



## **Conference Calls Made Easy**

**Bonus Master Class:  
The Context for Conference Calls**

**Hosted by Dr Penny Pullan**

**Penny Pullan:** So, welcome to the first Master Class, *Conference Calls Made Easy*. We have 77 people registered from right around the world. Quite a few of them probably aren't on the line at the moment. Quite a lot of people are waiting for the recording. It should be sent out in a couple of days. We are recording, so please bear this in mind when you're speaking, and make sure that you only say things that you're happy to have on the recording that we may well use again in the future.

We will be in presentation mode for most of the call because of the numbers, although I will turn it off and allow people to ask questions at various stages during the call.

**So, first of all, I'm going to run through the purpose of this call.** We're here today to introduce a new Master Class series especially aimed at people to help make conference calls easy, using the system that I've developed over the past years while working on quite big global projects. And we're going to use, first of all, my way of starting off meetings. Many of you may have seen my start-up card. And that's something that I find useful. So, I'm going to go through a series of things to make sure we're really clear about what we're here to do.

So, we are today for this Master Class, which is the first of five. The full Master Class will cover all aspects of making conference calls easy, from preparing for maximum success through to how to supercharge your calls and make them work actually in the moment, how to make all of this happen—so, where do you get a bridge line from? How can you record calls and get them transcribed so that everybody can have access to them, even if they miss out? How can you make sure that the changes that you make to your calls are sustainable? And all of these are things that we'll look at in the rest of the calls following on from this one.

**But today, what we're going to do** is to cover the material all about conference calls. We'll cover the context of conference calls. Why are they happening so much now? We'll attack the huge, untapped opportunity for really effective remote working that lots

of people ignore. We'll look at 12 crucial indicators that you can use to find out if your conference call will work or flop. And this is where you need the bonus that I sent through to you. It might be useful to print it out and make sure that you've got it in front of you. Make sure you've got a pen as well, because we'll test your call that you have in mind as we go through.

We'll look at some vital flaws and assumptions that underpin many calls that actually don't work. So, for example, a lot of people think that conference calls are a way to get things done really quickly. And that isn't necessarily so. Then we'll have a quick look at how conference calls compare to video conferences and web seminars. We'll also have a look at the full series. And I sent you through a bonus showing a mind map of all the frustrations that people have with conference calls. And many of the individuals on the call or listening to the recording have sent in questions and examples that back this up. The full Master Class series will actually cover every single hassle or issue or frustration that's shown in this mind map. So we'll run through the mind map and some of the questions that have come through. We'll do that later on.

We will be able to ask questions, too, about the call. But because there are quite a few people registered, I wanted to make sure we could do this in a way that was fair. So if you have any questions, please write them down. Then, when it comes to the question time, I'll ask people by region of the world to come in and ask their own questions.

**So, let's run through who's doing what in this call.** Well, I'm presenting. But really, to get the most out of this call, it's up to you to really participate. You'll need a pen and some paper. But you may find that you can actually use the back of the bonus that you've printed out. And you'll also need a conference call example, maybe a meeting that you've had in the past that you'd like to run by conference call, or maybe a conference call that you're planning in the future. That's probably the most useful one to use.

**How will we work together today?** Well, when it comes to the questions, please make

sure that you say your name before you speak. That can make it much easier for people to relate to what you're saying. I will actually ask for questions by region of the world when we get to that stage. I'll say, "We're entering a question time." Then I'll ask for questions. So, I might ask for questions from mainland Europe. I might ask for questions, then, from people in the Americas, or from Asia. Most of the people on the call are actually based in the UK, so we'll split it into the UK north of London and the rest of the UK. But I'll explain it again when we get to that point.

Again, this call is being recorded. So please make sure when you do speak that you're happy to have anything that you say recorded.

What happens next, after this call? Then there will be the rest of the series. And we'll go through what that covers. Again, if you want to have a look at the Master Classes, you can find them at [www.conferencecallsmadeeasy.com/preparationCD](http://www.conferencecallsmadeeasy.com/preparationCD) and <http://www.conferencecallsmadeeasy.com/duringCD>.

Okay. So, I'd like to open up the call in a moment for some quick questions if there any questions that people have so far. I'm going to turn the presentation mode off, and then ask people for questions. Okay. So now it's opened up to everybody. Is there anyone who has questions who's based outside of Europe, so Africa or America or Asia? Okay. Does anyone have questions who's based in mainland Europe? Okay. Any questions from anybody in the UK?

**Paul:** Hi, Penny. Yes, it's Paul here.

**Penny Pullan:** Hi, Paul.

**Paul:** Hello, there. Hi. Yes, Penny, one of the questions I think I put on a note back that I'd be interested to find about is the difference between the face-to-face meeting, where we hear so much about communication is actually very much a visual stimulus, and the style in which people use to get information across. So, interested to know how effective

conference calls really can be compared to the face-to-face scenario.

**Penny Pullan:** Yeah, that's something we'll cover, certainly in the full Master Class. But it's my experience that conference calls actually can be an awful lot better than they generally are. It's my experience, and also the experience of the people on the survey, that actually although project people, many, many people are in more than six conference calls every week, despite that, the level of those calls is generally fairly poor, which is why I particularly chose the photographs that you saw on the web page when you registered, because they summed up a lot of the messages that were coming through from people about conference calls actually being quite un-engaging, quite difficult. But they can be a lot better than they generally are. But they won't replace face to face.

**Paul:** Right. Thank you.

**Penny Pullan:** Okay? Any more questions from the UK? Okay. I'm going to move back into presentation mode then and start talking about the context. Why are we using conference calls now?

Okay. So, why now? Why at the end of the first decade of 2000, why are conference calls so big? Well, actually, they've been around for years. I think it was in the 1960s when AT&T started them off. But bridge lines then were really very expensive. Bridge lines are the thing that we're using now, something that you can dial into, a central place, where you can have up to hundreds—I think I'm allowed up to 1000 people on this line. They used to be prohibitively expensive. But even in the 70s, people were beginning to develop the very first voice-over-Internet protocols, where you could use the Internet. Now, we're not using the Internet at the moment, but it is a possibility. So you were listing things like Skype conference calls for small numbers, and that's certainly beginning to take off.

But why suddenly are we seeing so many conference calls? And why do so many of the

people on my survey have one, two, three, four—one of them even had 11 or more—calls in a week? I supposed a lot of it started with 9/11 and the attacks on the World Trade Center, when business travel was banned or slashed in many organizations. And people had to find new ways of working, not just traveling to meet face-to-face whenever they needed to have a meeting. That really focused people. “How can we meet when we can’t travel? How can we meet with our colleagues across the Atlantic when we can’t just jump on a plane to see them?”

Another thing that’s key is globalization. Project teams 10, 20, 30 years ago would all be sitting at desks on the same floor of the same building. Now, you’re lucky if you’re in the same country. Many, many projects I’ve worked on have had people scattered all over the world. And you just can’t get together face-to-face for every single one of the project meetings. You might be able to get face-to-face at the beginning, and I would certainly recommend that. But later on, even—you want to have a review meeting, maybe you want to go into more detail in the planning, maybe you want to set up some design meetings, you want to go through the test planning—you can’t meet face-to-face for all of these. So there have to be new ways of working. And conferences calls have stepped in to breach that gap.

Another issue that we’re coming up against the whole time is outsourcing. You know, if a big chunk of your team is elsewhere in the world, outside your organization, even—maybe a group of developers in India—then it’s going to be impossible to meet them face-to-face whenever you need to communicate. And that’s another reason for conference calls.

Well, what about now? Well, we’re in a credit crunch. Travel, in some companies, certainly, is being frowned upon. And travel with mounting petrol prices is becoming more and more expensive. So, certainly several of my colleagues in similar companies who are consulting on remote working are finding that their business is actually going up as more and more companies are trying to work remotely.

I suppose there's a really good reason why we're using conference calls now, which is that they're so flexible. You can do a conference call anywhere. You don't have to be in the office. And that's great if it's the middle of the night and you need to talk to someone in Australia and you've made a conference call. You don't have to get up and drive into the office to use the video conference suite. You can just pick up your telephone call. In fact, you can use it any time—the middle of the night, the middle of the day, whenever.

The technology is everywhere. And it's not something that really people have to battle with. Most people use the telephone enough that they're happy to do the conference. And you don't need to have Internet access, although webinars can be helpful, because people can see presentations at the same time. With conference calls, you can have somebody in a car being driven somewhere, and they can still take part. And I don't know. There might be somebody on this call who's traveling, who's on a train or in a car, possibly.

One of the things I listed on the card that I sent you was that we would talk about a huge untapped opportunity for really effective remote working. And if you think about the ways that we work, when you're in face-to-face meetings, you're at the same time and in the same place. And what changes when we go to working remotely? Well, we can have conference calls and video conferences and so on, where we're at the same time but at different places. But what happens if we change both of those, so that we have a different time and a different place? That's another thing that can really, really help remote working. It's an opportunity, if you have things that you can work on together when you're not in the same place, that you don't actually all have to be there at the same time. That's great.

What sort of things might that be? You could have a forum for your group. You could have Wikis where you can build up content and then all edit them as a group. You can have blogs for your teams. You can have a Facebook project group, where you can actually see pictures of each individual. You can use older technology, like Lotus Notes, or even collective group emails. But with people having so much email, I would really

shy away from using collective emails to everybody. But these are certainly ways that you can really enhance your remote working. And you can use all of these to support what you're doing in your conference calls.

So, there you are. That will really help you to think about how you can use all the technologies that are for a different time and a different place to support what you're doing at the same time, even when you're dispersed around the world.

I'm going to turn off the presentation mode now. So, in a moment, you'll be able to ask questions. Okay. We're opened up to everybody. So, if there's anyone who has a question and they're from outside the UK, please ask your question now. Okay. If there's anybody in the UK who'd like to ask a question about the context for conference calls, please do speak up now, mentioning your name at the beginning.

**Susan:** Penny.

**Penny Pullan:** Hello.

**Susan:** Hello. It's Susan here.

**Penny Pullan:** Hello, Susan.

**Susan:** Hi. I'm from Samaritan's Purse. The main thing that governs our use of conference calls is the cost.

**Penny Pullan:** Yes.

**Susan:** There's no way around that, is there, really?

**Penny Pullan:** I think the thing to do is to remember that the cost of conference calls is so much cheaper than actually having to travel to meet face-to-face. And what you do

need to do is to make sure that you're using the best cost that actually meets the requirements that you have. And that's something that I will cover in my full Master Class series that I know that at least one person in your organization is attending, Susan.

**Susan:** Right, great.

**Penny Pullan:** Okay?

**Susan:** Yes. Thank you.

**Penny Pullan:** Any more questions about the context of conference calls? Okay. I'll move back into presentation mode.

And now we're going to look at the 12 crucial questions which indicate how well your call is going to work. If you look at the bonus that I sent you, it's called 12 Crucial Questions – Is Your Call Going to Work? This is, if you like, a sort of a quiz that you can run through. But it had a deadly serious purpose. The purpose of this is to try to identify which aspects of your call need to work to make sure that it's going to work.

The other thing about this is that it will indicate whether it's worth having a face-to-face meeting, because there are some occasions where conference calls just won't work as well as face-to-face. And despite the extra cost of having a face-to-face meeting, it's well worth it in these situations.

So, please pick up a pen. And as we go through, question by question, think about your own conference call or your own meetings that you'd like to think about. And just mark it against each of these questions. You'll see that there's a series of possibilities for your answers. You can strongly agree that the question is right. You can agree for your call. It can be neutral, so you're not sure either way, you can disagree, and you can strongly disagree. So, think of your own meeting and score as we go through.

So, the first question is:

**1. Is success absolutely critical for this meeting? If we don't meet our objectives this time, we have a lot to lose.**

So, the sort of thing there is: Do you need to see the whites of the eyes of the other people? Maybe, if you're doing a serious negotiation, the outcome of which could impact the success or failure of your business? So, take a moment just to put a tick in the box. For your meeting, your call that you're thinking about, tick which one you think fits the question. Is success absolutely critical for this meeting?

Okay. Here's the second question:

**2. Do we need to achieve our goals urgently? Time is of the essence. Any delay is unacceptable.**

And this is one of the vital flaws, one of the vital assumptions that people make. They think that using a telephone conference means that everything happens much faster. Now, that's fine if an hour's conversation is going to be enough. But actually, if you think about a three-day face-to-face meeting, where you're getting through serious amounts of work, if you needed to do that as a telephone conference, and you could put in two one and a half hour chunks each day, it would take you a minimum of nine days to cover the same amount of work. Now, I suspect it would actually take even longer, because you don't have any of the evenings and the social events on a three-day face-to-face meeting.

So, don't assume that if something's really urgent and you need to do it quickly that it will be faster to do it by telephone conference. It might be easier to get a short slot to have a discussion than to get a short face-to-face meeting. But if you have to do a meaty amount of business, then that won't necessarily be so.

So, for your own meeting, do you need to achieve your goals urgently? Think about it. Will a short conversation do, or do you need some really meaty goals met urgently. So tick whichever of those suits.

Okay. The next question, number three, is all about trust. So:

**3. For your meeting or conference call, is it critical that you share a very high level of trust amongst the team members?**

Now, if you're going to talk about anything that's at all contentious and you have no trust currently, I would say there's absolutely no point in having a telephone conference. That's a real "uh-oh," because there are going to be issues. And this is where being able to see the whites of the eyes of people to see what they really mean adds so much. And, of course, with conference calls you just can't see the other people. Although there are lots of ways to bring visuals and to help you around that, it's not the same as face-to-face.

However, if you're already fine and you trust each other, then there's no reason why not, why you can't go ahead with conference calls. So, have a look. Is it critical for your meeting or your conference call that you share a very high level of trust amongst team members? And mark the answer to your question.

The fourth question:

**4. Will our meeting need really in-depth conversations so we can take well-informed decisions and reach agreement?**

There are some topics that really need to be discussed in depth. For your meeting or telephone conference, do you need that? So tick whichever box is appropriate.

The fifth question is all about whether you're going to have difficult discussions. So, for your meeting or conference call, think about:

**5. Are you likely to have difficult discussions which may cause conflict or evoke strong emotions?**

And tick which box is right for that question for your own meeting.

There are all sorts of things that can cause difficult discussions, all sort of political issues, things that may cause conflict, misinterpretations; things that might be quite

emotional for some people in the group.

Question six:

**6. Do we need to tap into everyone's enthusiasm and energy to achieve our goals?**

It might be all right if your enthusiasm and energy is already very high as a group. There's a vital flaw here, though. Watch out. Don't assume that your own energy is an indication of everybody else in the group's energy, because it may well be that as a leader or somebody who's pulling together a group, you're really excited about this meeting and the situation and what you're going to do, and actually everybody else couldn't care one bit. So, do you need to tap into everybody's enthusiasm and energy? And mark, in the boxes, which is applicable for your group.

So, number seven. We've alluded to this earlier, in question two. The question here, question seven, is:

**7. Will splitting our meeting into a series of short chunks of one to one and a half hours ruin it?**

Because, really, if you're going to do conference calls, if you've had much experience, you'll know that beyond an hour to an hour and a half, it gets very difficult. You get people dropping out. And even if they're still there on the call, people's brains will have wandered off long ago. That's when fighting the attraction of email and instant messaging and all those other things that are out there becomes very difficult, even for the most committed of attendee.

So just check, for your meeting, will splitting it into a series of short chunks ruin it. Or is it something that you can do? And mark which is the right answer. You might find that for some things, you really do need to have a solid discussion that lasts three or four hours to really get into the bits, and that breaking it mid-point, mid-thought, might be an issue.

Okay, question eight:

**8. Will our meeting be mostly creative brainstorming and problem-solving?**

This looks at whether what you're doing is really new or whether you're building on what has gone before. You may find, actually, with creative brainstorming and problem-solving that some Internet tools would be able to help support you here. And I know that there are various ones that we'll talk about in the full master class. So, for your own meeting, tick the box that's most appropriate.

Question nine:

**9. Will we have to challenge assumptions, clarify expectations and test understanding to succeed?**

Do you have something really quite complex that you need to look at things from everybody's perspective, and that you're going to have different views, differing assumptions from people that you're really going to need to have to sort out? If so, tick a box to strongly agree on the left. Otherwise, tick the box that's appropriate for your meeting.

Question 10:

**10. Do we represent a variety of cultures and time zones?**

This is an important question. By culture, it's not just about where we are time-wise in the world. But it's about: what are the expectations of people. What's the potential for misunderstanding between different people on the call? What about the culture maybe even of the function or department that they're in? Is there some sort of common language? For example, if everybody is an engineer who has been trained in the same field, they're likely to have a common language, that if there's one person who doesn't speak that—even if their common language is English, they don't speak the common language of the engineering department necessarily.

Time zones are really important, especially if people are doing calls in not their own language. If they're having to be up in the middle of the night, it's very difficult. It's hard work. You may find that there's a mismatch, some people having just had breakfast, they're feeling fresh and ready to go, and other people, maybe it's 11:00 at night and

they're really wishing they could be asleep.

So, again, another vital flaw: If people are on the call, don't assume they're there. Too many people assume that just because people are logged in that they're really there. And with the time zones, if you have a mix of time zones and cultures, that can be an issue that you need to think about. So, have a look at the question and tick in the box which is most appropriate to your own meetings.

Moving on to question 11, this is a technology question:

**11. Do some of us have less access to or comfort with conference call technology?**

Now, with conference calls, all you need is a telephone. So, actually, it does tend to be quite easy compared to some other things. But don't assume anything. Some people find it quite difficult to put in a code and the hash. And it seems to be the more senior that you go up an organization the harder people find it sometimes. Obviously, it's better using telephones than using the Internet or webinars or video conference suites. But still, don't make assumptions.

So, let's have a think. Do all the people in your group have the same access to and comfort with technology, or are there some that have less? Mark your answer to that question in the boxes.

And now we're on to the last question on this call.

**12. Are the costs of failing to achieve our objectives far higher than the cost of bring us all together face-to-face?**

This is really the crux of it. If you're going to fail in the call, then actually, does it matter? And if it does matter, what are the costs of that failure? And if the cost of that failure is much higher than getting everyone face-to-face, then it's probably worth bring everybody together face-to-face.

Okay. So, we've gone through all the questions. Have a look at where your answers

are. If they're all over on the right hand side, then you know that actually the meeting that you've been thinking about probably will adapt very well to conference calls. And you probably don't have to do a huge amount of extra preparation and thought to make it work well. If all your answers, on the other hand, are over on the left, you've got a problem on your hands. If every single tick is in the left hand box, that you strongly agree, I would seriously advise you to go for a face-to-face meeting.

If, like most people say, you have some over on the left and some over on the right and some in the middle, you can focus on those aspects that are way over to the left. And the full Master Class series will really help you to get that sorted.

What we're going to do now is come out of presentation mode so that you can ask any questions that you have on these 12 crucial questions and your own results. Okay. Now I'm going to do the same as before. We're now in the mode where anyone can speak. I'm going to ask if there's anybody who's outside Europe who'd like to ask a question, please ask your question now. Okay. If there's anyone in mainland Europe, so outside of the UK, who'd like to ask a question, please ask your question now. Okay. Over to the UK. If there's anyone in the UK who'd like to ask a question about these 12 crucial questions, please ask now.

**Anne Marie:** Anne Marie here. Good afternoon.

**Penny Pullan:** Hi, Anne Marie.

**Anne Marie:** It's in regard to question three. We deal with Asia on certain business aspects.

**Penny Pullan:** Yes.

**Anne Marie:** And I personally still have an issue with trust, out of experience. But because of the distance, in very many instances it's almost the only opportunity we

have to do meetings with them. What sort of solution would you recommend there?

**Penny Pullan:** Well, I suppose it depends whether what you're doing in your call needs to have a very high level of trust to succeed.

**Anne Marie:** It does, actually, because we're talking about very important decisions which are being made.

**Penny Pullan:** Mm. And if there isn't that trust, you need to think about what are the consequences. So, Anne Marie, can I just ask you, in your overall pattern, were most of the answers right over to the left, or did you have a mix of answers?

**Anne Marie:** I would say on most of them I'm on the left.

**Penny Pullan:** Really. That's very interesting, because I would say probably, then, you're going to need to do quite a bit of work to be able to even think about using conference calls for the meetings that you need to do.

**Anne Marie:** Because of our kind of business and because of our international involvement with all of our partners or business partners, we do have a lot of conference calls. And a lot of them are very successful, I must say. That is based on the fact that we do know each other. And, you know, the trust has already been built up, that makes it easier.

**Penny Pullan:** Yes. So, I would say probably with your type of meeting, again, later on in the process would be where you could have the most successful calls. So, I would say that if you're up at the front stages of a project, where you're trying to scope out what's going to happen or you're developing a vision, that's when you really need to be face-to-face. Later on in your projects, where you're reviewing what's happening, you're learning lessons, you're doing more detailed planning and elaboration of what you've already done, then probably conference calls would work much better than up at the

early stages.

**Anne Marie:** Yes.

**Penny Pullan:** Okay. Thank you very much, Anne Marie. Now, I know there's somebody else trying to ask a question about these 12 crucial questions.

**Ginny:** Hello, yes. It's Ginny.

**Penny Pullan:** Hi there.

**Ginny:** Hello. I had a question with regard to question 10, variety of cultures and different time zones. The question is: What if you have a variety of cultures, same country, same time zone? So, you've got, even though it's based in the UK, the participants are from various other countries. And English may not be their first language.

**Penny Pullan:** Okay. Well, that then flags up that that may be an issue for you. And this could even be a killer issue. If people aren't used to English as their first language and they have real problems communicating in a telephone call one-to-one, then I would say that using a straight conference call isn't going to work.

If you have people who are pretty fluent in English, even though it's not their first language, you may well be able to use ways to support them. So, even using something as simple as a chat, maybe inside your company, or something like MSN, something like that, where you can actually have somebody who's typing the key points, the keywords of your call as the words are spoken, that can really help and support people who are operating outside their own language, their own first language.

**Ginny:** Okay, thank you.

**Penny Pullan:** Okay. Any other questions from the UK?

**Brian:** Hi. It's Brian here.

**Penny Pullan:** Hi, Brian.

**Brian:** Hi. Yeah, just listening to the questions raised around questions three and 10. As a company which has a bigger offshore presence, we've found that to build up the trust and also deal with the cultural problems, we've had both reciprocal visits to each other's sites and also, as you say, as you alluded to before, making good use of MSN communicator. And we've found that that's been an effective tool in also assisting around issue conference calls.

**Penny Pullan:** Yes. And that's certainly something that I would reinforce strongly, that if you get a low score on three and 10, you may well need to do the sorts of things Brian's been talking about, so those reciprocal visits, face-to-face meetings initially at the beginning of your project, making sure that you support people who don't have English as a first language.

Actually, in my survey somebody asked the question, "What do you do when you have people using the same language, but actually they have such strong accents that other people can't understand them?" And, again, the same things would happen, where you could support them by having some sort of scribing locally to the area so that you can show the words over the Internet. That can be really helpful.

Thank you, Brian.

**Brian:** Okay.

**Penny Pullan:** Any other questions from the UK before we move on to the mind map?

**Sarah:** Hi, Penny. It's Sarah here, from Leeds.

**Penny Pullan:** Hi, Sarah.

**Sarah:** I was just going to make a quick comment, actually, about some of the things that you said, really, rather than the question.

**Penny Pullan:** Okay.

**Sarah:** One of the biggest problems I've had is around trust in members, I would say. To a quite considerable extent, it made me chuckle when you said, 'Are all the people there that you expect to be there?', you know, for your call, because before now I've started the call, I've done the roll call, made sure everyone's there, thinking I've done my best, only to get halfway through and realize that half of them have gone with no apologies, no, "Sorry, I've got to go," no anything. And you sometimes sit there thinking, "Can I justify a trip across Europe to go for a meeting," or overspending basically for an hour, "or do I take the hit on the TC and hope for the best, that everyone is going to stay in the same room?"

**Penny Pullan:** I think hoping for the best probably isn't going to work. What I would say is that you don't necessarily just have to go for one hour. Something that can really help you build up levels of trust is actually to spend time with people. And if you can spend a couple of days somewhere and get to know them, and have some time out of the office, maybe all going for a meal together, that can really help to raise trust, and to mean that the people you work with remotely the rest of the time actually know you as a person rather than just a complete disembodied voice.

**Sarah:** Yeah. To be fair, actually, with this particular case, it was a series of meetings, and I did actually start off over there. And it just seemed to fall over as time went on. And part of me almost afterwards did wish that I'd gone back over there for another hit and say, "Come on, guys, we need to sort this out." But it really did make me sort of

chuckle, because I think the first question is such a critical one here, almost perhaps more critical than any of the other ones, because you just don't have that sort of visibility with what people are getting up to and how to pull it back together.

**Penny Pullan:** Mm. And again, it depends what you're doing as well how crucial this is. But there are also web tools that can help you if you add them to your conference call, maybe actually see who's there and add in questions and so on.

But we do need to move on. I'm going to go back into presenting mode now. And if everybody can pull out the mind map that I sent to you as a bonus, which has all the conference call frustrations, these are all the frustrations that are covered in the full Master Class series that I'm running later on this month and in May. I just wanted to make sure you could see all the things there. And just to pull in some of the people who have registered and who have answered my survey or had questions, I'll just go around and make sure that you know the sort of issues that other people have as well.

The one which had the most, most questions by a long way, and issues, was this one down at the bottom, where you've got the picture of the girl asleep on the computer. I'm not engaged. Liz, Alexander, Charlene, Atul, Paul and Fraukje all said they have issues with keeping people engaged on the call. Andreas said he can hear side talks in the background, and Steve said, "How do you manage to keep some people awake?"

That's one of the really hard things about conference calls, especially if they're done badly. You know, people just aren't engaged. But there are ways that you can actually cope with all of these. There are ways that you can put pictures to these disembodied voices. And it just can be quite simple. Just a simple map of the world with a picture of each person on the call can do wonders for that, for example.

People didn't really ask about the expenses. I think in business now, conference calls are so much cheaper than travel—you know, airfares and hotels—that that's not such an issue now.

One thing that's important is the fact that so many people are on conference calls where they have some people face-to-face and other people remote on the conference call. And it doesn't work if you don't have a level playing field. The people who are remote feel left out. People say, "Oh, I'll just write something on a flip chart," and the remote people on the call haven't got a clue what's going on. So, that's something to consider when you're preparing your calls.

There's a lot around misunderstandings. You know, how do you sort out these mismatched energy states? You can't see the energy of the group. So Neil and Nancy both asked, "How do you gauge the energy of the group? How do you plan ways that you can get a feeling for the energy of the group and ask people about it?" "How do you detect emotions?" is something that you asked, Anne Marie. And Radislow asked how to schedule so that actually you get the best time for people. It is different from face-to-face. You can't see people, this whole disembodied voices—"Who's there? Who's talking?"—the whole lack of visual clues and lack of body language and communication. You need to have a different design that will support what you're trying to do, not just use a face-to-face meeting and put it on to conference call.

Terry asked here, "Do video conferences work better?" And sometimes they do. But they have their own issues. You can't look somebody straight in the eye on a video conference. Often people need to travel and be in offices for their video conference suite to be able to use video conferences. So there are issues. And there are ways that you can work with conference calls to actually overcome many of these.

Preparation obviously often doesn't happen. And this is something that Frankie said, you know, "It's not a proper meeting. It's not considered a proper meeting, so people just don't prepare in the same way that they would for a face-to-face."

This thing of having nothing to look at was something that you brought up, Paul, you know, where people are missing a vast majority of the communication which comes

through. We're really tuned into visuals now. And conference calls are so auditory. We've got nothing to look at. And that can be really boring, which is one of the reasons why I've sent you the bonuses that are really colorful, hopefully engaging. So there are things you can do to help.

John asked out to bring out a quieter person, and Anna how to encourage people to speak up. And that's how to actually encourage facilitation, have really good facilitation, bringing out people as appropriate. Anna's not getting participation, because sometimes when you ask a question or for volunteers, nobody answers. And actually, that could mean lots of things. Do you think they all agree? Probably not. Are they all asleep? Maybe. Are they multi-tasking or not listening? That may well be true.

Chris asked how to stop things becoming a talking shop and avoiding decisions. And that's all part of this next piece. You know, it can go on too long because no one's keeping time. There's no clear purpose. It can drift. Dave said, "There's no clear purpose or even stated end result." Michael said they tend to start late and then finish late. And Ian says that they tend to have a lack of focus. So, having a clear agenda and appropriate content, not too much to do, and have breaks really helps. And that's why we're going to stop after an hour. So I'm keeping an eye on time here.

You may find that actually technology, if you don't have clear instructions, can be tricky. Or you lose the dial-in number, which is why I sent you postcards and emails each time with the dial-in number and the code, so that you've got everything at your fingertips.

Quite often there are issues with background noise, or with technology, people using mobiles or Skype. Stuart said he's had problems with conk-y technology. And Carol spoke about breathing sounds sometimes when people aren't using the right sort of phones. All you can hear is them breathing rather than their words.

A big issue is nothing happens afterwards. Maybe actions aren't taken. Or even if they are taken, they're taken as very long minutes, and people don't read them. And the

other key thing here is that people actually aren't intent on doing their actions. Maybe they thought they might when they were on the call. But even if they were only 80 percent sure they'd do them, by the time they've left and they've seen the pile of things they need to do, they change their minds. And so Andy said one of his issues was ensuring callers own their actions and their milestones. And Kimmy said, "You know, how do you get people to respect others by allowing them to complete their sentences?"

Okay. I'm going to open up, very quickly, for questions in a moment. But I just wanted to make sure that you all were aware that all of these issues are covered in my Master Classes. You can find them at [www.conferencecallsmadeeasy.com/preparationCD](http://www.conferencecallsmadeeasy.com/preparationCD) and <http://www.conferencecallsmadeeasy.com/duringCD>.

Okay. I'm going to turn the presentation mode off and ask people if you have any queries or comments on this mind map. Okay. Anybody outside the UK, first of all. Okay. Anyone in the UK?

**Female Speaker:** Yeah, I do. It's Fraukje. You mentioned earlier the problems in a call where some people are actually in a meeting room, and somebody just dials in.

**Penny Pullan:** That's right, yeah.

**Female Speaker:** So I guess you might cover that in other courses. But I'm wondering, do you force everybody to dial in to overcome that issue, because it's really annoying, you know. The people who are in the meeting room, they have some sort of, I don't know, internal joke, which they—then everybody's laughing, and the person who's dialing in has no idea what's going on and why they're laughing. So I find that a real issue.

**Penny Pullan:** Okay. Yes, you're right. That is a real issue, and especially if you're the person who's on the remote end. It really, really hurts, doesn't it, to be left out?

**Female Speaker:** It does.

**Penny Pullan:** And they may be quite crucial things. It might not just be a joke. It might be a really crucial part. And I suppose one of the things that I'll cover in the following calls is about how to create a level playing field. It doesn't mean to say that you have to have everybody dialing in. But you can make ways of making it much more level, so that people can actually be remote and be included. But it means that everybody who's in the meeting room needs to be really well prepared, know that there are remote people and be very aware of them the whole time. And there need to be ways of actually capturing what's happening in the room for the remote people. And we'll look into things like that in the Master Class in the following-on calls.

**Female Speaker:** Okay. Thank you.

**Penny Pullan:** Anybody else? Okay. I'm just going on to presentation mode now, and I'll talk a little bit about the Master Class series. And then for the bonus, for all of you who are actually listening in, because I think it's really important that you get something because you made the effort to be here this afternoon. I'm just going to go into presentation mode now.

Okay. So, the Master Class series cover every single issue on the mind map. So that colorful mind map you received as a bonus and all the questions that people asked that I've said today will all be covered during that.

So, the first class will be how to prepare for maximum success. So, we'll look at six keys to successful preparation. We'll help you to minimize the time you spend in your preparation, for the maximum effect for the minimum effort. What I'll do as well is send you a checklist that takes you step-by-step from the moment you decide to have a call right up to the call itself. And you've seen the ones that I've sent you so far. So you'll know it's going to be pretty thorough.

We'll go through who you need to have on board before you start. We'll look at how you can plan for various different situations. So that could be sharing information, making the decisions, gaining everyone's input and solving problems. We'll also give you a top tip and examples for making sure that everyone on the call knows who's there and what everyone looks like. That's so important, because having calls with disembodied voices just isn't engaging. We'll also make sure that we cover everybody's questions. So you'll have a chance to send questions in beforehand and also add in your questions on the day. You can find that one at [www.conferencecallsmadeeasy.com/preparationCD](http://www.conferencecallsmadeeasy.com/preparationCD).

The second call is about supercharging your calls. It's hard to get the best out of your calls in the moment, while you're in there. So, how to ask a question and get answers back rather than silence. We'll look at the three most important ways to engage people so they'll keep focus on your call rather than their email or chat or Facebook or whatever they're interested in or trying to do at the same time, how to keep your calls really short and productive. We'll look at ways to cope without being able to see your participants, so coping without the visual aspect. And it may be that you'll add in some visuals. The different ways of working that can make or break your call, how to ensure that your calls get more effective over time, so that as you run more and more calls, you're actually improving and learning what you're doing. And we'll cover all your questions. This one is here: <http://www.conferencecallsmadeeasy.com/duringCD>.

On the third call, we'll go into making it happen. And we'll cover everything you need to know how to make it happen. We'll learn how to share the work, so how you can share the work around and get people to actually take on work, and also increase their interest at the same time, which is key to getting people to actually make actions stick. We'll talk about what technology you can use, and also what to avoid. For this Master Class, contact me at [penny@makingprojectswork.co.uk](mailto:penny@makingprojectswork.co.uk).

We'll talk about how you can turn your calls into permanent records, so that anyone will catch up with them. And this is something I'll be doing.

So, the whole purpose behind this is to make your calls run more smoothly, to make them short and effective, to reduce the time on preparation by using all the support and checklists that we give you, and to make sure that people are engaged in the subject.

Just to run through the investment for this, you can go on one-day courses. I've found some for about £800. There's something on the Internet as well. It's a set of CDs. It's got eight hours of awful conference calls that you can listen to and learn from their mistakes. I mean, I really would not go for that if I were you. You could get me to come in on sight—very happy to do that. But I suspect it would be rather expensive.

So, against my marketing guru's advice, what I've done is I've put this, not at a £395 she reckoned it should be. She said, "Or you can offer people an investment of £295." But actually, I'm going to run each one this time for just £67. So, actually rather than being in a room talking about conference calls, you get to actually experience them as well as learning about it. The website goes through all the different things that you can do, and you can click on there and reserve your place on line. You'll get an instant receipt as well.

Okay. I'm going to open it up now for any questions. But I realize that we're pretty much on the hour, and if you'd like to go, then you're very welcome to do so. But I will stay around if anybody would like to ask me any questions. I'm just going off presentation mode now.

Okay. It's really a free-for-all for anybody now.

**Susan:** Hello. I'd just like to say thank you very much—very, very helpful.

**Penny Pullan:** Thank you. Who is that?

**Susan:** It's Susan.

**Penny Pullan:** Thank you, Susan. That's great.

**Susan:** Lots of key things that I'm going to use in future that I learned today. Thank you.

**Penny Pullan:** Do email one or two of them through.

**Susan:** I will.

**Penny Pullan:** And I'll send you back.

**Susan:** Thanks very much.

**Penny Pullan:** Thanks.

**Anne:** Okay. So, basically, this session just covered—our frustrations on calls, and also run through these 12 crucial questions as well.

**Penny Pullan:** Yes.

**Anne:** Okay. So we've got formal classes to go through, correct?

**Penny Pullan:** That's right.

**Martin:** Hello, Penny, it's Martin. I just wanted to say thank you very much for the hour. And I think the most interesting bit I found was the business about not being engaged in the call and just checking out what your role was and why you're actually here. I think that's a very key message, like a lot of the other things that you've picked up. Because we do conference calls in different time zones, I think it's very relevant to understand what some of these things are. So I will certainly send in a little bit of information about some of the conference calls we do and bring that up with you.

**Penny Pullan:** Thank you, Martin. Do send your sort of key thing in, too. We will spend quite a bit of time in the main class, probably almost a whole session, actually, looking at how to engage people, both how to plan to engage people and also how to engage people in the session. Thank you.

**Penny Pullan:** Anybody else have a question? All right. If nobody else asks me a question in the next minute, I'm going to stop in a minute's time. So if there's anyone left to ask—okay.

Thank you very much.