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“Can you mute yourself?” scoffed one of my clients during our introductory online meeting.

I was very embarrassed! After all, this meeting would decide whether I get the client’s business or not. She was continuously judging me; and quite evidently, a yelling baby in the background wasn’t exactly music to her ears (pun fully intended). While most people are empathetic of young parents juggling work and their hyper toddlers during Covid-19, this client wasn’t exactly appreciative of it. My toddler hasn’t been at his best behavior either. Perhaps, he’s missing his friends or getting bored or both. When he was younger, he knew he was supposed to instantly stop talking when papa got a call. Today; he’d do the opposite – start singing – actually YELLING – his favorite Cocomelon songs.

I respected my client’s request and muted myself. In fact, I turned off the video to be able to show my toddler an angry face. I irritably mouthed the words “No talking please.” Well; that didn’t go well. He got mad at me instead and started yelling. Now; his volume was higher, and I had my meeting audio & video off for close to a minute. The client asked “Are you there, Mohit?” I was there, but how would I unmute myself with my toddler yelling at the top of his voice? These were not songs anymore; it was good-old, deafening screaming. So, I turned my video on while being on mute still, put a smile on my face, gave my client a thumbs up to confirm I was listening, and turned off the video again.

There needed to be a change of strategy. An angry face wasn’t working; so, it was time to beg. I folded my hands in humility and bowed to the master – “Can thee stand ho yelling?” Well; that’s an exaggeration. I just requested him to stop yelling.....and bowed a little, I guess. That helped somewhat as he at least stopped yelling and started talking. This was my chance to shine; bring out my expert negotiation skills.

He said “I don’t like papa. I don’t want him.”

"I am so sorry you have to endure a papa like me. Can you forgive me for that and let me complete my call?" I responded, hoping he would understand some part of it and calm down. He didn't! Perhaps; he sensed the sarcasm in my voice.

"Why did you show me an angry face?" there was a resurgence of his anger and his yelling had returned. I had to think spontaneously here. This was no time to negotiate.

"Do you want to watch Paw Patrol?" here came the game changer. I finally decided to give him some screen time; something I absolutely hate to do. That worked, though, and he jumped on to the bed to watch his favorite TV show. Thank God for that!

This was good, but where do I conduct my meeting now. Remember, I was still on mute with my video off? I was barely keeping up with all the information that the client was sharing, but I couldn't keep going on like this. So, I decided to let my toddler be in the master bedroom with the TV and I would hide inside the bathroom; away from the TV sound but still close enough to tend to him if he needed. That seemed to be the only recourse. I ran inside the bathroom and started debating about options for seating.

On the pot? – Terrible idea; can't do a client meeting from there. Next!

On the washbasin? – Yeah; so that the client could see her reflection in the mirror? Next!

On the floor? No; that's too disgusting. Next!

Inside the shower panel? Well; maybe it isn't that bad after all. If I take all the toiletries down, the sauna-style tiles in the back would make it seem like my house was like a resort. Or at least that's what I thought.

I went and took down all the toiletries and sat myself on the bench in the shower panel and went ahead to unmute myself. Little did I know; the client had left the meeting already.