

TIPS

ON HOW TO BE A BETTER COMMUNICATOR IN YOUR PERSONAL AND WORK RELATIONSHIPS:

- Expect the positive. An attitude of 'He's so unreasonable' won't solve anything and is not very productive. Instead, tell yourself, 'We can work this out' and communicate in a respectful and open manner to come to an agreement.
- Use courtesy words and phrases like 'please', 'thank-you' and 'I'm sorry' on a regular basis. This helps show respect and build rapport.
- It's best to say something positive first, then if necessary, express a negative opinion or comment in a tactful way.
- When you disagree about something that is being said, disagree agreeably. This means show respect for the idea; listen attentively until the person is done; ask questions if needed; be non-judgmental, and offer an alternative solution.
- Smile at the person or group, whether you are the listener or speaker. This will help show empathy and respect for the other person or group. Or, if the topic is very serious, keep your face open and empathetic by keeping eye contact.
- Set time aside everyday to talk and connect with your spouse or partner. This will help avoid having misunderstandings and making wrong assumptions that may lead to a more serious conflict.
- Discuss and make plans together to spend quality time with your spouse or partner at some time, at least once a week.

PASS IT ON!
Please feel free to pass this brochure along to co-workers, family members and friends.

CLIP AND KEEP THIS INFORMATION!

MAKE IT HAPPEN

... AT YOUR WORKPLACE!

Here are some suggestions to encourage and support being an effective, face-to-face communicator in your workplace and at home:

- Offer training opportunities on improving communication skills in employees' personal relationships as well as in work-related situations (e.g. conflict resolution techniques, assertive communication skills, active listening methods, understanding different styles of communication).
- Ask about the communication training opportunities that currently exist in your workplace.
- Consider organizing team-building activities that include opportunities to improve communication skills.
- Develop a policy and guidelines that indicate that inappropriate or disrespectful communication will not be tolerated at any level within the organization.
- Ask your co-workers for feedback about a particular communication skill that you are trying to improve.
- Be a role model for expressing courtesy and politeness to others in the way that you communicate.
- Promote and encourage employees to communicate ideas and suggestions on how the organization can work more effectively and efficiently. Recognize employees whose ideas are acted upon as a result of their suggestion.
- Learn how communication styles and habits are influenced by culture and ethnic background by hosting a workshop conducted by a local agency (e.g. Multicultural Association, United Way, YMCA or YWCA).



"The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood."

Ralph Nichols

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For more information about the Working Toward Wellness Program, please contact the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit at 258-2146 x 3100.

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Working Toward Wellness

LIVE BETTER. LIVE LONGER.

W E L L N E S S B R O C H U R E

FACE-TO-FACE... MAKING COMMUNICATION WORK!

Everyday, we communicate with one another at work, at home, and in the community. No matter how well we think we speak and listen to others, effective communication can be difficult. The truth is, even basic, face-to-face communication is not so simple.

Balancing the increasing demands of 'work life' and 'personal life' is not so simple either. On one hand, most of us are asked to do more with less at work. On the other hand, we face the many challenges of balancing the multiple roles in our family lives, in dealing with: children, spouses, aging parents, friends, social activities, entertainment, and the need for personal time.

The reality is that the problem is getting worse, not better. Research suggests that more Canadians now have problems balancing 'work' demands with 'personal-life' demands, compared to a decade ago (Duxbury and Higgins, 2003). The good news is that there is evidence to suggest that effective communication is an important tool in managing multiple roles and competing demands.

We live in a world that relies more on communication devices than ever before, such as: cell phones, e-mail, and voice mail. These devices were developed to help us be better communicators and to be more efficient. But have they really helped?

The truth is that these devices have actually added to the workload of most people, at work and at home. Although no one can deny their benefits, most people agree that they have contributed to the lost art of 'face-to-face' communication.

Face-to-face communication skills require speaking and listening to one another, as well as understanding and using non-verbal cues like body language and facial expressions. Consider when you have had a conflict with a supervisor, co-worker, spouse or partner. Was it resolved effectively over the phone or by email? Probably not.

It's worth noting the importance of being able to listen well, a skill that often takes second place to speaking well. In fact, many believe that listening is more important and even more difficult than talking. Maybe that's why we have two ears but only one mouth! Read on...

BENEFITS OF BEING A GOOD COMMUNICATOR

Being able to communicate well in the workplace and in your personal life will help to:

- Reduce stress levels and increase feelings of control
- Set priorities, define, and understand goals or values
- Work better as a team
- Identify boundaries between work life and personal life
- Reduce anger and frustration
- Work through and resolve conflicts
- Build rapport and enhance relationships
- Develop self-confidence
- Understand the reasons why others react or behave in certain ways
- Show respect for others
- Express emotions, 'needs' and 'wants' effectively

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE...

- | | T | F |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Communication technology has helped us become more effective communicators. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. In general, women and men communicate differently. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. Active listening increases the risk of having misunderstandings. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. Good communication skills help to identify boundaries between work life and personal life. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. You should focus on what you are going to say next while another person is speaking to you. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. Speaking includes more than just the words that are being said. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. It's a good idea to keep eye contact with the person or group with whom you are speaking or listening. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. Each of us uses a "filter" as we view the world so that it makes sense to us based on our individual personality and cultural background. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9. It's best to first say something negative to a person, followed by something positive. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. Seeking help from a professional counsellor may be a good idea if you feel that a communication problem at work or at home is getting out of control. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

see answers on back panel



WHY IS FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION SO IMPORTANT?

In both work and non-work settings, good interpersonal or face-to-face communication skills can enhance relationships, promote self-confidence, and have an overall positive effect on workplace and family environments. These are elements that contribute to a good work-life balance. On the other hand, it's no surprise that (mis)communication is often the root cause when there is a problem with a significant relationship in our work or non-work lives.

Many communication experts report that the ability to communicate effectively with others is the number one skill needed to perform our job well (Human Relations in Business, 2001). Further, without the ability to communicate well with our spouse or partner, many relationships eventually end in failure.

Without a doubt, human beings are social creatures. We have a strong, deep need to have interactions and to be in relationships with others around us. We communicate to learn, relate, help, influence, and play.

WHY

Clearly expressing our wants, feelings, thoughts, and opinions is only one-half of the communication process. The other half includes listening to, and understanding, what others communicate to us. A key measure of effective communication is that the 'receiver' perceives and understands the message in the same way that the 'sender' intended it.

To further understand the importance and purpose of face-to-face interactions, whether we are the sender or the receiver of the message, consider the following three communication goals:

- Make sure our message is understood.
- Make sure our message has the effect that was intended.
- Make sure our message is honest, considers the feeling of others, and is kept confidential, if needed.

WHAT IS A MAJOR INFLUENCE IN HOW WE COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER?

It's important to understand how our own cultural/ethnic backgrounds and personalities affect how we communicate with the world around us.

Communication does not take place in a vacuum. Each of us has a 'filter' or a 'lens' inside our heads that we use to help make sense of the world around us. In addition to our individual personality, being a member of many cultural groups at once (gender, national origin, age group, type of employment, where we live, etc.) also has an effect on what and how we speak and listen. This also applies to the ways that others communicate with you, as well as how we listen to others as they speak to us.

When communicating with another person, respect that they are using a filter that is different from your filter. Try not to fall into the common trap of thinking that there is only one right way (yours!) to communicate.

WHAT

HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION SKILLS?

Active listening requires you to:

- Tune out distractions or day dreaming, and concentrate on what is being said. Stop doing what you are doing, and focus on the speaker.
- Allow the speaker to finish their thought before you speak. Do not interrupt or finish their sentences.
- Don't focus on what you are going to say next.
- Listen for key words on which to comment or ask questions.
- Show that you understand what is being said by occasionally re-stating the main idea or by asking a question that shows you are on the right track.
- Finally, identify the main reason for listening to the speaker. Is it to: a) receive or evaluate ideas and information; b) show empathy; or c) be entertained? This will help you decide on the right listening style.

Becoming a better listener is well worth the effort. People appreciate, respect and value others who are great listeners.

How to be a better speaker

Speaking includes words but their meaning is largely affected by the tone used; how fast or how loud the words are spoken; which words are emphasized; the accent used; and even how non-word sounds are used (e.g. um, huh, clearing throat sounds). Oddly enough, the use of silence also adds significant meaning by what is not said. To make your point more effectively, and to show respect for the speaker, consider the following:

- Use words that show you care about the issue and have respect or caring for the other person.

- Always try to understand where the other person is coming from as you respond.
- Be as confident as you can when speaking, without sounding like you have all the answers.
- State clearly what you want. If you are trying to solve a problem or conflict, focus on your desire to find a solution that meets the other's needs, as well as your own.
- Use 'I' messages (e.g. I feel, I think) instead of messages that accuse (e.g. You said).
- Avoid making assumptions or judgments about the other's motives.
- Don't be too quick to give advice, or to monopolize the conversation. Encourage the other person to 'take their turn' if they want to participate in the conversation.
- Try to generate a variety of possibilities or scenarios before making a decision.

Be aware of body language

What is NOT said is just as important as what IS said. Non-verbal communication tells a story of its own, whether you are the listener or the speaker. Use body language to show respect, and to show that you are interested in listening or speaking to the other person.

- Maintain eye contact. Looking away sends the message that you're not interested, even if you are.
- Avoid fidgeting to help stay focused on the other person.
- Respect the space of others. If standing, stay about an arm's length away.
- Leave your arms folded on your lap or table, or at your sides. This will help show that you are open to a different opinion or a new idea.
- If you are speaking or presenting while standing, use arm movements occasionally to help emphasize your ideas without focusing too much attention away from what you are saying.
- Whatever you do, don't cross your arms over your chest while speaking or listening. This gives the impression that you are being too defensive or close-minded.

Remember, like any skill, it takes commitment, patience and plenty of practice to become a better communicator. However, if you feel that a communication problem is getting out of control, seek help through a communications training program and/or by talking with a professional counsellor. This will help equip you to deal better with communication issues, at home, at work, and in the community.

HOW

GET STARTED

So, you have made the commitment to work on improving your interpersonal face-to-face communication skills; one-to-one as well as in a group setting. This section addresses ways to be a better listener and a better speaker, as well as how to be more aware of body language. Here are two key points to keep in mind as you begin.

In case you haven't noticed, women and men communicate differently. Both styles make sense and are equally valid. For example, women tend to talk more about how they come to a decision whereas men keep their thought processes to themselves for the most part, and then state their decision out loud when they have made it.

We live in an increasingly multicultural environment. This is important because the ways of communicating will differ. This includes things such as using: words that have different meanings; methods of dealing with conflict; decision-making processes; and non-verbal cues.

TAKE STEPS

How to be a better listener

Make no mistake – the ability to really, really listen is hard work.

Hearing the message is only a small part of listening. Being an active listener is a skill as well as an attitude. This involves trying to accept people for who and what they are, not what you want them to be.

Active listening helps to ensure that communication remains clear, with less risk of lost messages or wrong assumptions.

GO FOR IT!

RESOURCES AND WEBSITES

Contact the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit for resources and programs on topics such as parenting, conflict resolution skills, stress management.
519-258-2146
www.wehealthunit.org

Toastmasters International, Windsor Club Public speaking club
519-966-1311 or 519-727-3254
www.windsoro.com/toastmasters

Professional Counselling Services
Contact Information Windsor for a list of these services in Windsor-Essex County
519-973-4636
www.informationwindsor.com

Contact your Benefits Representative or Employee Assistance Program provider to inquire about counselling services or other programs on communication

Multicultural Council of Windsor-Essex County
Programs and resources to better communicate with persons from a variety of cultural or ethnic backgrounds
519-255-1127
www.themcc.com

Public library and bookstores
Large selection of books on improving communication skills.

Couple communication skills
www.familyserviceguelph.on.ca
Click on "Couple Communication Skills"

Free Management Library
www.managementhelp.org/

Communication and Listening Skills
www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Links/Listening.htm

www.wehealthunit.org