

10 Ways to Communicate Better at Work

Tips for interacting easier with your colleagues.

By Lindsay Olson

Communication is arguably one of the most important business skills, no matter what your industry. Yet so many of us haven't been trained in how to [communicate with co-workers](#) and clients. Here are some tips to help you become a better communicator:

- 1. Listen.** Most of us are terrible listeners. Instead of truly listening to what the person is saying, we interrupt, prepare our response, or think we already know what the speaker is going to say next. It's impossible to understand what someone needs or wants if we don't give them our undivided attention.
- 2. Pay attention to body language.** Body language can tell you just as much as what a person says, if not more. Observe how they act when they talk. Is your co-worker saying she can meet a deadline, but wringing her hands while she says it? She might be afraid to tell you it will be hard to make the due date.
- 3. Consider communication preference.** Not everyone likes to communicate the same way. [Email works for some](#), but others would rather pick up the phone and talk, text, or even use social media or instant messaging to relay something. Respect the person you're trying to contact and use the method she seems to prefer. If you've called a client several times and always get her voicemail, but she's always quick to respond to email, switch to email instead.
- 4. Consider your tone.** The problem with email and social media is that it can be difficult to determine the tone. You may mean something as a joke, but if it comes off pushy or angry, you could cause an unintended reaction from the recipient. Make sure your [language](#) is clear, and if you are angry, take a few minutes to cool down before you type. Better yet, meet in person so nothing is misconstrued.
- 5. Don't be too casual.** Getting along with your work colleagues can help you do your job better, but don't take it too far in your communication on the job. Keep the cursing for after hours, and make sure your emails, meetings, and phone calls are professional. Being too casual on the job may make others feel uncomfortable.
- 6. Check your grammar.** Spell check is your best friend on the job. Always proofread anything you type—be it an email, Tweet, or letter. If you're not great at catching errors, ask someone else to proof it for you.
- 7. Keep criticism constructive.** If you manage others, you want them to do their best. Work to ensure your comments aren't [emotionally charged](#), and that the person you're speaking with grasps what you're trying to say when giving feedback. Provide positive reinforcement when a job is well-done, and find ways to add in tips for improvement without being "that boss."
- 8. Restate what you hear.** Rephrasing what your co-worker or boss says to you by repeating the important points shows you are listening and understand what you were told. It gives both parties a chance to clarify if there is any confusion, and by repeating it, you'll remember.

9. Get a little personal. People let their guards down when you talk about their lives outside of work. Ask about a co-worker's kid's soccer tournament. Find ways to interact on a personal level without going too far. You'll go a long way toward building trust.

10. Never stop improving. Effective communication is a skill you must practice. Observe how others respond to your communication to clue you in on areas for improvement.