

# {REINVENTING OUR DETERMINATION TO SUCCEED}

By Reverend Sam Zwarenstein

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There is no doubt that given the many challenges we've had to endure since the onset of COVID-19, it would be difficult to focus on the positive experiences. One such positive phenomenon is the world of online meeting platforms, including GoogleMeet, GoToMeeting and Zoom. In the highly unlikely event that you haven't heard of these platforms, just ask any person working from home or attending a conference or education seminar, or any of the millions of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, siblings, etc. about these blessings that have allowed so many to connect with the outside world for work, family, or a myriad of other reasons.

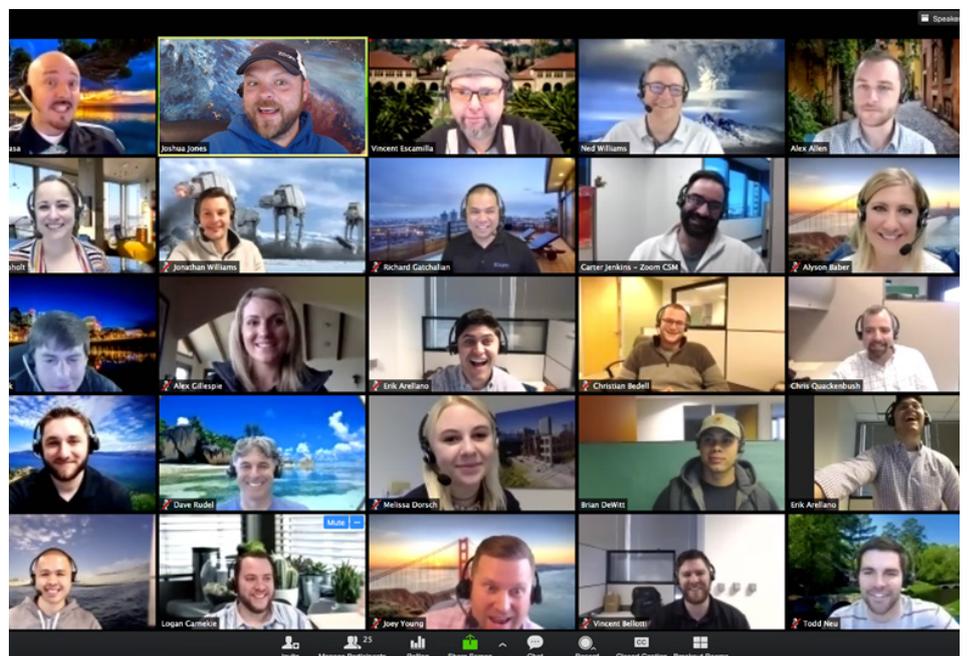
These platforms have allowed many businesses to stay in business and operate in a manner that has brought some sort of familiarity to their operations. They've also enabled the facilitation of online learning in an interactive sense, so that participants can ask questions, join in on the conversation, and just like it is for businesses, bring a sense of familiarity to their environment. The benefit that most of us have had the pleasure of enjoying is catching up with

family and friends. Given the social and physical restrictions we've been enduring since mid-March, the various online meeting choices have given all of us the chance to connect visually (in most cases) with those we are physically missing. Grandparents can chat with their grandchildren, some of them are seeing grandchildren and other family members (born since March) for the first time, via the internet. Extended families can have their family gatherings without having to cater for the entire crowd at one person's house (that goes for food and space).

Another positive outcome is that you don't have to catch public transport or order a ride-share or

even drive (and look for parking) to meet others. You can also, for the most part, wear casual clothing, perhaps even your pyjamas, and relax in the comfort of your lounge, bedroom, favourite chair, etc. with your preferred beverage and you're set.

For me, Zoom in particular has provided many hours of interaction, fun, learning opportunities, and best of all - entertainment. Many parodies have emerged, leaving their mark of "art imitating life", reflecting the technological struggles of connecting and the frustrations of assisting those new (and not so new) to the world of marvellous mystery and the often unexplained.



Amongst them is this video by Yonatan Gruber - <https://youtu.be/Ef5dRyvQ1Y> - it's in Hebrew, but there are subtitles. Not only is the video hilarious, the comments people have posted will resonate with all of us.

And then there's a special set of behaviours and mannerisms that we all think are unique to our own people, yet when discussing these traits with others, we realise that every culture has their own, sometimes scarily similar, adventures.

Let's have a look at how some of our people behave on Zoom.

Firstly, talking over each other. Sometimes this is how people behave when face to face, so it shouldn't be too much of a surprise that this is how we act on Zoom. One person is talking, then someone else talks at the same time, and then for good measure, someone else talks over them. What makes it more frustrating or funny (you can pick either or both), is that because we're not face to face, it doesn't work the same as in person. This results in lots of facial movement, and incoherent voices competing for the same airtime. When you put this in the context of perceived audience participation (e.g. the sing-along portion following the screening of *"Fiddler: Miracle of Miracles"* in April), you get way too many people trying to join in and sing together, which was beyond hilarious. By the way, more than one person trying to sing or speak at the same time on Zoom, is too many.

Then there's the mute feature. It has become the Zoom equivalent of "pocket dialling" where somehow (use your imagination) participants unmute themselves, even though they are not addressing the session at that time. The result - we hear them talking, or we hear the TV/radio in the background, or we get to experience their meal through the wonder of sound. During some sessions, we've had to act as the "mute police", patrolling the list of participants to make sure they're on mute. There's always someone who keeps unmuting themselves, no matter how many times you mute them.

How about those individuals that, even if momentarily, forget that they are on camera and they go about some of their daily activities oblivious to the consequences? People have gone to the toilet or have gotten changed or they're "multitasking" and they clearly can't do more than one thing at a time (at the best of times). All this during an online session and everybody gets to share in that experience.

Of course, all of this is in addition to the technology melees, the time zone mix-ups, the multiple log-ins under the same profile, the meeting ID conflicts, and the list goes on.

We could also look at the financial success that some of these platforms have enjoyed over the past few months. In January 2020, Zoom shares were valued at just over \$68 USD each. In mid-July they were just over \$275 USD. In a Jackie Mason-esque routine, we would be rueing not buying Zoom shares back in January. We would say; "If my (insert relationship) hadn't talked me out of buying shares, I could have made millions of dollars. That's family for you", or "That was the one stock I needed to complete my top performing portfolio, now I may as well give it all up".

In April 2020, Zoom reported more than 300 million peak daily meeting participants. There is some postulation about what that statistic means, and even by Zoom's own admission,



daily meeting participants can be counted multiple times, so it's not the same measure as daily active users. Still, it's a very impressive achievement.

Clearly Zoom and the various other platforms have enjoyed all this success in the past 6 or so months, and it appears they'll be riding the quarantine or isolation wave for some time to come.

There is also a level of success and accomplishment that we can enjoy as part of this boom. I have no doubt that if in November 2019, we would have had a planning session with the aim of offering our classes, services and other sessions online, no amount of preparation, research, testing or engagement would have yielded the success we have experienced with our various online offerings since March 2020.

The sheer fact that we were thrown into the deep end on this has driven a desire to overcome the obstacles we faced (and still face), and not only to the point of making do, but to new heights and achievements. So much so, that we receive accolades from around the community, the country and the world, and even communities who have been live streaming or otherwise broadcasting their services and classes for a number of years already, are emulating our methods and style.

Amongst the reasons for our success is that we have the clergy, administrative and inventive resources to pull together to make this happen. Ideas and concepts can be spoken about

and visions can be dreamed about ad infinitum. Without the capacity to make it happen, it won't go much further than dreams and discussions.

We are also well-placed within the Jewish community to engage with our members and the broader community where they are, not just where we want them to be. We can connect with them in their homes, at work, in the park, at a community centre, on Shabbat and Festivals, wherever and whenever. Not being able to get to the synagogue is no longer a barrier to regular engagement.

Most of all, it has been the determination to not give in and just accept our fate. COVID-19 has resulted in so many complications and frustrations, and has gone a long way to separating people from their loved ones, from their work, from their friends, and from their community. We have fought through these barriers, we have found a way to overcome the obstacles, and

we have created an environment that enables us to continue to engage with the community, with friends and family, and with people all over the world.

The perseverance we have demonstrated to allow us to do what we already have, is undoubtedly the key ingredient. We have learnt that as long as we keep at it, not giving up when we face unprecedented challenges, but rather finding a way to overcome complications and barriers, we will succeed. We have also learnt that we have to do this over and over, because the challenges continually find new ways to appear and get in our way.

“Obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it.” - Michael Jordan

Let's find the courage to keep on reinventing our determination to succeed, time and time again, and embrace the opportunities we afford ourselves. ■

