

Transcription - Have You Been Ignored At A (Coffee) Meeting?

Welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today, we're going to talk about your presence, your professional presence and we're going to look at it in terms of being invited to a meeting and then being ignored, particularly if it's a coffee meeting.

This came about by a person who shared with me being in that situation more than once and then doing an exercise, I guess it was more like a training exercise where observing people at a distance, people you don't know. And in this scenario it was more like a training video, if you like, rather than a real situation. There was three people sitting having coffee and if you look from a distance it was obvious they were three business people dressed appropriately. One of them wasn't saying anything, the other two were talking. So the one not saying anything, there was a bit of encouragement by the group to look at that in the video and say, what do you think is happening there?

And what the observation was, is that the person was actually not happy looking, didn't look happy. He was keen to join you could tell by the body language, moving forward, trying to open the mouth and then nothing because the other people kept talking and he didn't exist. His facial expression went from, at some point it depends what they were talking about, the group could not hear what the conversation was about, that was deliberate, the observation was that there were parts where you could tell by the eyes, by the facial expression, by the movement of the head, all of that, that the person is really liking what's being discussed, so very positive feedback if you like, especially when another topic was discussed, you could tell the person was like, no, the expressions given was like, I wouldn't. Warning signs again, all communicated from quite a distance apart and from not hearing what the conversation is.

Another one was the frustration. You could see as the meeting went on, you could see in the whole body language, frustration at some point, it was so bad that there was leg movement by the person. It's almost like I'm ready to run, but I can't, I have to be here. So there's a whole lot of things that were observed from there. So, the group we're talking about had a discussion afterwards and talked about what the learnings are from here.

The learnings, firstly, they accepted the fact that we're making assumptions that the person was invited and ignored. Maybe the person was only coming as an observer or whatever. Nonetheless, I think the learning was don't be so absorbed in what you're saying and doing and not noticing the people around

you and their reaction, somebody is trying to say something, supposed let them say it or even if you want to finish your point. So you can say I know you want to say something I would like to come back to that in a minute. That was totally absent, right?

So the person felt disengaged. If this happened more than once, I can imagine the person would be thinking, what's the point of me going? The other thing to think about it, why did you invite that person? Why you do you want them there? If you don't want to hear them at least make it clear before the meeting. Sorry, you might have ideas and I might hear them and your feedback, I value your feedback and input after the meeting here. It's focused just about you know, us talking be clear about it or I really need you there just to take the notes or I really need you and say it is that I've asked also to join us because whatever. If you don't want that, don't pretend, just don't have them there. I think that's important because you can cause them more damage by having them there and you know, you hurt their pride and all of those things. It's unprofessional. But the bottom line is it is unprofessional and it is unbusinesslike and it's all of the negatives that we wouldn't want to see.

Two things that come to my mind as we talk about that. It's about situational awareness. Now, I have mentioned this previously because I'm very much in favor of us being situationally aware all the time and in this situation, nobody is aware of what's happening. So you've got three people, whether it's three or five doesn't matter even if it's only two, one person might dominate the conversation and the other person can't get a word in. Now, I live with this every time Fulyana and I meet as you would know from the recordings. Often I'll let her say something, and she will say, could I say something and you can see I take no notice. But as we do this on zoom I actually wave my hands so that she knows that I'm going to say something any minute now.

So it's about being situationally aware. And it is important because this is obviously a situation where you want some input or you want some backup or you want some recording whatever it is. Then be clear on what Fulyana was saying about the reason for the meeting and the reason for the person being there as much as we can.

Don't get caught up in the moment and feel the need to blurt out everything. We're thinking about a particular activity, the more we do that, the less we are hearing. So the less we are open to any other comment that comes through. So if you're going to have this meeting and you've got a lot to say, you prepare for it in the same way as you would prepare for any meeting.

So it doesn't matter how many people are going you prepare beforehand. You know, you've got your notes of what you want to say so that you don't have to remember it all. And you can certainly look at your notes and elaborate on it and there's nothing wrong with going to a meeting and having your phone, having keep notes on the phone or whatever it is. You're using your notes on the phone and saying, I'll just keep these notes here. So I make sure that I cover everything that I wanted to talk about with you at this meeting the same way for someone who's attending the meeting or being asked to attend a meeting or a coffee, get together, whatever it is. I understand what it's for, understand what your role is, understand what the outcome is going to be. What's the outcome for you as well as what's the outcome for the other people that are going to be there and understand why they are there.

And if you're not sure, ask. This is about being professional, about giving your time, about giving of your expertise and if you want to be in control of what you're doing and how you're managing yourself and how you view yourself, you have to give yourself the tools to do that. And part of that is being situationally aware and you can't be situationally aware if you don't understand what's happening now.

If you get in a car and you say, I'm going to drive to the city, you look for a map or you work out in your head the way you're going to do it, where you're going to park, what you've got to do with the traffic this way or that way and then when you're in the car and you're driving, you need to be situationally aware or you're going to be on the back of a tow truck. So let's think about going to a meeting in the same way as you would as getting into a car to drive somewhere because that's what it is. You're going somewhere to do something and there's going to be an outcome.

I just want to reemphasize that bit that you just said about the person themselves as well. I talked before about the person organizing a meeting. And I think in those scenarios sometimes it's a hierarchical thing. Say two managing partners and one director if you like. And then those managing partners, they're talking. So if you're going and you're not one of those managing partners, just make it clear that whoever has invited you that it's okay for me to comment and participate. And if they said no, I want you as an observer, be honest if you're the sort of person can't be an observer. Just say if somebody said to me, I want you to be quiet. I said, well, I'm going to find that very, very difficult. I'll probably do my best, but anyway clarify that. I know I'm joking a bit, but plan for that and make sure that you are participating or be honest and say I feel like a shag on a rock.

So I don't know why you're sitting there if you aren't talking. Is that because the other person might think I have no opinion, introverted or whatever.

I'm also concerned about how I come across by not talking or by talking about that because they want you there. There is some sort of respect. I think they're not there because they don't like you, they're there for a reason. Clarify that. But also look at how you want to come across and clarify that before the meeting. All good before the meeting. During the meeting, you might still get caught up with an activity that goes off the rails for whatever reason. And so you have one or both dominate the conversation and you can't get a word in during the meeting. You can resort to the physical, you can actually put your hand across between the two of them and say, you know, can I say, like when we were at school, but can I speak?

If you are not comfortable about doing that before the meeting finishes or even if they say okay, we've talked about everything now, you've got to do it before they leave, before that activity finishes. You say, can I just clarify for myself why you had me here because they might not realize that they've done that.

They might not realize that they've cut you out and they might make all sorts of assumptions. As Fulyana has said about your interaction and your contribution and the fact that you might be agreeing with everything they've said, when in fact you might agree with some and not agree with a whole lot, if you haven't had a chance to do it beforehand, if you couldn't do it during the meeting, do it before the meeting breaks up.

All right, Well, I think we've covered that. You should all be prepared now for your coffee meetings. And if you run into any strife, just say Fulyana said I have to do it this way. I wouldn't do that. I do it all the time. We will leave it there. on I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.