

9 Tips to Improve Your Communication Skills

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Communication is an essential part of work and home life. Understanding how to be a good communicator can be an important productivity tool, one that's frequently neglected. Poor communication can often have disastrous results; lost time, injured feelings, frustration, ineffective meetings, unproductive teamwork, resulting in a general lack of career advancement and goal achievement. To become effective communicators we need to be aware of a few fundamental tips we can use in our work and life interactions. Regardless of the situation, the same rules apply.

9 Easy Tips to Improve Communication Skills

1) Show Appreciation

Prior to getting into the meat of your conversation, be sure to express your thanks for the other individual's time. Time is an extremely precious resource, and it important to be respectful and considerate of that. Also, complement or recognize any positive contribution they are making. Appreciation and praise can go a long way towards building good rapport.

2) Connect

Connect on a personal level if possible. Look for places where interests overlap if any exist. Even in a professional situation, there may be some personal interests in common, hobbies, sports, children, etc. Take care to avoid such controversial topics as political leanings or religious beliefs. A real sense of connection makes a difference in the tone and outcome of the current conversation and most likely future communications as well.

3) Stay positive

Maintaining a positive attitude is crucial to productive communications. Be constructive rather than negative or complaining. People shut down, effectively ending any real communication when they feel attacked or criticized. Be encouraging and kind even when expressing concerns or displeasure.

4) Watch tone

While it's sometimes necessary to be assertive in order to make your point, don't be aggressive. There is a fine line between the two. Try not to cross it. An adversarial tone is not in any way productive. Be confident and direct, while still adopting a calm, cooperative tone.

5) Focus on the result

It's important to figure out what result you are after before you start the conversation. Knowing your objective helps you to direct the conversation and to remain on point. What are you hoping to accomplish? Are you trying to give help, resolve a conflict, or collaborate on a project or issue? Are you seeking advice or trying to influence behavior? Your desired outcome helps to determine the flow of communication.

6) Listen

Eye contact is crucial. Be polite and don't interrupt. No one likes being interrupted and though it's natural to want to rush in to make your point, it's very disrespectful of the other person's thoughts. Try to understand the other person's perspective. Maintain an open mind. Learning how to value different viewpoints can be an important communication tool.

7) Notice non-verbal cues

Watch body language. Lack of eye contact, distraction, or fidgeting are often signs of restlessness or impatience. Yawning or sighing are usually signs of mental or physical fatigue. When you notice these types of non-verbal signals, it's a sign that this conversation is not going to be a productive one. Quickly wrap up the conversation, postpone the conversation, or inquire about the discomfort if your relationship allows.

8) Request feedback

Confirm that you have a mutual understanding of what's being communicated. We often think that we've reached a resolution and come to an understanding, only to find out that we have completely misunderstood the other person's thoughts. Ask for input and feedback. This not only confirms that you have successfully communicated; it also makes the other person feel that they have been heard and understood.

9) Follow-up

Be clear about what actions will be taken and establish accountability. Confirm deadlines, responsibility, and expectations. If relevant, document any agreements in writing. A clear understanding of what is supposed to happen next can help avoid a conflict later on.

Always try to end your communication in a friendly manner. Reiterate your thanks and try to leave the other individual feeling understood and valued. Productive communication involves respect, consideration, awareness, and clarity. It is possible to be both direct and kind and still get the results you want.