

REPORT ON BUSINESS

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EMERGING LEADERS REINVENTING HOW CANADA DOES BUSINESS

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Need to know

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ASK AN EXPERT

Screen fright

I've always been a lousy presenter, and it's worse on Zoom. How can I keep my team's attention on video calls?

Presentation expert Dave Paradi often finds himself talking to a grid of black squares. He could assume he's bad and boring, and nobody is listening. But he doesn't—and neither should you. “Most people think they're far worse at presenting than they really are,” says the founder of Think Outside the Slide. For this widespread misconception, blame curated TED Talks, tech wunderkinds and standing ovations in rom-com denouements. “You're doing a regular update of results for your team; nobody expects you to be Steve Jobs,” says Paradi. Success is when necessary info is delivered and retained. You can achieve this goal by working backwards: “What do you want your team to do or know? This is your focus, and if you and your audience both understand where you're going, people are more likely to stay with you.” Now ditch the bad attitude about Zoom. Thanks to this technology, online presentations can actually be more effective than those done in person. “People can see your face much better than

they would from the back of a boardroom,” notes Paradi. More importantly, he says, “in a boardroom, your slides are always competing with you.” Zoom lets you choose video when you're feeling engaging and cut to a slide when you need a break. As tempting as it is to hide your own distracting image, don't. “Be aware of the camera to make sure not just your face but your hand gestures are in the frame,” says Paradi.

It's about to be a long, cold, lonely work-from-home winter. How can I fight employee burnout virtually? Even before COVID-19, employee burnout was rampant and rising: People work longer hours, skip vacations and check email all night. Then add in a pandemic. “Now it's so much worse,” says Brea Giffin, director at Sprout Wellness. “We're working from home, so disconnecting is even harder, and yet we're more isolated too. There are no long lunches or after-work beers.” Good bosses should, of course, watch for burnout signs—agitation or

aggression, lateness to meetings, missed deadlines—but better bosses should assume burnout's already happening and address it. Think top-down first: “Set up a forum where employees are encouraged to talk and vent so they don't feel alone,” suggests Giffin. You can participate too, and you should, in order to cultivate a safe space where it's okay to share stresses and talk about mental health. Any and all resources you have on offer, such as oft-underused employee assistance program providers, should be widely promoted and accessible. Next, think bottom-up: “Whenever you can, connect with employees on a personal level. People forget you can just pick up the phone,” she says. But the single most important thing a boss can do to fight virtual burnout? “Remember, leaders set boundaries in any organization. If you tell everyone you turn off your email at 7 p.m. and to please respect that, they will,” she says. Moreover, you've made it okay for them to do the same.

My employees are hoarding vacation days until the pandemic ends. What should I do?

“Employers have an obligation to make sure employees take vacation,” explains Cissy Pau, principal consultant at Clear HR. This will solve a larger problem—a mass staff exodus when travel's allowed—but that's not why you should force breaks. “Even if they can't go anywhere, people need to unplug, rest and relax,” says Pau (see burnout, above). And although you have the right to change your policy, don't. “Now's the time for empathy, compassion and flexibility,” says Pau. The best vacation policy—pandemic or not—is to explain the rationale, send out the vacation calendar, encourage bookings and repeat as necessary. /Rosemary Counter