

25 Tips for Improving Your Communications

Efficient managers require effective communication skills. It is necessary to invest time and effort to ensure optimal understanding between the manager and their team. Here are 25 tips to enhance communication skills. Identify areas for improvement and create an actionable plan. Efficient communication in the workplace leads to better relationships, productivity, and job satisfaction. Demonstrating commitment to professional growth through communication improvement benefits workplace communication.

1. Listen actively

To actively listen, focus on the person speaking and avoid any possible distractions. To better understand their message, it's advisable to summarize it, especially when it contains multiple points. You can confirm your comprehension by saying, "Let me make sure I've got this right." You mentioned three critical points. Is there anything else you want to add?

2. Use illustrations

One can use a vast array of anecdotes, historical situations, proverbs, parables, and analogies to support or validate a point, which serves as a visual aid and aids in retention for both parties involved.

3. Confirm attention

When you initiate a conversation, the other individual might have various concerns on their mind, differing from yours. It's best to begin by clearly stating the purpose of your conversation, which could be a topic, need, or objective. Additionally, ask for a specific duration of time so the other person can manage their schedule accordingly. For instance, you could say "I require your opinions on..., would you be available for 10 minutes now or should I return later?"

4. Plan the interaction

Before speaking, plan the purpose, information to be shared, information to be obtained, a strategy that combines the giving and taking, and a desired response to determine if the purpose has been achieved. Planning each step beforehand is important. Make sure to think before speaking.

5. Cancel lost causes

In case the person you're having an important conversation with seems distracted, like being on a phone call, engrossed in reading, or absorbed in other matters, it's better to reschedule the meeting. You could say, "I can understand that you're occupied right now. Is there a convenient time for me to come back later?". Such a polite reminder could divert their attention towards your matter instantly or at a later time that you agree upon.

6. Give prior notice

It is advisable to inform the other person beforehand about your desire to talk about the Wykoff project for ten minutes, and schedule a time accordingly. In case the person agrees to talk immediately, it is still preferable to express that it is inconvenient for you at the moment. This approach allows the other person to contemplate on the matter and respond more thoughtfully when you meet to discuss it later.

7. Select time and place

To achieve your objective, it's important to consider the purpose, availability, and comfort level of the other person, as well as the physical layout of the workplace. Based on these factors, you can determine whether to meet in your office, a conference room, or a corner of the cafeteria, and whether to schedule the meeting in the morning, afternoon, or at the end of the workday.

8. Anticipate potential scenarios

It is advisable to anticipate potential scenarios and their outcomes during your interactions. Be proactive and prepare adequate measures, including addressing any questions, objections, or digressions that may arise. Consider rehearsing and drafting a script to equip yourself effectively and be better positioned to tackle potential reactions. Being prepared in this manner is a critical aspect of ensuring successful interactions.

9. Maintain focus

It is imperative to uphold focus and adhere to the intended goal during communication interactions. It is common for individuals to veer off-topic or mention matters that are irrelevant to the communication's purpose. By directing your inquiries and remarks towards the desired outcome, you will effectively achieve your objective.

10. Mitigate bias

On occasion, one may desire to influence an individual's thoughts and actions (e.g., in sales, education, and persuasion); at other times, objective opinions and emotions are preferred, necessitating the use of unstructured queries and avoiding the expression of personal viewpoints and emotions.

11. Foster a positive environment

Certain situations, such as reprimands, denials, and terminations, can be complex to navigate. Nevertheless, it is crucial to maintain a reasoned and unemotional approach, treating the other party as an equal, prioritizing mutually beneficial outcomes, and ensuring both parties view the outcome as equitable and essential.

12. Encourage interaction, not domination

The effectiveness of communication hinges on the degree to which the other party participates, rather than merely listens. Engage the individual with questions and requests for information, and maintain an interactive dialogue for optimal success.

13. Utilize the Funnel Technique to extract information

Begin with open-ended questions, such as, "What are the reasons behind Team B's delay?" and gradually move towards more structured, direct inquiries like, "Have the two new members reached peak productivity?" and "Is there an issue with team morale?"

14. Differentiate between replies and responses

Although people may provide a reply to your queries, it may not necessarily be the answer you were seeking. This could be due to various reasons such as lack of understanding or cautiousness. Therefore, it is crucial to rephrase your question to obtain a satisfactory response, even after receiving a reply.

15. Utilize concise language

Research suggests that maintaining brevity in written and verbal communication increases the likelihood of being comprehended and remembered. Keeping at least 65 percent of words to one syllable is highly recommended. Therefore, it is important to keep this in mind when expressing ideas. (This paragraph is composed of 88 percent one-syllable words, which attests to its efficacy. Hence, one need not fret about sounding childish!)

16. Provide adequate digestion time

Encourage pauses for reflection and give your audience ample opportunity to process information. A helpful approach is to prompt your listeners with questions such as, "Can you think of three key benefits of this new system?" before outlining them yourself. By allowing adequate space for independent thought, you can ensure that your audience remains attentive and engaged. In written communication, it is advisable to use concise, well-structured paragraphs to avoid overwhelming readers with information.

17. Utilize vocal dynamics

Alter your speaking style by varying your pace, tone, and volume. Use slower delivery for emphasis, quicker tempo for anecdotes, and change your volume to highlight key points. Humor and accents can add variety and interest to your communication, but should be used judiciously and without offense. Without variation, listeners may become disengaged and lose interest.

18. Signal transitions

Use clear signposts such as connector words (for example: however, in contrast, therefore) and specific phrases ("I will now discuss...") to signal changes in topic or direction. Written communication can utilize paragraphs, subheadings, and chapter titles for clarity and comprehension.

19. Use probing techniques

To encourage open communication, use strategies to elicit more information from those you are speaking with. Echo probes ("Not getting anywhere?"), neutral probes ("Tell me more about that."), and silence probes (allowing time for the other person to continue speaking) can all be effective ways to encourage people to communicate more fully.

20. Confirm understanding

To ensure that your message has been fully conveyed, ask the listener to summarize key points in their own words. Avoid using patronizing language and approach the interaction as an equal conversation between adults.

21. Question deductively

When providing instruction, asking questions can be an effective way to build comprehension and understanding in the listener. By guiding the listener to arrive at the correct answer through a series of deductive questions, they are more likely to retain and apply the information presented.

22. Utilize the layer method to create a message that invokes human interest

Distinguish between abstract and concrete concepts, alternating between rules and examples, and including both people and things. By doing so, you can bring life to a message that might otherwise come off as dull or excessively technical. Begin by introducing a policy or procedure and following up with examples of how it affects individuals and groups.

23. Avoid any gender bias when referring to groups of people

Ensure that your descriptions and references do not exhibit preference for one gender over the other. Using singular pronouns such as "he" or "she" is no longer considered acceptable. Instead, opt for plural references such as "they" or "their" to describe employees and customers alike.

24. Test your assumptions when communicating with others

Particularly when influencing someone else, ensure that your assumptions are accurate by testing them. For instance, you might ask, "Given all the recent discussions around quality improvement, I assume that you've heard about this before in your many years with the company. Is this correct?"

25. Answer the question of "What's in it for me?"

(WIIFM) that other people are likely thinking as you communicate with them. Design your message to address their individual concerns and needs, beginning as early on in the conversation as possible, to increase the likelihood that they will accept rather than reject the message. Utilize empathy to see things from the other person's perspective and ensure that their interests are represented in your message.