

Here are some tips I've figured out from doing over ten years of on-line phone calls with prostate cancer guys. Many of them have developed because of mistakes I've made over the years. I hope you find some of them useful.

The calls on The Reluctant Brotherhood are mostly concerned with our emotional well being, there is not much technical information. We don't spend much time on number, diagnoses, treatments, etc.

Our conversations get very serious and sometimes dark and a little dangerous. Anger, fear, sadness, and, of course, joy are all welcome on our calls. Humor is a big part of the calls and we are known for getting little politically incorrect once in a while.

The tone of the calls is casual and they are lightly moderated. The most important part of our calls is often having men tell their own stories and be heard by others. That is a rare occurrence these days.

Thanks, John Teisberg,  
The Reluctant Brotherhood.

## **Job Description**

The Call Leader is in control of the call. Your job is to keep the men focused, on topic and hold boundaries when needed.

It is a very good idea to keep your calls entertaining for yourself. This does not mean a laugh a minute, it means enjoying some quality time with other men. It is important that you get a good payoff for running these calls.

## **Know your controls**

Take some time to know what buttons and controls you have. Practice with a buddy before show time.  
Learn how to mute your mike.  
Learn how to mute a callers mike.  
Learn how to manipulate the 'chat' box, how to save it, how to send it, etc.  
Learn how to kick a guy off the call.  
Learn your background and camera settings.

## **Time**

Start your call on time and end it on time. 90 minutes is the sweet spot for keeping an audience focused. That is the average length of a feature length movie and that is not an accident. If you do go longer do not run on for more than two hours.

Keep your word and show respect for your callers by ending on time.

## **Get on your call early**

About 15 minutes before the call starts you should log into Zoom or whatever program you are running. Check your mic and camera and make sure everything is working.  
If it is not you might have to launch the call from a different computer, use your smart phone to run the call, or get someone else to start the call.

## **Opening remarks**

After 5 minutes or so, if you have any opening remarks this would be a good time to read them.

Examples of things you might want to mention:

- This is a 90 minute peer to peer support group.
- We are not professionals and this is not “therapy”.
- Our advice, ideas and suggestions are not professional advice.
- Get your health care information from your doctors and other health providers.
- This will not be a normal conversation.
- This is a special time you have made for yourself, stay focused and make the most of it.
- Joking and humor is a vital part of our healing and entertainment.
- Sometimes we go too far and that’s ok, we are not here to be politically correct.
- Politics and ‘news stories’ are not part of this call because they are so divisive these days.
- You do not have to answer any question tonight if you do not want to, it’s ok to take a pass.
- We are here to listen to each other and support each other.
- That does not mean we have to agree with each other, but it does mean we show respect to each other.

## **When should I actually start the call?**

Usually about 5 minutes after the start time. This gives late comers a chance to get settled in and it’s a good time to do some good hearted teasing and maybe even have a few jokes.

## **Closing the call**

Usually we talk right up to the last minute. When the time is up just say so. Everyone usually starts saying ‘good by’ and it is a fairly graceful shutdown.

If someone is in the middle of something hot you might want to go longer. Let the guys know that it is ok to leave the call now because the 90 minutes is up, and they can certainly stay. That is a respectful thing to do and usually everyone stays.

Sometimes a call runs out of steam a little early it’s ok to shut down then if you want. Usually if I have extra time I’ll ask the men if they have anything to say in closing. You will hear some surprising things and it’s a neat way to solidify the group.

## **Who is actually on the call?**

Using Zoom these days is common and pretty much everyone has their camera running so I can see their faces.

When a guy calls in with his phone only his phone number shows up. I make it a point to ask who just called in and put his name on the screen. If you ‘right click’ on his box you’ll get an option to ‘rename’ the caller.

## **Lurkers**

Once in a while we will get a 'lurker'. That is someone who calls in with a phone or no camera. I always ask who just called in because we want to put your name on the screen. If there is no answer feel free to bounce that guy from the call. This is a private conversation.

Usually I'll say; "If the caller does not identify himself I'm going to drop you from the call. Five, four, three, two, one." Then I drop him.

## **Who goes next?**

When it is time to call on the guys I just start with the first picture and go across. This is simple and I don't have to write anything down.

A big no-no is to ask a question and leave the floor open. When you invite any one to answer you are asking for trouble. There will be several seconds of silence then suddenly three guys will start talking. After a few minutes of bumbling around they will agree who will talk first. This is embarrassing for everyone and easy to prevent.

You, the leader, must be more directive. It's a little weird but it works like a charm. Simply ask each man alone to answer the question. Start with his name and ask the question or present the topic. I usually just start with the first guy on my screen and go across. It's easy.

Everyone gets it and it works.

## **Never ask compound or multiple questions**

If you ask a guy multiple questions at once you can expect several seconds of dead air while he figures out what he's going to say. No one wants to sound like a fool.

Keep your question tightly focused and specific.

A simple question can often be difficult to answer.

## **Get the agenda**

Before hitting the topic or focus question ask each man to check in. Remember to ask each guy one at a time and don't leave the floor open for all to talk.

Here is the check in we use:

*'I am going to go down the list and ask each of you:*

*How are you doing?and*

*Is there anything you want to ask or put on the agenda for tonight?*

Sometimes a whole call can be taken up with one guys problem and that's ok. You can fire up the topic or focus question on the next call.

## **Wingman**

It's always a good idea to have an active wingman. If the call starts going off the rails his job is to butt in and let you know. He's also your backup if you suddenly have to leave the call or you lose your connection.

## **Backup**

Always have at least one guy who is ready to launch and run the call in case you do not show up. That guy will have to have the codes and smarts to do that.

You might get caught in traffic, lose power, or actually forget the call. Have one of your guys ready to step in to start and run the call.

## **Topic or focus question**

This is usually sent out in advance. This is often the magnet that gets men to get on the call. Sometimes you will not even get to the topic or question and this is ok.

Let me know if you want a list of potential topics and I'll send it to you. Our call at The Reluctant Brotherhood is focused on emotions and not so much on technical information.

## **Suicide**

Once in a great while you will get a guy who talks about killing himself. This is very rare but it might happen. Have suicide hot-line numbers handy and get a little smart about what to do when that happens. This is a good outfit to check out <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>  
National Suicide Hotlink 1-800-273-8255

## **Diarrhea of the mouth**

Once in a while you will get a guy who just will not stop talking. I do not like to, but sometimes I'll butt in and say that we want to make sure everyone gets time to talk. 90% of the time the guy gets it, but if he doesn't you're going to have to get more insistent.

In 10 years I've had only two guys try to take over the call. You, the leader, can kick him off the call or simply mute him. It's embarrassing but the other men on the call will be relieved.

It's ok to kick drunks off the call too.

## **Camera tips**

Lighting. Consider getting a lamp above your camera/computer and putting it off to the side a little. Your face will be easier to see and that's interesting.

Look sharp. Before the call check yourself in the mirror. Comb your hair and maybe put on a fresh shirt. It is a simple way to make a good impression.

Take a look at your background. If your bedroom is in the shot make sure your bed is neat made up. Keep your dirty clothes off camera.

## **Look into your camera**

When you look away from your camera it looks like you are not paying attention to the guy who is talking. It is natural for you to look at all the guy who is speaking on your screen. It is kind of weird, but if you look into the lens of your camera you command a much stronger presence and everyone thinks you are looking directly at them, like you normally would if you were face to face.

Of course don't check your email or pick your teeth while the call is going on.

## **Your mic**

Most of us use our laptop to run the call. You might want to consider getting a separate headset with a mike built in and here's why: The mic built into a laptop is often far away from your mouth. The farther you are from your mike the thinner your voice gets.

Your voice will get a huge upgrade if you use a different mic. USB headsets and mics are cheap and they are excellent.

## **Recording the call**

Although some guys like to record the calls most of us do not. If you are using Zoom there will be a notification everyone gets if you are recording. For some guys this is a little intimidating.

Please get in touch with me with your ideas and questions.

Thank you,

John Teisberg

[john@thereluctantbrotherhood.org](mailto:john@thereluctantbrotherhood.org)

Founder of The Reluctant Brotherhood

1460 Simpson Street

Saint Paul, MN 55108

telephone 651-645-9299