

10 tips for effective interpersonal communication

1. START WITH YOURSELF

How well do you know your interpersonal communication strengths and weaknesses? Do you prefer to express your ideas verbally or in writing? Do others feel the same way or have the same impression? If you're not sure, ask for feedback from a trusted friend or colleague to gauge how others perceive your communication strengths and weaknesses.

2. KEEP YOUR AUDIENCE IN MIND

No matter who you're communicating with, it's always important to pay attention to your audience. For example, how will they be feeling? What are their expectations? What do you need from them and how can you structure your approach to gain the information or agreement that you're looking for? When considering your audience, it's also important to make sure you're talking to the right people who actually have the ability to help.

3. CHOOSE YOUR TIMING

We all know (or should know) there's a right time and a wrong time to raise certain issues, which means understanding how others think and work, and what current pressures they may be facing. With this in mind, consider whether the conversation you want to hold is difficult or sensitive. Is it urgent or can it wait? Your choice of timing can make a big difference to how your conversations can go, and how your message might be received.

4. BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOU NEED TO ACHIEVE

Sometimes it's easy to lose sight of what we're aiming for when we meet and communicate with others. Perhaps when you're communicating, you want someone's perspective – but will they be willing to provide it? Maybe you need them to do something – but have you made sure that they have sufficient background in order to do the job? Perhaps you are seeking agreement – but have you made sure they have all the facts and be able to make a decision? Being clear about your focus means you can anticipate how ready people will be to engage with you.

5. CONSIDER YOUR TONE AND APPROACH

We've all had rushed meetings where we haven't always been sufficiently 'present' to be as effective as we need to be. In tips two and three, I addressed audience and timing, but you also need to be in the right space to have the conversations you need. For example, are you leaving sufficient room to be patient? If not, how will you come across? Rushed? Impolite? Or will you be in control of the situation and have the mental capacity to engage? This is especially important if the conversation is important to you and the outcomes you want to achieve or when there may be heightened emotions if the topic is difficult.





6. BE PRESENT

My advice here is similar to point five above, but it's also about yourself, including the time and energy you invest in the conversation or meeting. This is especially important if someone is coming to you. This perhaps more than anything else helps to build long lasting relationships where people feel comfortable communicating.

7. BE PREPARED

Just as you need to have a sense of what you're hoping to achieve, make sure you're prepared with the background to the conversation or meeting so you can actively listen, ask and respond to questions and enable the conversation to develop a comfortable rhythm.

8. LISTEN MORE THAN YOU TALK

Remember that communication is a two-way process and engaging with another person is to achieve some outcomes. Give people the opportunity to talk, share an alternative perspective, elaborate and to grow in to the rhythm of the communication. We learn a lot by creating space for others to feel an equal part of our communications.

9. CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Often when we're listening to someone we hear what we want to hear. What's more, in today's multicultural environment there is wide scope to misinterpret or to misread non-verbal and/or cultural cues. Good interpersonal skills mean being aware of misunderstandings and developing an approach to clarify and check.

10. BE YOURSELF

Perhaps the most important of all! Mostly good interpersonal skills and communication skills are about being natural – being yourself. Those who come across as genuine build effective relationships. This doesn't mean that everyone has to be the same – consistency and authenticity is important.
