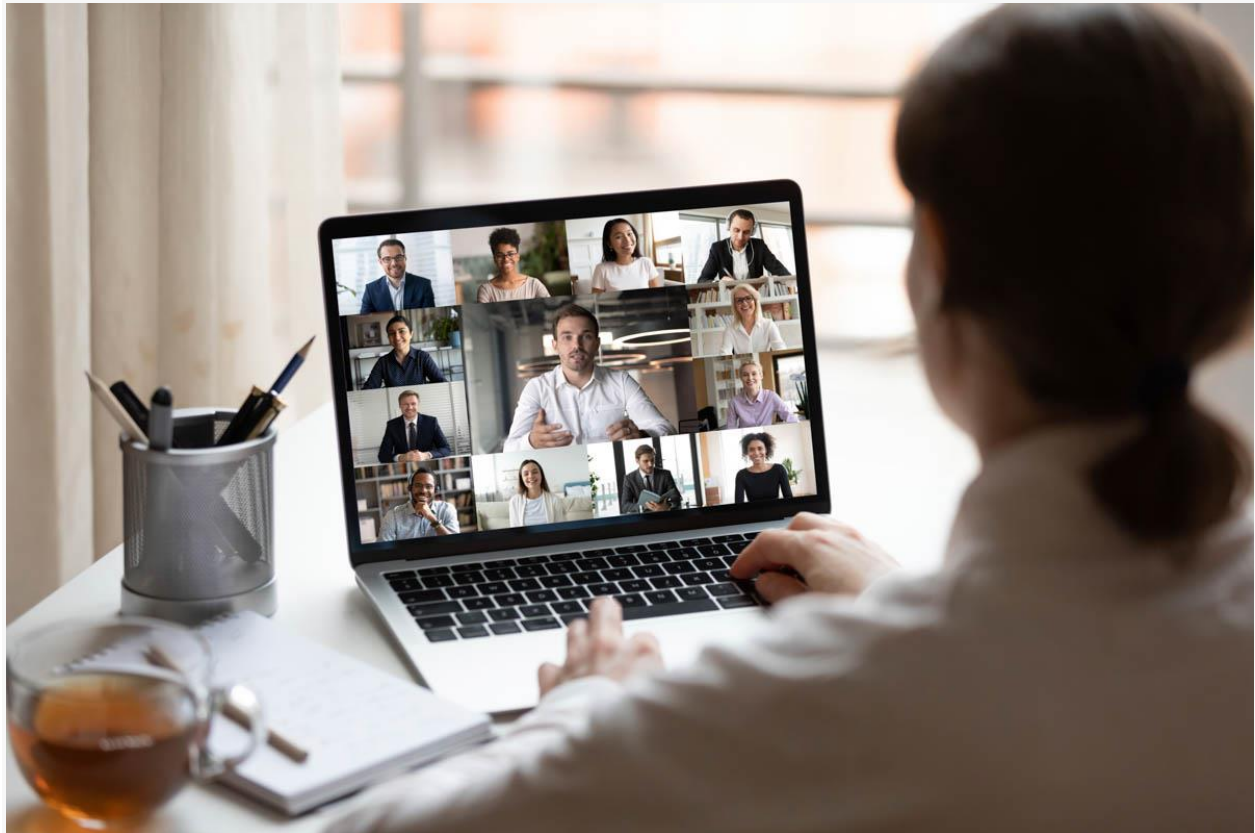




Even Virtual Meetings Can Have Powerful Lessons

By **Brenda S. Thompson**
UCF Forum columnist
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It's not all about me — online inspiration leads me to believe that in our new environment there are ways to still improve and advance the lives of others.



(Photo by iStock)

Virtual meetings are an essential component of just about everyone's new workday routine. And one recent week was no exception, as each day I attended several of those remote conferences.

Two of the meetings, however, surprised me and were quite special because they created opportunities to hear from dynamic speakers who engaged me and the other participants in authentic ways. The speakers led us into their mental spaces and allocated time to connect with each other, reflect on our lives, define and redefine who we are, identify talents or gifts we possess, and think about who we would like to become. And days after our virtual encounters, their messages are etched in my mind causing a positively disruptive mindset.

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As I listened to the first speaker, I thought about my life and how it has changed since the pandemic began. I miss my extended family and friends, and the camaraderie of my office mates. I also miss the excitement and joy associated with successful face-to-face collaborations that made something new, lasting and meaningful.

My life is different now, and current conditions have isolated others in similar ways, limiting so many of our customary indulgences.

As time passed during the meeting, my mind started to wander. I thought about how I read and listen to the news, constantly monitoring data that describe the devastating effects of COVID-19 and doing all I can to stay away from the virus. I check off items on my daily to-do list with the precision of a task master who controls and advances work that must be completed on schedule.

Following recommended guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, I have become a bit of a recluse, not venturing too far from my safe home environment; however, I still enjoy the company of just a few precious friends and family members through ZOOM. As I ended my brief mental escape from the presentation, I remember hearing an admonition, "... enough of this pity party. Let's get going!"

And that is when the speaker's words reset my focus. She got everyone's undivided attention by sharing her amazing story of leading a great organization for more than 15 years. Since its founding in 1989, the organization has made wishes come true for children with life threatening illnesses at no expense to their families. Based in Central Florida, the organization provides support for families who face unthinkable health crises their children are going through.

The speaker described her organization's impact on the lives of more than 170,000 chronically ill children whose wish was to visit the smaller scale Disney-esque village her company created, and enjoy a week of pure bliss with their families at this magical place filled with fun, food, rides, amusements and yes, ice cream any time of the morning, day or night.

She praised the more than 1,800 volunteers per year who give unselfishly of their time and gifts to create a fantasy experience for children, bringing smiles to their faces. And

fundraising efforts have generated more than \$25 million to create and maintain the village and programs.

The presenter was powerful and in her concluding remarks, she shared this quote that has been attributed to various writers through the years: “The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.” As her mantra, these words inspire her every day she goes to the office to discover ways to grant wishes to others.

Later in the week, I participated in a virtual session with a second speaker. His message focused on mindfulness, and during his presentation, participants’ thoughts were skillfully directed inwardly, focusing on our individual selves as we considered the value of a more purposeful and aware life.

By nature, many of us believe we are our brother’s keeper and whenever there is a call for assistance, we tend to respond to that need in many creative ways; sometimes, never stopping to monitor our own body’s response to being on call 24/7.

After participating in several of the speaker-directed activities, I acquired a heightened state of awareness, and concluded that my needs should be a major consideration for me, too, as I give back to society. Using the metaphor, “You can’t pour from an empty cup,” I now realize that my well-being and needs should also be factored into the equation as I structure my life of service.

In retrospect, I realize the views espoused by both speakers were not diametrically opposed to each other and their themes somehow intersected to express a profound message of what it takes to be a good steward. Each speaker touched my heart in ways I will always remember.

In the midst of my incertitude regarding the congruency of each speaker’s thesis, I realized that both messages are especially relevant today. Each of the experiences inspired me to think more deeply about life and the paths I will choose to navigate through it.

Author L.K. Krost reminds us that “Taking care of yourself doesn’t mean me first, it means me too.”

Baseball player Jackie Robinson once said: “A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.”

These inspirational words lead me to believe that in our new normal environment, there are ways to protect and support ourselves as we renew our passion to continue our great work of improving and advancing the lives of others. Let’s get going!

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