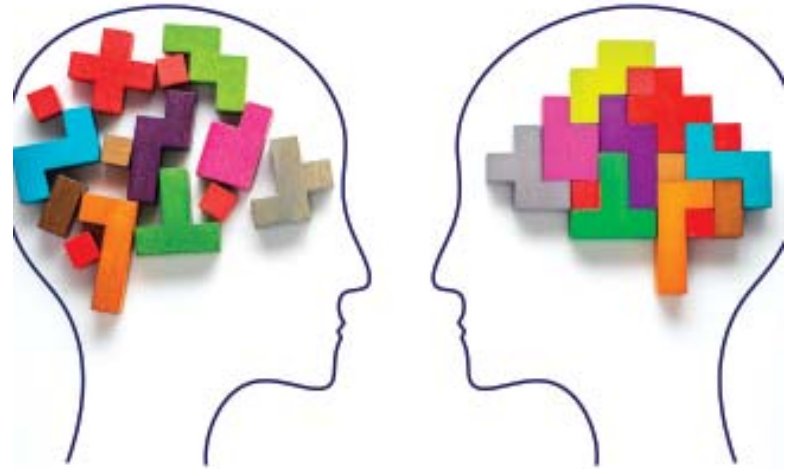


Mastering Effective Communication

Companies can improve performance, productivity and profitability by communicating effectively because good communication clarifies goals, fosters teamwork and cultivates success. But effective communication takes effort, and businesses must determine what they want to say and how to say it.

Effective communication is about more than just exchanging information. It's about understanding the emotion and intentions behind the information. As well as being able to clearly convey a message, you need to also listen in a way that gains the full meaning of what's being said and makes the other person feel heard and understood. Effective communication sounds like it should be instinctive. But all too often, when we try to communicate with others something goes astray. We say one thing, the other person hears something else, and as a result, misunderstandings, frustration, and conflicts ensue. This can cause problems at work, home, school and relationships. Communicating more clearly and effectively requires learning some important skills. Whether you're trying to improve communication with your boss, co-workers, spouse or kids, learning these skills can deepen your connections to others, build greater trust and respect, and improve teamwork, problem solving, and your overall social and emotional health.



What's stopping you from communicating effectively?

Stress and out-of-control emotion

When you're stressed or emotionally overwhelmed, you're more likely to misread other people, send confusing or off-putting

nonverbal signals, and lapse into unhealthy knee-jerk patterns of behavior. To avoid conflict and misunderstandings, you can learn how to quickly calm down before continuing a conversation.

Lack of focus

You can't communicate effectively when you're multitasking. If you're checking your phone, planning what you're going to say next, or daydreaming, you're



almost certain to miss nonverbal cues in the conversation. To communicate effectively, you need to avoid distractions and stay focused.

Inconsistent body language

Nonverbal communication should reinforce what is being said, not contradict it. If you say one thing, but your body language says something else, your listener will likely feel that you're being dishonest. For example, you can't say "yes" while shaking your head no.

Negative body language

If you disagree with or dislike what's being said, you might use negative body language to rebuff the other person's message, such as crossing your arms, avoiding eye contact, or tapping your feet. You don't have to agree with, or even like what's being said, but to communicate effectively and not put the other person on the defensive, it's important to avoid sending negative signals.

Tips to communicate effectively

Become an engaged listener

When communicating with others, we often focus on what we should say. However, effective communication is less about talking and more about listening. Listening well means not just understanding the words or the information being communicated, but also understanding the emotions the speaker is trying to convey.

Pay attention to nonverbal signals

The way you look, listen, move, and react to another person tells them more about how you're feeling than words alone ever can. Nonverbal communication, or body language, includes facial expressions, body movement and gestures, eye contact, posture, the tone of your voice, and even your muscle tension and breathing. Developing the ability to understand and use nonverbal communication can help you connect with others, express what you really mean, navigate challenging situations, and build better relationships at home and work.



Keep stress in check

How many times have you felt stressed during a disagreement with your boss, friends, or coworkers and then said or done something you later regretted? If you can quickly relieve stress and return to a calm state, you'll not only avoid such regrets, but in many cases you'll also help to calm the other person as well. It's only when you're in a calm, relaxed state that you'll be able to know whether the situation requires a response, or whether the other person's signals indicate it would be better to remain silent. In situations such as a job interview, business presentation, high-pressure meeting, introduction to a loved one's family, for example, it's important to manage your emotions, think on your feet, and effectively communicate under pressure.

Assert yourself

Direct, assertive expression makes for clear communication and can help boost your self-esteem and decision-making skills. Being assertive means expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs in an open and honest way, while standing up for yourself and respecting others. It does NOT mean being hostile, aggressive, or demanding. Effective communication is always about understanding the other person, not about winning an argument or forcing your opinions on others. ■