

“We can still hear you...”

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“During a conference call break, one of my colleagues pressed the mute button and then blurted out, ‘What an idiot! Can you believe he actually said that?’ We quickly found out that the mute button wasn’t working when a voice came over the speaker saying, ‘We can still hear you.’ What should we have done at that moment?”

Unfortunately, it doesn’t do much good to close the barn door after the cows are out. At this point the only thing to do is immediately apologize. “We are so sorry. Dave spoke out of turn and there really is no excuse for his comment. Please accept our apology. We are interested in what each person has to say.”

In addition, to close the loop Dave needs to take responsibility and follow up the conference call with a letter of apology to the person to whom he referred.

The real issue isn’t the mute button. Dave forgot a cardinal rule: Never say anything derogatory during a conference call.

Here are several tips to make your conference calls successful:

- Have everyone in the same room at each location. It’s helpful to see your colleagues’ non-verbal cues as they speak.
- Ask each person on the call to introduce themselves: “Hello, this is Sam Mathis, senior account manager at the Manchester office. It’s not only polite, but it will help people put a name to a voice.
- Review the agenda for the call at the start, and specify when the call will end.
- Ten minutes before the end, the organizer should announce the time so people can wrap up.
- In the closing moments, the organizer should reiterate key points and review any agreed upon to-dos.
- After the call the organizer should send out.

Video conference calls are great because people can see your expressions and body language in addition to hearing your words. If you’re on a video call:

- Look at the camera when talking, not at your screen so you create eye contact with the people on the other end of the call.
- Beware of bad habits: picking your nose, chewing your fingernails, playing with your hair.
- Smile and sit up so you look engaged and interested and not bored. Keep your focus on the discussion at hand. Remember, you’re on camera; avoid doing other tasks, like reading mail.
- Use your hands to gesture. You’ll appear more animated and be more interesting to watch as you talk.