The University Speaking Center

Demonstrating Empathic Communication in Virtual Meeting Spaces:

Since we have shifted over to virtual meetings, it is harder to show empathic communication while being online. Some tips for supporting empathic communication in virtual environments are:

1. **Anticipate the potential need for increased empathy:**
   a. Check in beforehand with members of your group to see if there are any particular concerns that someone may want to talk about before or after the meeting.
2. **Acknowledge deficits and establish ground rules and expectations to account for it:**
   a. Encourage cameras on, set the display to gallery view, mute yourself to prevent interference when someone else is talking.
   b. Help participants understand the need for greater attention to how others are communicating and to be mindful about assumptions they might make in regards to what someone said and how they said it, or if they are silent.
3. **Slow down:**
   a. Where more processing time is needed, slow it down. Schedule extra time, incorporate breaks, and take other measures to address the slower process of communication exchange that virtual spaces require.
4. **Apply extra doses of attentiveness and sensitivity:**
   a. When you engage in empathic listening, you engage in practices like attentive listening (head nods, saying "hmm hmm," and establishing eye contact) and reflective listening, such as saying, "if I understand you correctly, you are saying . . ." and "you must feel frustrated by that situation; I know I would."
   b. Ask more clarifying questions, and become more exhaustive in your efforts to confirm that the person feels you've demonstrated your understanding of the person's concerns in the way they intend.
5. **Recognize the limits:**
   a. Do not pretend that virtual spaces will address all our communication needs, even when we try to account for deficits.
   b. Find creative ways to overcome the communication barriers that technology imposes: having socially distanced face-to-face meetings, making phone calls instead of video chats, etc.

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