

Workplace Communication Hotspots

There are certain areas where communication is especially sensitive and messages are easily misunderstood or lost.

● FEEDBACK

When commenting on another's performance, make your comments specific, positive and constructive. Stay away from general criticism and blame.

● REQUESTS

When delegating work or asking for help, be clear about what you need and ask in a respectful manner. Check in frequently to make sure the assignment is understood.

● **MEETINGS** A productive meeting has an agenda, the right group of people, a goal or purpose, a time limit, ground rules and action items. Preparing for a meeting ahead of time, informing all participants of goals and expectations, and having someone facilitate the meeting can increase effectiveness.

● **E-MAIL** Before you hit "send," check that you have a descriptive subject line, the right recipients in the "to" field and a clear message. Avoid humor, potentially offensive comments, lengthy explanations or questions, and emotional or private subjects.

● **PERFORMANCE REVIEWS** Use your annual assessment as a time to review goals, update progress and take stock. Make goal setting and self-assessment a yearlong process, and enter your review as an active participant. There shouldn't be any surprises.

There are plenty of opportunities for communication pitfalls at work. Use your skills and some common sense and you'll turn challenges into opportunities for great communication.



What's Your Style?

● **Aggressive.** This person thinks he or she is always right, is a poor listener, tries to bring others around to his or her point of view, interrupts, gets angry or impatient, and speaks quickly and loudly. This person often drives ideas, is decisive and is a high achiever.

Is this you? Remember the active listening skills in this brochure, and be aware that you may come across as intimidating. Make understanding your communications objective.

● **Expressive.** An expressive person gets excited or emotional while speaking and is very persuasive. This person tends to act on intuition and feelings and doesn't listen well to explanations or facts.

Is this you? Realize that while "gut instincts" are valuable, not everyone will share your excitement. Back up what you say and remain professional.

● **Passive.** This person focuses on relationships and agreement. He or she may seek agreement or try to make all parties happy, and often prefers to let others take center stage and make decisions.

Is this you? Know that agreement isn't always possible, and if you're always giving in, you'll ultimately end up resentful. Learn to speak up for yourself.

● **Analytical.** An analyzer likes to have facts and data. This person asks questions and gets distracted if a conversation is too emotional or abstract. He or she is results-oriented.

Is this you? Realize that more than facts go into decision-making and communicating. Take people's feelings and nonverbal cues into account, and be an empathetic listener.

● **Assertive.** Confident, yet able to take others' viewpoints into account, this person is able to negotiate, compromise and consider alternatives. He or she gets messages across clearly and listens well.

Is this you? Congratulations. You've mastered the art of effective communication. However, whatever your communication style, there's always room for improvement. Knowing how you come across to others is the first step toward better communication.

The Way You Say It

Your Guide to Effective Communication



Get Your Message Across

Remember the childhood game “telephone”? As a message from one child’s lips to another’s ear traveled around a circle, it changed into something entirely different from its original form.

You might find yourself playing a similar game at work. You send and receive messages constantly, but is the accurate meaning and relevance getting across as intended?

Sharp communication skills can help you in almost every area of your work. Here’s how to communicate more effectively:

6 Ways to Shape Your Message

1 TREAT others with respect. Be persuasive, but keep an open mind. Remember, it’s the differences between people — cultures, talents, personalities, strengths — that make a creative, vital workplace.

2 LISTEN carefully. You may miss important details or seem distracted if you’re thinking about what you’ll say next.

3 THINK before you speak. Words said in haste or anger are often those you wish you could take back. Take a deep breath before you speak your mind. If you doubt whether what you are about to say is appropriate, it probably isn’t.

4 CLARIFY. You communicate to persuade, explain, inform, solve a problem or gain information. Choose your words carefully.

5 BE POSITIVE. Complaining and criticizing hurt the morale of those around you. Seek to solve problems, rather than just pointing them out. Give twice as much praise as criticism.

6 MAKE your point. Don’t bury your message with unnecessary words. Explain yourself, then let people ask questions for more information.

LISTEN ACTIVELY

True listening involves your mind much more than it does your ears. The key is to listen actively. Here’s how:



Acknowledge. Nod your head or say something that confirms you’re engaged in what’s being said.

Encourage. Ask an occasional question or recap what the speaker has said to show that you understand.

Focus. Make eye contact with the speaker. Mentally repeat what he or she said if it helps you stay focused and minimize distractions.

Invite. Keep your body posture relaxed and open. Avoid crossing your arms or legs, fidgeting, frowning or slouching.

Defer. Listen without judgment. If you find yourself reacting emotionally, ask questions to make sure you understood the message or take a break from the conversation.

Understand Nonverbal Communication

There are many ways you can communicate every day without even saying a word.



- **Visual:** Body language, such as crossing your arms or drumming your fingers on the table
- **Tactile:** Shaking hands, a pat on the back, hugging
- **Facial expression:** Frowning, smiling, raising your eyebrows
- **Time:** Arriving late for an appointment, leaving a meeting early, keeping a customer or co-worker waiting
- **Physical space:** Standing too close, backing up, turning your back
- **Vocal:** Clearing your throat, sighing, changing the tone of your voice

Nonverbal cues can make communication come across differently than intended. Those cues can contradict what you say or add emphasis to it. They can send home the meaning of your spoken message, or they can convey something more powerful than words.

The bottom line: Pay close attention to nonverbal messages, both the ones that others send you and the ones you convey.

Studies show that we retain 25 to 50 percent of what we hear. That means in a 10-minute conversation with a boss or co-worker, that person hears only two to five minutes’ worth of what you have to say.

NOT BEING HEARD? People have different learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic). If you hit a communication barrier, try sending your message a different way. For example: If verbal directions don’t work, draw a map or chart. If written instructions don’t hit the mark, give a physical demonstration.



When the Communicating Gets Tough ...

Conflicts arise in every workplace. If you’re dreading a difficult conversation, use this checklist to help the talk run more smoothly.

- What is the purpose of the conversation? (Is it to solve a problem, come to an agreement, or clear the air)
- What is the worst that could happen? (Someone could get angry or walk away)
- How am I feeling? (Recognize your own issues; realize that it may not be the other person’s intention to make you feel that way)
- How is my attitude? (Enter the conversation with a negative outlook and things may go badly — be optimistic and positive)
- What is the other person’s side? (Enter the conversation resolved to listen)
- Can we work together? (Think of the other person as a partner rather than an adversary)

Answering the questions above can take the sting out of a conflict. You may not always agree, but conversations may become more productive and less heated.