

## Greetings!

*I hope you enjoy this **Online Communications Module**. We created it in response to the huge changes in our daily lives and how we communicate, because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the stay-at-home orders.*

*My gut tells me that many of these changes in how we meet and interact with others--both professionally and personally--are permanent. Fewer airplane trips, more Zoom calls. We think the information here will be useful for many years into the future. It was created as both an add-on to my online course “Engage Yourself, Engage Your Listeners: Speaking with Confidence, Clarity and Connection”, and as a stand-alone mini-course.*

*Because of the technical nature of this material, I have turned over the job of creating these worksheets to my collaborator, Terry Simpson, who has more than 25 years of experience as a cameraman, lighting director, and gaffer for television, film, and video. Terry also spent more than 10 years teaching workshops and classes in film schools, teaching both professionals and beginners. So, I leave you in good hands.*

*Enjoy Your Journey.*

*Cheers,*

*Jean*



## Zoom Calls: Learn to be your own Film Crew

Since the time of Covid-19, if you watch TV at all, you've seen an unprecedented number of news anchors, talk show hosts, musicians, as well as LOTS of guests sitting at home or in their offices, using their laptops, desktops, phones, or iPads to "call in." I'll use "Zoom" here to refer to all such video calls (including Teams) regardless of platform. *I own some stock... 😊*

**On the good side, this has turned up some wonderfully creative moments** that can be uniquely interesting, funny, and even poignant. Makes sense. After all, for the guests, you are looking at the person in their own environment surrounded by the decoration, books, and art that they have chosen to represent themselves (intentionally or not). They may be as comfortable as you will ever see them on TV. At home and at ease. It can lead to some truly insightful and/or funny interviews.

**But we've also seen some dreadful looking images, and worse yet: bad sound** (*people will watch bad video many times longer than they will tolerate bad audio*). Or really incongruent images—a top economist in front of pink nursery wallpaper comes to mind. Away from the control of studio professionals, the "bar" has dropped considerably for what is "watchable." Our goal is to help you raise the bar on your own Zoom calls.

**There are essentially 3 major things that can ruin a Zoom video:**

- 1) Too little (or too much) Lighting
- 2) Echo-ey or interrupted Sound
- 3) Lousy network connection

**These lessons cover the basics about how to avoid the first two.** *As for improving your network connection, our quick advice is that if you have a choice to use Wi-Fi or wired ethernet, choose wired. If you have to use wireless, try to minimize traffic (don't let your 16-year old download movies or upload their 4k mega-video art project during calls).*

**Additionally, there are several things that make for "weird" Zoom video:**

- 1) Camera placed too high or low, or badly framed shots
- 2) Boring, flat, or cluttered backgrounds
- 3) Children or pets walking into and through the call

**Again, we will cover the first 2 pretty well.** *This last one--cute and wonderful the first time or two, but it may get "old" for your co-workers (or they might love it!)*

Bottom line, our goal here is to eliminate DISTRACTIONS and ANOMALIES that interfere with good communication of the story being told—your Story, your Message.

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**In my professional life in television, film and video, I learned that it is all about CONTROL factors (most Directors are control freaks):** If I can put the talent or subject in a studio especially built to exclude all extraneous noises and light, and CONTROL who goes in and out, we can make moving pictures that look and sound GREAT. Further, if I can CONTROL where the Talent sits, stands or moves, I can light them beautifully, like a Portrait photographer. And if I can CONTROL what the camera Sees and doesn't See, and the Set designer makes sure that what is Seen communicates congruent details, then we can almost guarantee the movie will tell the story we want. At the very least, we can be pretty dang sure it is watchable. And free of DISTRACTION. The rest is up to the Talent.

**For our purposes here, we want to stop DISTRACTION so YOU can be your Best Self.** *Think of YOUR home office or corner as a mini-TV Studio.* We are going to help you assert and maintain CONTROL over all of the major elements—lighting, camera, sound, set (your background). You will learn to eliminate most of the DISTRACTIONS so that your audience can focus on you and your message.

**Here is a mental exercise: imagine that 4 business people are on a Zoom call,** 1 at the office, 2 at home offices, and 1 who insists on calling in while wandering around their house, past windows and through doors, then taking a walk to the grocery store, and shopping. It would be **distracting** as they go through different noise and lighting environments—the picture could change from too orange to too blue to too green. And it would all be shaky and a little chaotic. Do you imagine that anyone on the call could focus on a totally brilliant idea that person had in the 10<sup>th</sup> minute of the meeting?

**MY APPROACH to these worksheets is a little different than Jean's.** This packet includes both *Supplemental Readings*, marked “**INFO**,” and interactive “**WORKSHEETS**” with **ACTION STEPS** where you apply the INFO to your own office set-up (*often with sketches*).

**For many of you, the INFO sheets may go into way too much detail,** but some may want to know the “Why's” and “How's” of this technical stuff. I'm trying to cater to both groups here. So, if you just want to be told “WHAT” to do, not WHY, skim the INFO sheets, paying close attention to the **Takeaways, TIPS, and Summaries in BLUE typeface.** **That will give you the “Executive Summary.” ALL: be sure to DO the ACTION STEPS!**

**For all of you, our goal is to help you set up your office for the best Zoom-Call picture,** tweak your lighting, place your camera, get the most appropriate Mic, and place the right furniture and drapes in the right place to minimize ECHO and absorb NOISE.



*Cheers,  
Terry*

