

Tips for Improving Face-to-Face Communication



Here are a few ideas to consider:

1. Talk in person.

Don't hesitate to pick up the phone if electronic communication is confusing, or if the message to be delivered could easily be misconstrued or come across negatively, even if it was not intended that way.

2. Identify the best medium for a message before you act.

If it is a difficult message, a message with potentially negative consequences or if it is a complex message, email is not the best choice. Words are only part of what contributes to understanding and other factors—tone of voice, body language, sometimes facial expressions—can play a key role.

3. Interpersonal problems can't be solved by email.

If there is difficulty with a boss, a peer or a subordinate, an in-person dialogue is the way to go. If a face-to-face meeting isn't possible, a phone call will be more effective than email in these situations.

4. Listen to understand.

Concentrate on the speaker and try to understand the entire idea or message being presented. Give your full attention and fight the urge to let your mind wander or to plan your response while the other person is talking.



In this day and age of emails, text messaging, and chats, one thing gets lost in the shuffle—face-time communication. We have all the state-of-the-art communication tools, but have communication and understanding increased? Not necessarily. In fact, we think there's a case to be made that it has decreased, or at least led to a lot of miscommunication.

What can be done to improve real communication, over and above all of the electronic communication tools that we have at our disposal?

5. Ask questions.

To check understanding, ask a question to clarify a point or rephrase what is being said so that you are certain that you accurately comprehend. This works with email messages too, by helping to clarify what is being said or asked, instead of jumping to unintended conclusions.

6. In face-to-face conversations, notice nonverbal behavior.

Body language, eye contact, and facial expressions will help you better understand the speaker's message. In telephone conversations, listen for voice inflections, tone of voice, rate of speaking or unexpected silences. Check understanding if the nonverbals do not agree with what is being said.

7. Cool off before you let your fingers do the typing.

It's tempting to react to a negative email by shooting off a highly-charged missive with capital letters and underlining to prove your point. While it might feel satisfying initially, it doesn't help to deal with an emotionally charged situation. And you never know who the email will be forwarded to. When you initially react strongly to a received email or voicemail, walk away from your desk and calm down before responding.

8. Take personal accountability for how you feel and how a situation is affecting you.

Use a feedback model in which you describe the situation, state your feelings about what happened, and describe the effects of what happened on you or others. Then listen to reactions and discuss suggestions, alternatives and/or future actions. Learn to respond constructively and professionally for a more effective result. People get less defensive if we approach them from our personal observations instead of blaming or accusing of the other person.


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Take charge of communication.

You have the power to improve your word and approach. Ask yourself, "How can I best communicate to increase understanding and help solve the problem or respond to the issue?" Use today's technology when it can enhance your communication, but don't rely on it completely. Instead evaluate and choose the tools that will make your communication most effective. And, yes, sometimes that means talking person-to-person!

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