BEST PRACTICES in a Virtual Group

1. Adults want to participate well.
    a. They have voted with their feet/time to be with you.
    b. Can assume they are motivated. God is up to something good.
    c. Prepare well yourself.
    d. Share expectations and any overviews.
    e. Agendas/flow/timelines help guide everyone.
    f. Encourage preparing personal thoughts ahead of time.

2. The living Christ is the central participant in this group.
    a. We are not "talking behind God's back."
    b. *What is Jesus doing among us?*
    c. Be alert – he is up to far more than we can imagine.
    d. Relax – let Jesus do the heavy lifting (Matthew 11:28-30).

3. Paying attention to people uniquely is a really big deal.
    a. Keep your eye out for struggles or barriers to participation individuals may be experiencing. In this format helping with technology learning curves can be a right way to care.
    b. Be willing to begin where people are, and discover where they are.
    c. Who do you need to move toward? What is God nudging you to do?

4. Building trust and intimacy will take time.
    a. Check-in with every person briefly to begin.
    b. Using the Breakout Room function available on ZOOM is easy and helps make the group experience even better.
    c. Every adult has something to say...and will, when they feel safe.
    d. Some adults may engage more in this format.

5. Create a conversational environment.
   a. This will require preparation on your part.
   b. Being more directive will be appreciated in this format.
   c. Get comfortable with silence.
   d. Share your screen. Share images.

6. Adults like to move around.
   a. Think in "segments" of time.
   b. Think large group. Small group. Twos or Triads.
   c. Engage physical involvement. Open hands when praying.
   d. Invite "stand ups" to stretch and be comfortable.

7. Adults retain what they discover for themselves.
   a. Questions. Reflection. Pauses. Discussion. Journaling.
   b. We want to undo the "sage on a stage" or the "sit-n-git" mentality.
   c. Are you "occupying the space" OR "opening up the space?"
   d. Connect to their life experiences. Encouragement to apply, apply, apply.
   e. "What are you taking home with you?" This is always a great question.

8. Lead out of who you are.
   a. You need to do this "in your own skin."
   b. Personal approach, not professional; care and companionship, not expertise.
   c. Be creative … have fun … invite playfulness … eat together.
   d. If you are not co-leading, find someone early on that you can debrief the experience with from time to time, discuss how it is going from their perspective. You need that perspective.

9. Meaningful conversation and companionship is catalytic in people's lives.
   a. "Friendship is not a cherry on top of the Christian life"; it is the condition in which we learn to pay attention to the Lord and join in on what he is up to.
   b. In such a time as this there is an awful lot of loneliness and isolation.
   c. Discovering who God created them to be and how he desires to work through them for kingdom purposes.
   d. *"I pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles, in which vital and transforming events take place."   Rufus Jones (1863-1948)*

Additional Resources and Virtual Tips

For setting up and running a meeting:
- Simplify the invitation - send only what they need to log in. Delete all the "extra" information.
- If you have people new to the platform you are using, ask them to test it prior to meeting time. Ask if they want to test it with you.
- If you have a recurring meeting, resend the Meeting ID# and password to the participants the day of the meeting.
- Keep meetings to 90 minutes or less. Online fatigue is real.
- Some platforms have a call-in feature. This can be especially handy for those traveling, or not familiar with computers, or tired of a screen for the day.
- Consider what the ground rules or covenants ought be for virtual small group gatherings. What intentionality is required? For instance, how can you protect confidentiality when adults are online in their homes with other people around?
- Keep in mind that some people may be more thoughtful about what they say or more participatory online than they would be in an in-person gathering. This is a good surprise.

Personal aspects to give you peace of mind as you lead:
- Lighting is important. Lights behind your camera, screen, or phone is much preferred to light behind YOU. Poorly lit settings are also not preferred. Watch for shadows from lights and outdoor windows.
- Camera angle is important. It is more desirable to place your device so you look straight at the camera or so that it is slightly above eye level versus looking up your chin(s!) or nose!
- If two people in the same household are going to be participating it works better to use two different devices in two separate areas. Sharing a screen works, but not as well.
- Pay attention to how you look BEFORE you log in.
- Have a non-distracting, clean area behind you.
- Be sure you are in a place, if possible, that has a minimal amount of distraction.
- Over time you will get more and more familiar with the mute, video, and volume buttons.

Possible platforms to use:
There are a lot of ways to connect with video. Here are just a few free ones. And each offers "Help" links to navigate the technology learning curve.
- Zoom
- Microsoft Teams
- Skype
- Google Duo/Hangouts
- WhatsApp/Messenger video chat

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VantagePoint3 *is a ministry that helps adults discover more deeply who God is, who they are, and what God wants to do through them. Our deep conviction is that God wants people to grow up into maturity in Christ. VP3 partners with church leaders, as well as men and women in the marketplace, seminaries, and home who are looking for a proven, integrated process, like VP3's The Journey, to help them deepen and develop adults in Jesus' name.*

VP3 is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization who depends on donations *to continue to provide this kingdom work.*