



## MEETINGS & EVENTS



# Understanding Your Attendees

The New Persona Ecosystem for Meetings & Events

**DON'T** *do business* **WITHOUT IT** <sup>SM</sup>



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# Understanding your audience is key to delivering a successful event that resonates with them and drives behavior change

*As we emerge from the disruptions caused by Covid-19, much has changed in the meetings and events landscape. Creating a memorable event experience now requires more than just quality content and coordination. With the increased use of virtual and hybrid meetings as well as Covid-19 measures, elements such as technology, health and safety protocols, personalization, and unique spaces are more vital than ever before. Today's meetings professional is tasked with considering all these elements, including the needs of the attendee, a key and often overlooked aspect.*

*What are the motivations, challenges, and behaviors of your attendees? How do you know what will REALLY make a difference to them? Start by putting yourself in their shoes. Creating personas is a proven marketing technique that can help meeting professionals understand attendee needs and relate to them as human beings vs. just a name on a registration list. The goal is more personal, meaningful experiences that drive your event outcomes.*

So, what exactly is an attendee persona? Simply put, **an attendee persona is a general characterization of your audience members.** It is a way to encapsulate, using a fictional person, things like common behaviors, interests, challenges, and fears to better tailor your event design to your attendees' needs.

Since we're all multi-faceted individuals, it's unlikely that one single persona captures an attendee's full spectrum of thoughts and emotions. However, for the purpose of meeting design, personas are used to understand the attendee's highest motivations and characteristics for a particular meeting, event, or event topic. In this paper, we'll introduce you to the most common meetings personas for virtual, hybrid and in-person meetings – including some new pandemic-related ones - that we've encountered and provide strategies to engage each one.

### THE NEW EVENT PERSONA ECOSYSTEM

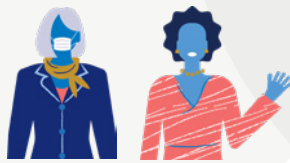
#### IN-PERSON



Inspiration Seeker

Reluctant Attendee

Brand Fanatic



Extra Cautious

Social Butterfly  
Gone Wild

#### DUAL



Ninja Networker

A-Student



Fussy friend

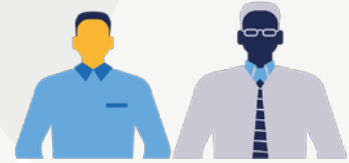
#### VIRTUAL



I Have to Be Here

Silent Partner

Multitasker



Out to Lunch

Slow to Warm Up



## IN-PERSON MEETING PERSONAS

*The pandemic has not only changed the meeting landscape but has also brought new concerns for attendees. The first two personas focus on individuals who will be attending meetings in person and reflect concerns about returning to meetings safely.*



### PERSONA:

## Extra Cautious

Choosing to attend your meeting in person required a lot of consideration. This person is NERVOUS about attending an event in person but has decided that the risk is worth the reward to attend your meeting in person. She has been reading every pre-event communication and already has a strategy in place for how she will engage and swiftly exit your sessions.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Design a policy** for your meeting for masks and social distancing and make sure to stick with it during the live event. Help this attendee feel safe and comfortable by reiterating the policy throughout the meeting so that his peers are aware and will hopefully give her grace and space.

**Offer alternative ways** of connecting with speakers and fellow attendees such as on a mobile app.

**Be specific** about which sessions and events are critical or optional to attend. This person will likely not be attending any optional networking events.

**Invite her** to participate in small group sessions when possible where he might be more at ease.



## IN-PERSON MEETING PERSONAS



### PERSONA:

## Social Butterfly Gone Wild

She has been craving in-person interaction and was overjoyed to register for your live event.

She's extremely confident in her vaccination or immune system and does not wear a mask unless it's required. Speaking of, she will try to follow your meeting's mask and social distancing policy if there is one. She wouldn't want to purposely make anyone uncomfortable though her excitement to connect live might get the best of her in a networking situation.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Clearly communicate** the meeting's mask and social distancing policy so that she knows what to expect and what's expected of her.

**Provide face-to-face** networking opportunities. This persona will be the last one to leave.

**Invite her** to lead a breakout session or join your meeting planning committee.



## IN-PERSON MEETING PERSONAS



### PERSONA:

## Inspiration Seeker

Inspiration Seekers are always looking for purpose in their personal and business endeavors. They value emotional connections and prefer having experiences to sitting in conference rooms or lecture halls. The Inspiration Seeker is creative and vibrant and will be absorbed in each moment of the event. They also have high expectations and want to leave an event with a changed outlook. Ideally, they will leave the event with a specific action, process, or idea they can share with their coworkers and incorporate it into their day-to-day life.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Deliver highly motivational** content through a variety of methods, such as powerful keynote speakers, 1:1 coaching sessions and content tailored to attendees' business and personal objectives.

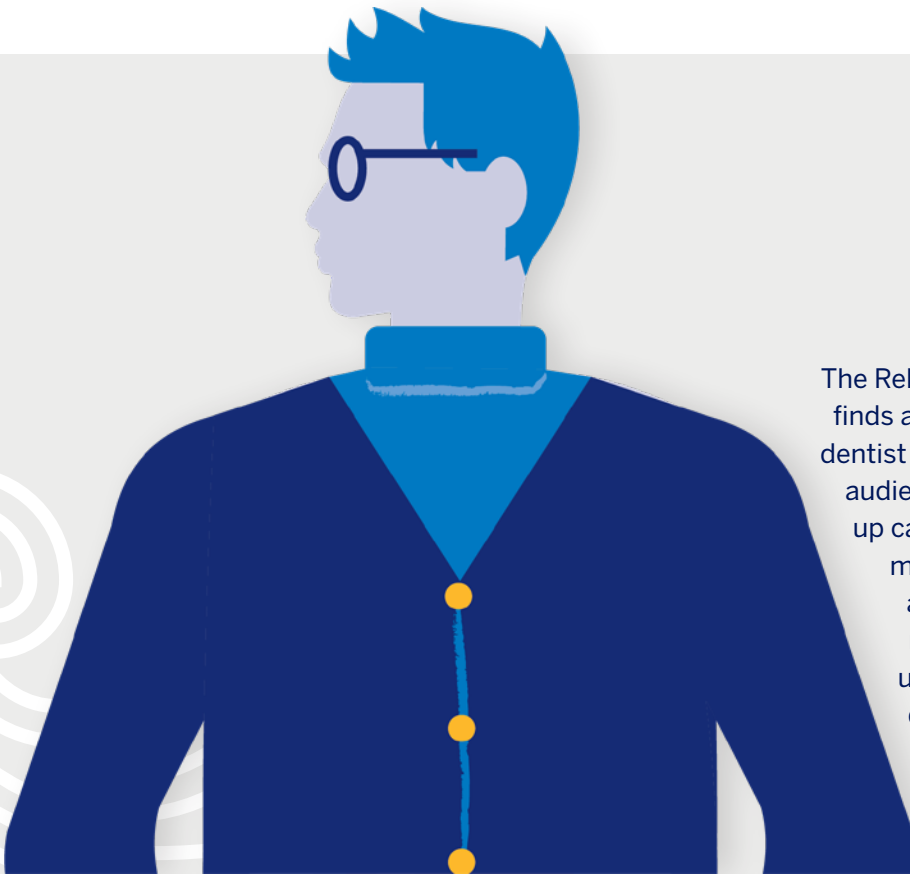
**Offer immersive experiences** that connect the Inspiration Seeker to local culture.

**Provide alternative** venues that will take them outside of the traditional meeting space.

**Consider community outreach** experiences or corporate social responsibility endeavors.



## IN-PERSON MEETING PERSONAS



### PERSONA:

## Reluctant Attendee

The Reluctant Attendee is likely an introvert who finds attending events about as appealing as a dentist visit. This is your most challenging target audience, because just getting them to show up can be a huge hurdle. Reluctant Attendees may feel overwhelmed by the experience and the social demands of events. They may be awkward with small talk and feel uncomfortable socializing with people they don't know. It's likely they're attending the event because they feel obliged to do so for personal or professional reasons.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Create opportunities** for attendees to get to know each other early in the agenda to help them feel more comfortable throughout the event and want to participate more.

**Consider providing** meeting and breakout session choices where possible so the attendee feels in control of their experience.

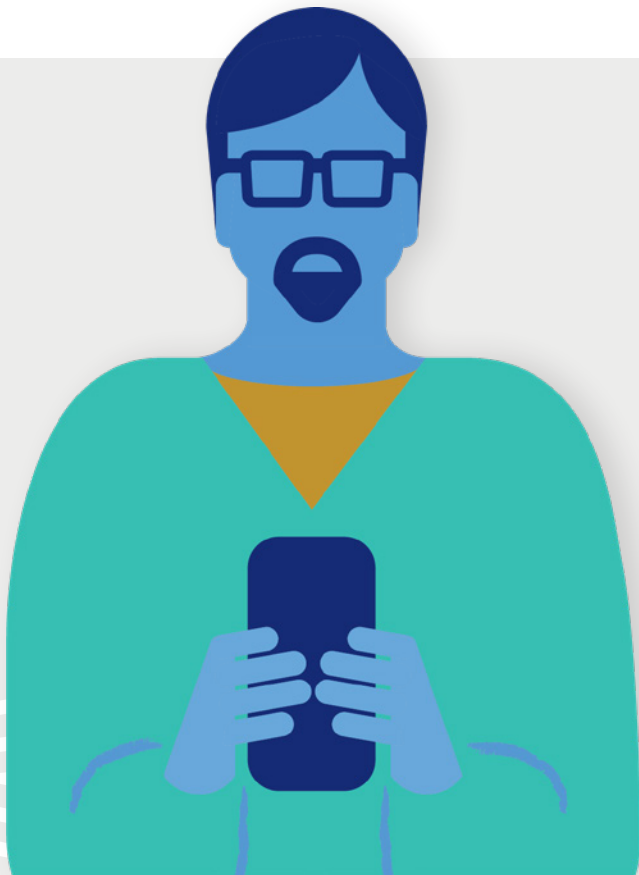
**Allow free time** and space for disengagement as this type of attendee often needs downtime to recharge.

**Consider incorporating** on-demand and/or virtual sessions to allow them to attend the event in their own comfort zone – from their office or home.





## IN-PERSON MEETING PERSONAS



### PERSONA:

## Brand Fanatic

The Brand Fanatic is a dedicated follower who identifies with a brand's culture and feels connected to its other devotees. They may feel that the brand lends them a certain status that they find enjoyable. The Brand Fanatic is always looking for the next big thing, "the inside scoop." The Brand Fanatic craves the wow factor, wants consistency in experience, and enjoys attending high-level events. In addition to owning the brand's products or services, the Brand Fanatic may also follow the brand on social media, own gear or accessories that identify them as a fan of the brand, and possibly even invest in the company.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Include plenty of gear** and opportunities for them to showcase their brand loyalty and win exclusive brand merchandize and experiences.

**Provide access** to key brand representatives, unique brand-centric experiences and product information.

**Hold "user group panels"** to give a forum for brand fanatics to share insight and ideas.

# The 5 Critical Hybrid Attendee Personas

*Are your attendees ready for a group hug and a networking dinner or are they double masked and making a beeline for the exit? Or are they mowing their lawn during your livestream?*

*As meetings and events return, hybrid formats are in demand and add another layer of complexity to the meeting design process. While the entire ecosystem of personas is applicable for hybrid meetings, here are the five most critical ones. For more details on each persona, refer to the persona description, which includes how to best design your meeting or event with each persona in mind.*





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## DUAL MEETING PERSONAS

*These next three personas are universal and apply to both in-person and virtual attendees as they have the same motivations, regardless of how they attend your meeting. If you're planning a hybrid meeting or event, it's wise to design it with these attendees in mind.*

### PERSONA:

# Ninja Networker

Whether he attends in-person or virtual, the Ninja Networker serves as a connector between your two audience groups. Your meeting gives him a reason to meet and connect with his desired audience and he will leave no stone unturned. If he attends in person, he will spend any “downtime” perusing the event app and sending requests and messages to the virtual attendees.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Make it easy** for him to identify and message fellow attendees. If you have an event app, he will be one of the top users.

**Give him another purpose** on the event app – with polls, questions in the activity feed, or games. He will likely be the first to engage and will use it as a way to connect with other attendees.

**Incorporate breaks** in the agenda so that he has time to network in person and/or virtually.



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## DUAL MEETING PERSONAS



### PERSONA:

## Fussy Friend

This attendee has attended a lot of meetings – in-person and virtual - and considers herself an expert. She’s engaged and has high expectations to be “wowed.” She’ll be the first to let you and everyone else know if there’s inaccurate information or if someone is on mute. She asks a lot of questions, some of which have a negative tone though she really does mean well.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Review your content** through the lens of a Fussy Friend and you’ll likely find an error or something that you could clarify.

**Invite this attendee** to join your meeting planning council or to provide other feedback or suggestions in advance. She will appreciate the platform and will hopefully provide some good ideas.

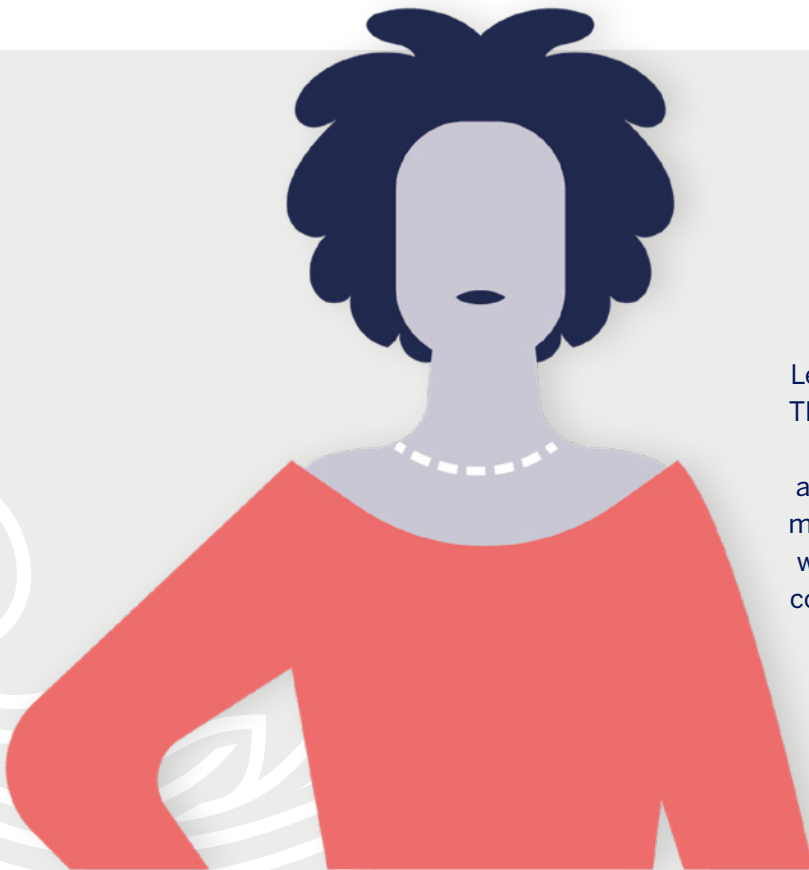
**Have a plan** to transition away from her questions or comments with grace.



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## DUAL MEETING PERSONAS



### PERSONA:

## A-Student

Learning and development drives this attendee. Therefore, she might decide to attend in-person if she feels she could learn more. If she's not as impressed with the agenda or speakers, she might choose to attend virtually. Either way, she will arrive prepared having read every pre-show communication, report, and speaker bios and will be engaged throughout.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Inspire FOMO** (fear of missing out) with an incredible speaker lineup and interesting topics, especially if some of the sessions are only available for in-person attendees.

**Share as much content** as possible before, during, and after the meeting.

**Provide a way** for this attendee to take notes or share the slides in advance specifically for note-taking purposes.



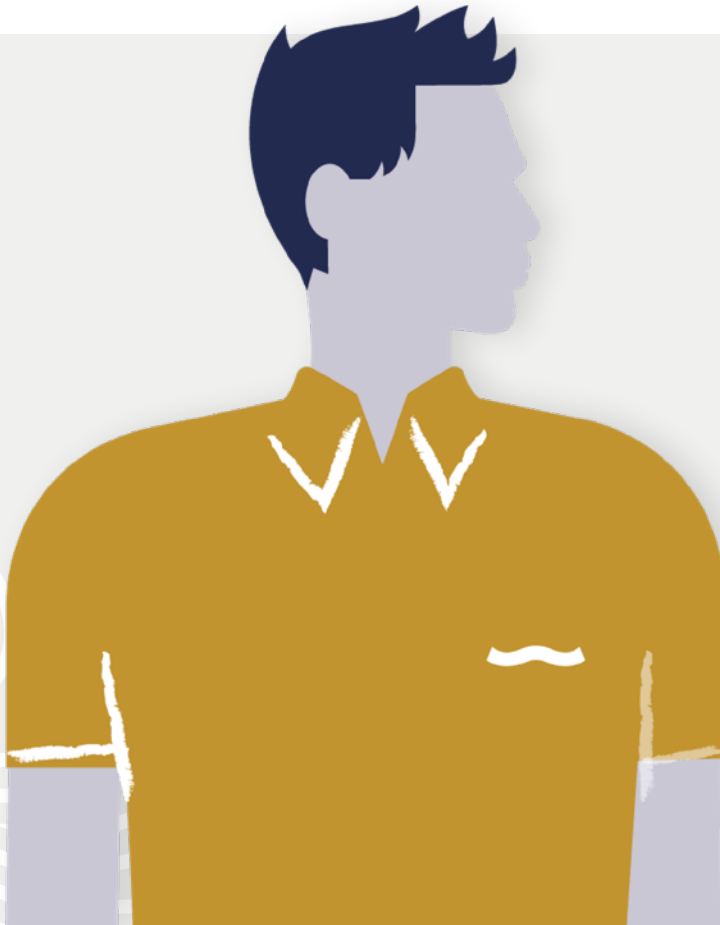
## VIRTUAL MEETING PERSONAS

*Virtual attendees have the advantage of attending the meeting from the comfort of their home or office but have many distractions competing for their attention. Additionally, virtual attendees may feel disconnected from the in-person attendees or activities, so finding ways to keep them connected is important for the success of the meeting or event.*

### PERSONA:

## Silent Partner

This attendee is paying attention and engaging, though in a different way than most. Think of them as a mentor or good friend. They have the meeting owner's back and will not hesitate to send a direct message with a polite correction or an additional example to support the topic being discussed.



### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Keep an eye** on your direct messages as well as chat and Q&A. More than other attendees, the Silent Partner utilizes the direct messaging feature of the virtual meeting platform and mobile event app.

**Acknowledge their feedback** or responses. While they don't want to be the center of attention in a group setting, they are usually willing to engage one-on-one.

**Go to them** for honest feedback on your meeting and for ideas for future meeting content.



## VIRTUAL MEETING PERSONAS



### PERSONA:

## Multitasker

These attendees have good intentions to participate, though struggle to stay focused on the virtual meeting. Their typical behavior is to join a virtual meeting, then minimize the window and work on something else. Their curiosity might lead them back to your meeting if they see or hear something interesting or unexpected. They will participate in some polls and group discussions but largely only retain the headlines.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

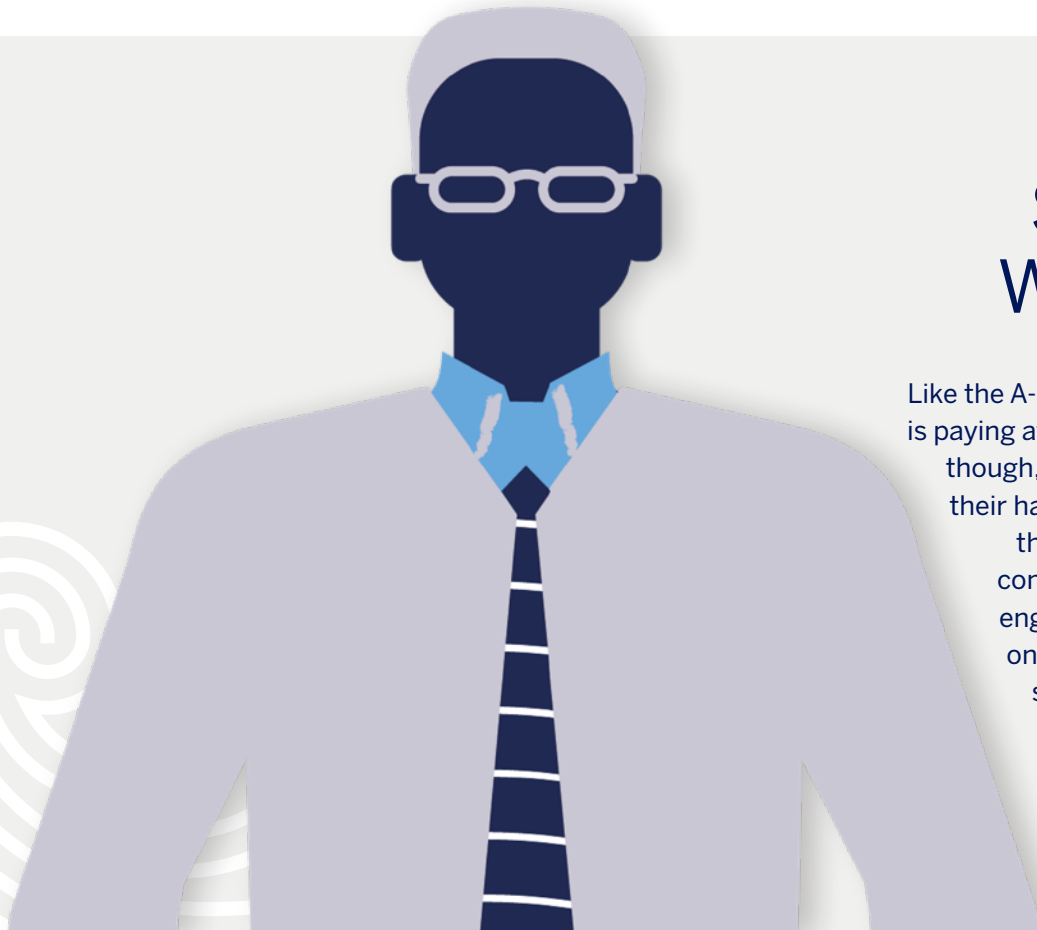
**Constantly reclaim** their attention with engaging speakers, an emcee, snappy and concise content that has been prerecorded, polls, gamification, and live Q&As.

**Encourage the audience** to be on video to help hold Multitaskers accountable.

**Also watch attendee** size; the Multitasker is more likely to engage in a smaller session.



## VIRTUAL MEETING PERSONAS



### PERSONA:

## Slow to Warm Up

Like the A-Student persona, this attendee is paying attention. As the name suggests, though, they won't be the first to raise their hand. Once they feel comfortable, this attendee will engage and contribute to your meeting. Their engagement will be more focused on quality vs. quantity. When they speak up, fellow attendees will want to listen.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Create a welcoming** environment for this attendee by asking for engagement early. Since they won't be the first to contribute, you will need to give plenty of opportunities for others to lead the way.

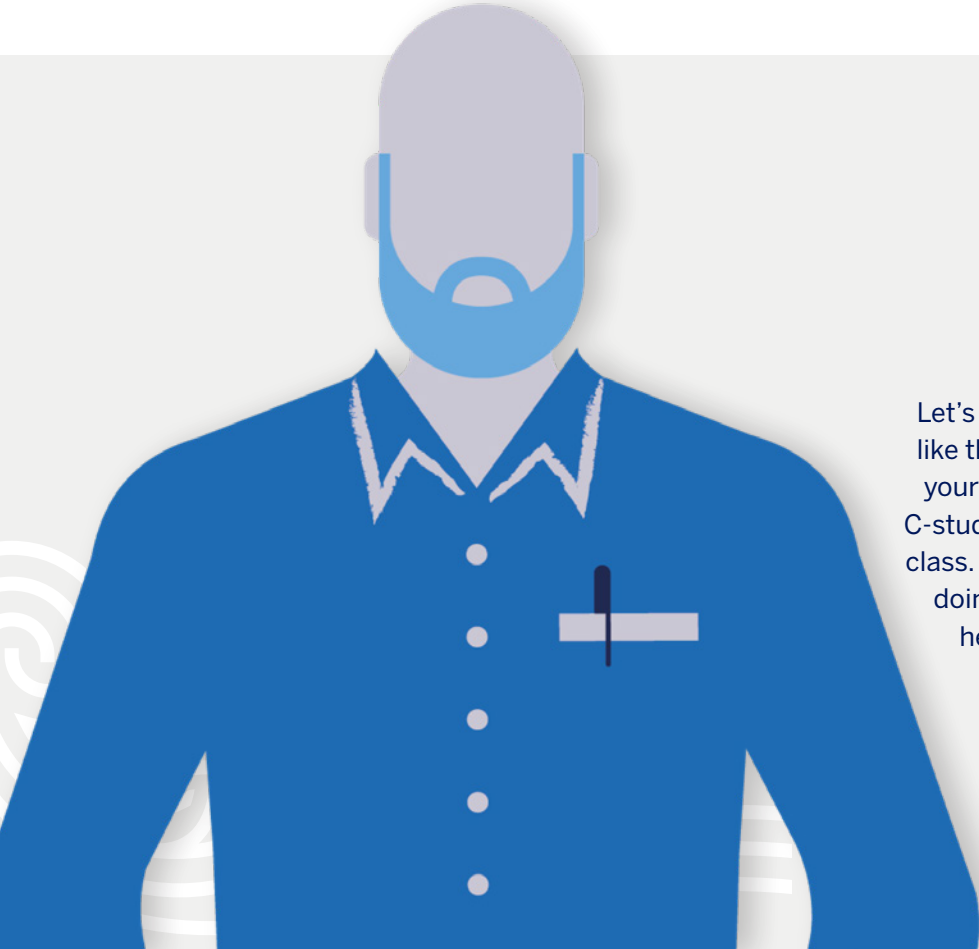
**Develop seed questions,** prompt your A-student attendees, and offer a variety of ways to engage such as polls, a live Q&A, surveys, etc.

**Possibly develop or offer** a follow-up or one-on-one with these types of attendees to offer a safe space for them to interact and understand the content.





## VIRTUAL MEETING PERSONAS



### PERSONA:

## I Have to Be Here

Let's be clear: while this attendee might seem like the A-student persona at certain points of your meeting, they are not. They're more like C-students doing the bare minimum to pass the class. If everyone is on video, they will be as well, doing bare-minimum head nodding and half-hearted chuckles to float under the radar.

The good thing about the I Have to Be Here persona is that they have potential to advance to an A-student. They feel obligated to attend your meeting and are mostly a captive audience, so you have a chance to win them over.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Include a surprise** element or something that will make them laugh.

**Develop your content** with this persona in mind and you will likely reduce the total meeting duration.

**End a few minutes** ahead of schedule. The "I Have to Be Heres" of the world will thank you.



## VIRTUAL MEETING PERSONAS



### PERSONA:

## Out to Lunch

This attendee has zero plans to pay attention or engage in your meeting. They attend your meeting because they have to, but they work on something else the entire time or step away from their computer entirely. If video is a requirement for the meeting, theirs will be on and they will be faking engagement. They cannot wait for your meeting to be over.

### HOW TO DESIGN:

**Unfortunately**, it will be challenging to convert this type of attendee. If you want to weed them out, you could have a pop quiz or some other surprise element to determine which attendees are engaged and which ones are... out to lunch.

# Conclusion

*The challenges of the past two years have shaped us all in obvious and not-so-obvious ways. The meetings landscape has changed. Health and safety concerns play an important role in the meeting process and the increased use of virtual and hybrid meetings adds additional layers of complexity. As a result, attendee engagement strategies from 2019 and earlier might not work anymore. Using personas provides insights into the attendees' needs, wants, fears and interests. With knowledge about your audience, you can tailor your meetings and events to be impactful experiences where attendees can connect, learn, and be inspired.*



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