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Stop watching me! How Zoom helped me overcome my dread of phone calls

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After actively avoiding phone conversations for most of my life, pandemic video conferencing has shown me what a holiday face-free time can be

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I'm terrified that phone calls are becoming obsolete.

Some could say there are bigger things to stress about - don't worry, I'm almost certainly panicking about those too - but this newfound terror has really surprised me.

As a shy and anxious child who grew into a shy and anxious adult (just a bit taller), I spent most of my life dreading phone calls. They seemed to bring out my most awkward idiosyncrasies, and I joined the mass of people who [actively avoided phone calls](#).

As technology encouraged us to book appointments online, email colleagues and text mates, phone calls became less of a chore to overcome and more of a symbol of days gone by. So, as landlines now inspire the same sentimental awe of a butter churner, generationally many of us became [phone haters](#).

But now? I could talk on the phone all day and all night. Friends, family, phone scammers who regret to inform me that the tax office is actively hunting me for sport - if they're willing to chat, I'm willing to listen! Especially, *especially*, if the alternative is Zoom.

My newfound love of phone calls corresponds directly to the rise of video conferencing. In offices, it's long been a joke that "that meeting could have been an email". The modern reiteration of that is "that Zoom could have been a phone call". In my part-time job, lately some colleagues and I have opted for a phone call instead of a Zoom meeting, and folks - it feels like a freaking holiday. A wonderful holiday from staring at my own face and colleagues' kitchens.

If you are one of those managers who focuses on KPIs and targets and bottom lines, you can bet your big ol' bottom line that these calls are absolutely more productive than if we were to attempt problem-solving while simultaneously entering a staring competition.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of things you can do while on the phone: pace around energetically. Write things with your human hands. Look out a window. Go outside and breathe air that isn't recycled from your own mouth or manufactured via machine (I do not know how air conditioners work). Lie on your back to stretch out the mass of thick, knotted meat once referred to as your "back". Do a little dance. Slice a fig. Need I go on?

 Interview requests

Conversely, here are some things you can do over Zoom.

Peer at your colleague unblinkingly. Stare at your own

seem to be automatically via Zoom or email. Why, I sob, why can't I just give them a ring?

feel at your colleague unthinkingly. Stare at your own reflection until your face becomes not that of a human but of a strange creature that does not have a name. Now your face is a dark orb, sucking everything around into its gaping abyss. Congratulations, you now have body dysmorphia.

Phone calls are energising and invigorating. I feel like how I imagine Alexander Graham Bell felt when he first had a yarn on the blower (or [Antonio Meucci](#), but that's a conversation for another day). I can imagine the sensation Bell felt while giddily chatting with a pal, toying with his shirt buttons excitedly, discovering the efficiency of quickly exchanged information, gossip and smallpox updates. That is to say: positively delighted.

Innovation is great, when it doesn't involve contributing to climate change or catapulting billionaires into space, and flexible work and telehealth have opened up opportunities for people previously shut out. That's not being discounted or debated here. But please don't let us wipe out phone calls altogether.

In my freelance work, interview requests seem to be automatically via Zoom or email. But never a phone call. *Why*, I sob, slopping makeup on to hide my allergy redness, *why can't I just give them a ring?* Hastily carrying my clothes horse to another room lest the interviewee discover I like washing my socks, I attempt to use a virtual background, but this somehow removes my entire body and I float there, a suspended blotchy head, a single tear falling down my face like a droplet of water on a freshly plucked tomato.

During lockdown, phone calls with loved ones were a saving grace. I genuinely love the sound of people's voices. [Voice memos](#), too, allow for this specific intimacy. These conversations make us feel connected, uplifted, a part of something. It's a real dialogue with natural spontaneity and without the automatic filtering and editing that comes with texting.

This may sound as though I've only just discovered something that's been around for many years, or that I've bravely overcome something that made me highly anxious. It's actually neither. My anxiety has just been transferred to a new platform, Zoom. And in a few years it will be whatever newer, mandated form of communication (Russian chatbot holograms?) will hold that feeling. So, until then, give me a call.

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I do agree on the superiority of phone calls, particularly with friends and family. But Zoom is an improvement on face to face meetings, as in large gatherings, while seeming to be looking at the speaker, I can catch up on my emails/texts, the news etc.

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