

Beware, beware, whatever you share... as you might end up with more than a red face!

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As we approach what we hope is the final Christmas cursed by COVID-chaos and enforced homeworking, Associate, James Hockley takes a light-hearted look back over the last two years and remembers some of the Zoom stories that grabbed our attention for all the wrong reasons. These stories variously caused shock, laughter and nationwide acts of communal face-palming, yet they all shared the same lesson – by careful what you do, say or show on camera, as it may come back to haunt you!

Jackie Weaver: You have no authority

The start of 2021 witnessed the sudden rise to stardom of Jackie Weaver. “You have no authority, Jackie Weaver” became emblazoned on t-shirts, pumped out across the radio waves, and the talking point in many Zoom coffees. Leaving aside any employment or data protection issues when disseminating recordings of private meetings generally, I, for one, am glad this verbal dual made its way into our living rooms. What better way to get us through the cold, dark winter months than to witness a modern-day Gladiatorial battle set in none other than the Handforth Parish Council. (Did images of Geraldine Grainger, Alice Tinker, Hugo Horton and Jim Trotter spring to anybody else’s mind as they watched the drama unfold?). Lesson? If you have (rightful) control over the Zoom eject button then don’t be afraid to use it – especially if a colleague has the temerity to question your authority.

The oversharing Spanish showerer

Not to be outdone by a British council in the year that Brexit happened, Torrelavega municipal council in Spain showed that Spanish councils, too, can get down and dirty... or, rather, up and clean. In a bid to kill two birds with one stone, councillor Bernardo Bustillo dropped his pantalones and jumped

in the shower whilst listening in to a council meeting that was being livestreamed. The problem for Bernardo was that he had failed to turn off his video and, in so doing, became the real butt of the joke. Whilst his colleagues looked on in horror and tried to alert him via calls and messages to his phone, this wave of panic was drowned out by splashes of water behind a partially frosted pane of glass. After finishing cleaning behind his ears, real horror struck as Bernardo climbed out in full view. All jokes aside, poor Bernardo was left offering to tender his resignation following Shower-gate. Lesson? Always check and double check that the video is turned off and the microphone muted when showering by stealth.

The Texan kitty

Then, there was the wide-eyed, perplexed looking kitten, otherwise known as Rod Ponton, who stole our hearts from across the pond in a way no other Texan State Prosecutor has done before or since. Judge Roy Ferguson of Texas's 394th judicial district managed to control his laughter when Ponton attempted to make his submissions through his feline-faced friend. "I believe you have a filter turned on in the video settings. You might want to..." said the judge, at which point the desperate looking kitten interjected: "Can you hear me, judge?". In case any doubt remained, Ponton went on to exclaim most seriously: "I'm here live. I'm not a cat". Lesson? Do be careful when using filters and be sure to get the judge's acknowledgement that, despite appearances, you are, indeed, not a cat!

Mrs Potato Head

Lizet Ocampo provided a further tale of filter-failure in the early stages of the pandemic as she appeared as a potato head for the duration of her Zoom meeting with colleagues. In much the same way as the Texan Kitty, the potato head was surprisingly good at capturing Lizet's emotions much to her colleagues' amusement. She had downloaded some funny filters

for virtual happy hours she attended the weekend before. What was appropriate for a Saturday afternoon social was not necessarily right for a Monday morning meeting with work colleagues, however. Fortunately, everyone saw the funny side and one of Lizet's team went on to share the image on Twitter. Not surprisingly, the tweet went viral leaving Lizet to tackle the root of the issue head on by tweeting: "I yam potato boss". Lesson? If using your Zoom account for work and leisure purposes, always make sure you know how to change your settings back so that you do not come unstuck; nobody wants to talk to a (sack of) spud(s) on a Monday morning!

Thoughts for the year ahead...

We hope this glance back at a few of the funny yet embarrassing Zoom stories from the last two years provides you with an element of light-hearted relief as we go off on our Christmas breaks. Whilst these stories are real life examples of what, with distance, can be seen as moments of comic gold, they do remind us of the need to be careful not to do, say or show anything that we would not do, say or show if we were physically present in a meeting room.

For all the great benefits that technology has afforded us during the pandemic years, we hope that in 2022 we can meet many more of you again in person rather than via a computer screen. We will leave it to your judgement as to whether you wish to come dressed as a cat or a potato!

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