

## **COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

## INTRODUCTION

Communication is your door to success.

Communication is one of the most talked about yet least understood areas of human behavior. Yet, we have been communicating with each other since the very dawn of our history. Our ability to communicate in a variety of ways is unique on earth to us humans.

However, effective communication is rarely taught and even more rarely learned. When we are young, we are taught the well known “3 R’s” - Reading (W)riting and (A)rithmetic and then progress to other areas and subjects - but what about the art of effective communication?



How do you make sure that you are passing on the message you intend, to ensure that what you mean is being correctly understood, how do you use means other than words to express yourself, accentuate meaning and in turn how to comprehend and interpret correctly what others are communicating to you.

Communication skills are more important than any other for, if we cannot express ourselves adequately, how can we impart and absorb information and knowledge? Superior communication skills are unquestionably important to living a life by design and vital to success in the business world.

Even people who do not possess the ability to speak can be wonderful communicators - the loss of one or two senses can impair particular dimensions of communications, but it certainly does not stop communication altogether.

Interpersonal communication is the exchange of any information between people. Being social beings, we communicate with each other whenever we get together whether it involves passing on important data or letting others know what we think and feel. All of us have an inherent need to communicate and we do so even when we have nothing or little to say.



When we are with our family, friends or colleagues we spend most if not all our time communicating with each other. Even when we are with strangers we will communicate with them if we are brought together by circumstances such as on a train journey, waiting in a long queue or at a public gathering.

This kind of interpersonal communication also occurs constantly at any workplace and is an integral part of any business. The way colleagues communicate with each other directly impacts on any business. Your approach and feelings towards your business, towards your colleagues and your job itself, are made evident through communications.



Thus, while communications may not specifically be a part of a business plan, interpersonal communication always has a direct and major effect on its success or failure. Business environments where anger, heated words and irritation with others is common, people are never going to be effective or productive. On the other hand, if constant joking, and having a riotous good time is commonplace, the effect will be the same.



Both these are extremes and both will adversely affect performance, cause chaos and ultimately failure. A balance between these two extremes is what is best; performance levels are optimized when people have high comfort levels when interacting with their colleagues, knowing that messages sent and received are being correctly and objectively interpreted.

### BASIC COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION

Interpersonal communication includes the following elements:

A **sender** or transmitter: Someone who sends a message verbally or non-verbally to someone else.

A **receiver**: Someone who receives a message from another person.

A **message**: Information in some form.

**Feedback**: Both the sender and receiver constantly elicit verbal and nonverbal feedback to the other person.

**Replication**: The duplication of understanding in one person that is in the mind of another person. Replication is the desired goal of interpersonal communication.

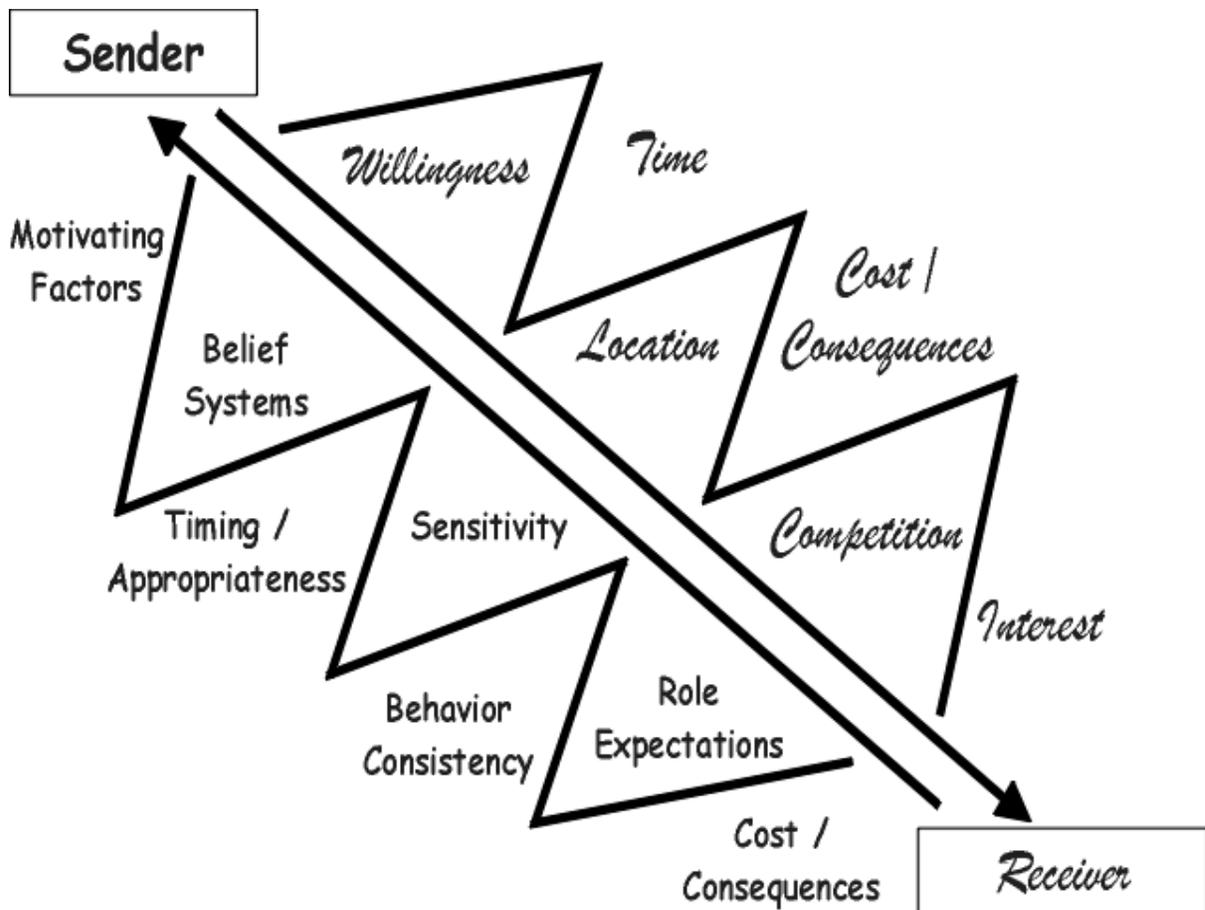
**Understanding**: An approximation of what the message means to the sender after being received from the receiver.

**Noise**: Anything that interferes or causes the distortion, or deletion of the replication of information being transmitted from the mind of the transmitter to the mind of the receiver.

Excellent communication is the ability to transmit a message by the sender to a receiver and have that message replicated in the receiver's mind. Excellent communication is the ability to receive a transmitted message and have the receiver be able to replicate the form and intent of the message.



If the receiver is uncertain about some aspect of a communication, it is the responsibility of the receiver to clarify the communication through the artful use of questions. Similarly, it is also up to the sender to ensure that the receiver is digesting the message, as intended i.e. what the sender thinks and means is what the receiver receives. This means the transmitter must be certain to code a communication so it is received in a manner that is understandable to the receiver.



### The Art of Communication

Few people would argue with the fact that skillful communication is one of the most critical success factors in both business and personal life. However, it is much more than just a means to an end. Communication is one of the most creative, beautiful and rich art forms that a human being can aspire to master.

Becoming proficient in the art of Communication doesn't require us to set aside large chunks of time each day, or clear out some special physical space in order to engage in it. All that is required besides your everyday communication situations, are a sincere effort to practice a few skills, some reliable feedback, and most importantly, your sustained attention and awareness.

Think about the tremendous variety of communication situations you face. Which are most difficult for you? Delivering a powerful and persuasive business presentation? Leaving a succinct voice mail message? Negotiating a contentious issue with your boss without letting counterproductive emotions dominate? Persuading another that the view they have held to date is erroneous and to accept another viewpoint through logic and rationale?

At the most basic level, there are 2 core elements at play in all of these situations and you need to apply and adjust these in appropriate ways to be effective.

**1. Elements of speaking:**

Body Language - eye contact, posture, gestures, expressions

Speech: Content, voice quality, clarity, structure

Manner: directness, sincerity, energy, sensitivity, rapport, focus

Sub-elements or offshoots:

Visual aids, imagery, animation

Self-concept and concept of others

Speaking from the heart

Timing, rhythm and pacing

Silence

**2. Elements of Listening:**

Attentiveness (eye contact, being awake, aware and interested)

'Listening' to non-verbal elements

Openness

Sub-elements or offshoots:

Expectations about person speaking, about their message, about their agenda

Listening to yourself

Feedback

Change in pattern

There is much discussion and argument about the proportional importance of different elements.

Some experts maintain that non-verbal factors account for as much as 75% of all communication! Another school of thought puts this at 7% for actual words themselves, 38% for vocal elements of tone, pitch and modulation and 55% for non-verbal clues.

Whichever way you look at it, non-verbal factors account for the major portion of communications.



Improving communications requires first that we understand that communication is rarely perfect or clear by itself. We must learn to listen better and speak more clearly. We must also check whether our message is delivered correctly and whether we have heard a message clearly.

## LISTENING SKILLS

The major barriers to mutual interpersonal communication is our very tendency to judge, evaluate, approve or disapprove, the statement of the other person, or the other group. Real communication occurs when we listen with understanding - to see the idea and attitude from the other person's point of view, to sense how it feels to them, to achieve their frame of reference in regard to whatever they are talking about.

**Listening is not the same as hearing.  
Hearing is using your ears to acknowledge the sound of something. Listening means understanding from the perspective of the speaker.**

Thus effective listening is the ability to distance yourself from your own preconceived notions or beliefs for a while and to listen purely **objectively** to what the other person is communicating.

Here's another way of looking at it - listening involves the use of tact. Developing tactful habits will stand you in very good stead.

T = Think before you speak  
A = Apologize quickly when you blunder  
C = Converse, don't compete  
T = Time your comments  
F = Focus on behavior - not on personality  
U = Uncover hidden feelings  
L = Listen for feedback



Other DO's and DON'Ts to Accompany T-A-C-T-F-U-L Strategies:

DO be direct, courteous and calm  
DON'T be rude and pushy

DO spare others your unsolicited advice  
DON'T be patronizing, superior or sarcastic

DO acknowledge that what works for you may not work for others  
DON'T make personal attacks or insinuations

DO say the main points first, then offer more details if necessary  
DON'T expect others to follow your advice or always agree with you

DO listen for hidden feelings  
DON'T suggest changes that a person cannot easily make.

### Could You Just Listen?

*When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving me advice, you have not done what I asked.*

*When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.*

*When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem, you have failed me, strange, as that may seem.*

*Listen! All I asked was that you listen, not talk or do - just hear me.*

*Advice is cheap; a rupee's postage stamp will get you advise from expert newspaper columnists.*

*I can do this for myself; I'm not helpless - maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless.*

*When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and inadequacy.*

*But when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you and can get about the business of understanding what's behind this irrational feeling.*

*When that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.*

*Irrational feelings make more sense when we understand what's behind them.*

*Perhaps that's why prayer works, sometimes, for some people - because God is mute, and He/She doesn't give advice or try to fix things.*

*"They" just listen and let you work it out for yourself.*

*So, please listen and just hear me.*

*And if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn - and I'll listen to you.*

*. . . Author Unknown*

**Really good listeners make others feel special. When you make others feel special, they will feel that you are special.**

More than a century ago, a young woman who had dined with both William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli (Prime Ministers of Britain), explained why she preferred Disraeli: "When I dined with Mr. Gladstone I felt as though he was the smartest man in England. But when I dined with Mr. Disraeli, I felt as though I was the smartest woman in England."

We are all familiar with the scene of the child standing in front of his father, just bursting to tell him what happened in school that day. Unfortunately, dad is snoozing or has the paper in front of his face and even when he drops the paper down half-way, it is visibly apparent that he is not really listening.

One child solved the problem of getting father to listen from behind his protective paper wall. Her solution was to say, "Move your face, dad, when I'm talking to you." This simple solution will force even the poorest listener to adopt effective listening skills because it captures the essence of good listening.



### Show that you are Listening

A crucial skill that you can practice to be a good listener is, **act like a good listener**. We have spent a good deal of our lives working at tuning out the information that is thrust at us. It therefore

becomes imperative to change our physical body language from that of a deflector to that of a receiver, much like a satellite dish. Our faces contain most of the receptive equipment in our bodies, so it is only natural that we should tilt our faces towards the channel of information.



A second skill is to use the other bodily receptors besides your ears. You can be a better listener when you **look at the other person**. Your eyes pick up the non-verbal signals that all people send out when they are speaking. By looking at the speaker, your eyes will also complete the eye contact that speakers are trying to make. A speaker will work harder at sending out the information when they see a receptive audience in attendance. Your eyes help complete the communication circuit that must be established between speaker and listener.



When you have established eye and face contact with your speaker, you must then **react to the speaker** by sending out non-verbal signals. Your face must move and give the range of emotions that indicate whether you are following what the speaker has to say. By moving your face to the information, you can better concentrate on what the person is saying. Your face must become an active and contoured catcher of information.

It is extremely difficult to receive information when your mouth is moving information out at the same time. A good listener will **stop talking and use receptive language** instead. Use words (even non-words) like 'I see' . . . 'uh huh' . . . 'oh really' - words and phrases that follow and encourage your speaker's train of thought. This enables you to react to the ideas presented, rather than the person. You can then move to asking questions, instead of giving your opinion on the information being presented. It is a true listening skill to use your mouth as a moving receptor of information rather than a broadcaster.

A final skill is to move your mind to **concentrate on what the speaker is saying**. You cannot fully hear their point of view or process information when you argue mentally or judge what they are saying before they have finished. An open mind is a mind that is receiving and listening to information.

If you really want to listen, you will act like a good listener. Good listeners are good catchers because they give their speakers a target and then move that target to capture the information that is being sent. When good listeners don't understand their speakers, they will send signals to the speaker about what they expect next, or how the speaker can change the speed of information delivery to suit the listener. Above all, a good listener involves all of their face to be an active moving listener.

### **Things to Remember**

If you are really listening intently, you should feel tired after your speaker has finished. Effective listening is an active rather than a passive activity.

When you find yourself drifting away during a listening session, change your body position and concentrate on using one of the above skills. Once one of the skills is being used, the other active skills will come into place as well. Your body position defines whether you will have the

chance of being a good listener or a good deflector. Good listeners are like poor boxers: they lead with their faces.

The speaker cannot just transmit meaning as a tangible substance. It must also be stimulated or aroused in the receiver. The receiver must therefore be an **active** participant for the cycle of communication to be complete.

**Listen with your ears**  
**Listen with your eyes**  
**Listen with your mind**  
**Listen with your heart**  
**Listen with your gut!**

**Easy listening is a style of music, not communication**

### **50 Reasons for better listening**

1. To learn some thing	26. To show compassion
2. To be entertained	27. To satisfy curiosity
3. To understand a situation	28. To be safe
4. To get information	29. To be a good lover
5. To be courteous	30. To make intelligent decisions
6. To be responsible	31. To prevent waste
7. To prevent accidents	32. To make money
8. To be a team player	33. To avoid embarrassment
9. To ask intelligent questions	34. To stay out of trouble
10. To improve confidence	35. To save time
11. To protect freedom	36. To be an informed customer
12. To find out people's needs	37. To be a supportive friend
13. To negotiate	38. To give an appropriate response
14. To be valued and trusted	39. To enjoy the sounds of nature
15. To use money wisely	40. To create "Win-Win" situations
16. To be more efficient/productive	41. To control distractions
17. To evaluate accurately	42. To increase concentration
18. To make comparisons	43. To improve your vocabulary
19. To share in your children's lives	44. To stay healthy
20. To analyze the speaker's purpose	45. To be prepared for sudden change
21. To be liked by others	46. To be a better family member
22. To get the best value	47. To settle disagreements
23. To improve self - discipline	48. To maintain a flexible attitude
24. To build relationships	49. To improve your personality
25. To solve problems	50. To use the gift of hearing

### **A WORD ON POSTURE**

Posture is the position of the parts of your body in relation to each other. Your posture constantly changes depending on the activity; but no matter what you are doing, there is a way of holding and moving your body that is balanced and efficient.

This way is called **good posture**.

Your posture is second nature to you, a taken-for-granted habit. If you have poor posture, others are probably more aware of it than you are; they may think you are lazy or lacking in self-esteem. You may be aware only of chronic fatigue, headaches or backaches, which can stem

from poor posture.

Poor posture also causes muscular strain, particularly of the spinal muscles and therefore wastes energy. It may cause crowding of the heart, lungs and abdominal organs causing impaired function. It produces uneven stress on spinal joints and discs and may cause permanent damage.

When postural habits are good, you can work and play longer without fatigue because your muscles work more efficiently. Your spine has a chance to develop normally and your internal organs function better. You look healthier and happier; your clothes fit better; and you make a better impression on others.



**The Lower Back:** When you stand, your lower back should curve slightly. This curve helps to distribute your weight properly through the spine and pelvis. The discs located between each of the vertebrae act as shock absorbers. Excessive pressure within the discs may, when sitting, cause damage, but this can be avoided through proper posture.

**Stand Tall:** The knees should be straight but not locked, stomach flat, ribs raised, shoulders and head erect. Pretend you are balancing a book on your head. Your weight should be evenly distributed on both legs.

**Walk tall:** Walk tall with your feet pointing straight ahead. Your arms should swing freely from your sides. Look straight ahead; never down.

**Sit Tall:** As you sit, your pelvis rotates and the curve of your lower back is flattened. Good seats and proper sitting posture help reduce this effect and ease the pressure on the discs. Sit tall with both feet flat on the floor, your whole back against the chair back, and your head erect. Your weight should be evenly distributed on both buttocks.

#### **Good Seats and How to use them...**

**At home:** Make sure your back is supported comfortably. Use arm rests if available. If you are sitting for long periods, shift your position from time to time.

**At work:** Avoid hunching forward. If using a stool, place it close to your work surface, so as to rest your arms comfortably. Also use the height adjustment if available to assure comfortable positioning.

**While driving:** Move the seat far enough forward to allow knees and elbows to be slightly bent as you reach for the steering wheel and pedals. Use added low back supports if needed and available.

#### **Avoid:**

- Using straight back chairs with no low back support;
- Slouching while driving;
- Using soft seats, such as sofas;
- Using flat stools with hard surfaces and no height adjustments;
- Reaching for your work; instead move your stool close enough to the work surface to allow comfortable positioning;
- Placing your seat too far back or forward;
- Using flat seat backs unless a supportive cushion can be used.

## Sleeping

Sleep on your side or back. **Do not** sleep on your stomach as this will aggravate "sway back" and forcibly turn the head to one side. Your pillow should be just high enough to keep your head in line with the rest of your spine. The mattress should be soft enough to fit the normal curves of the body, yet firm enough not to sag generally.



## BODY LANGUAGE

### The Language Everybody Speaks

Often body language is more important than getting the content of the message across. In a sense we can think of this as communication about communication, as it does not involve any spoken words and deals with a more basic form of conveying meaning.

Body language is as old as the human race itself.

### Words are inadequate

When we connect with a person, we also have to make it clear to each other how the content of a spoken message needs to be interpreted. How we do this says something about the relationship we have with the other person. Often words are inadequate for this purpose. For instance we do not easily tell each other what we feel for each other. Or how the words of a message need to be interpreted. To make the meaning of our words clear we use body language. Body language is a language without spoken words and is therefore called non-verbal communication. We use body language all the time, for instance looking someone in the eyes means something different than not looking someone in the eyes. In contact with others it is just impossible to be not communicating something unconsciously.

Usually body language occurs unconsciously. Yet the body language we use accounts for a crucial part of the quality of our communication. It follows therefore that it would be good to become conscious of our own and others' body language. We can learn to use our body language for a purpose as well as to learn to understand and interpret the body language of others. How we can interpret body language depends on the situation, the culture, the relationship we have with the person as well as the gender of the other.

Body language is also interlinked with spoken language and a whole pattern of behavior from a person. Besides, various body language signs can complement each other to make a particular meaning crystal clear or strengthen the meaning of what we communicate.

Some groups have developed a whole specific body language which can be very explicit in it's meaning and gets used to 'converse' where the use of words may otherwise be difficult or dangerous, such as soldiers during war, prisoners, etc.



### **Used to express feelings**

Body language is especially used to express feelings. For instance if we do not like someone, we may not say that directly to the person. However by way of body language we will make it clear intentionally or unintentionally. The opposite is also true. We may say we ARE angry with words and our body language may be saying loud and clear that we are NOT. This can be very confusing for the receiver.



This is giving off contradictory messages - one message in words and an opposite message in body language. It is also hard to lie or to cover up our feelings in body language. People who are unconscious about their body language will give themselves away by it. It has been researched that most people pay more attention and believe their impression of a person more by what they see in body language than what someone says with words. As a consequence we tend to doubt or put question marks behind the spoken words if they do not connect with the language of the body.

### **The importance of knowing our ways of communication**

How we come across to someone is only decided for a small part by the words we speak. To leave a good impression, say at a job interview, it is important that we know and to a certain extent, can control our body language. The receiver of our body language message will have a feeling or impression that is often hard to describe. It is hard to put in words or hard to prove what actually was communicated.

We all have said at times: 'I have a feeling he/she doesn't like me.' Or something like: 'I doubt whether what he/she says is the truth of the matter.' This kind of feeling is called intuition. Body language plays a big role in intuition as it gives us messages about the other person that we interpret at an intuitive level. It is therefore necessary to get to know our own body language first. Learn about it so that we can recognize it by others as well as by ourselves.

### **Posture**

We can tell something about a person when we notice his or her body posture, the way people hold themselves gives important information. For instance a lot of people feeling down or depressed, will convey that information by the way they hold their shoulders. Not only do we see it in their body posture, shoulders sagging and head down, but also in the way they have very little eye contact. They say to the world in fact that they are not interested in their environment or the people in it.



Compare that to someone who walks and sits straight and looks at the world and immediately you will have another impression of how this person is feeling. Our body posture often reflects quite well how we feel. Try walking upright and looking around next time when you are feeling a bit low and you will notice that such a simple thing already influences your mood positively.

### **Interest and Respect**

Another feeling we can communicate with our body posture is one of interest and respect for someone else. Turning your body towards someone when they are talking to you indicates that you are interested in hearing what they have to say. It is an act of friendliness and respect and often rewards itself when you get it back from the other person. A small effort in this way can make the difference between being accepted by others or not.

### Closed or open

A body posture can be closed or open. Someone who does not feel too comfortable when they are with someone else will often assume a closed position. He or she will possibly have crossed arms or legs or will hold an object such as a bag in front. The bag as well as the crossed arms and legs provide a bit of a barrier and protection for feeling vulnerable.

Trust has a lot to do with it and it is often natural to begin contact with someone you do not know with a bit of a closed body position until you have established some level of trust and comfort that goes with that. And trust gets established by our body language interactions as well as what we say.



### Movement

We are often not conscious of the kind of body language signals we send out, yet unconsciously we are able to interpret the body language of others. We rely on our intuitive feelings with this process of interpreting. Movement also belongs in body language. All movements, in our face, with our head, our legs, our feet and all body parts, our gestures, combine to make our body language congruent. Gestures, combinations of a series of smaller body movements, can be learned.

Take for instance the gesture when we want to say OK: our thumb and index finger make a circle and our other fingers stretch upwards, while our facial expression compliments what we are signing with this signal. It is often funny how young children learn these signals and do not always get them right. It can also be funny, as well as cause difficulties, when a gesture means one thing in one culture and another thing in another culture. So pay attention when and where you use them.



These kind of gestures have of course nothing to do with the learned sign language of deaf people, even though that language is made up out of series of gestures. Some of the principals of body language do not apply in the same way for deaf people when they are sign-talking.

### EXAMPLES OF BODY LANGUAGE AND THE MEANINGS THEY CONVEY

#### NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR

Brisk, erect walk

Standing with hands on hips

Sitting with legs crossed, foot kicking slightly

Arms crossed on chest

#### INTERPRETATION

Confidence

Readiness, aggression

Boredom

Defensiveness

Walking with hands in pockets, shoulders hunched	Dejection
Hand to cheek	Evaluation, thinking
Touching, slightly rubbing nose	Rejection, doubt, lying
Rubbing the eye	Doubt, disbelief
Hands clasped behind back	Anger, frustration, apprehension
Locked ankles	Apprehension
Head resting in hand, eyes downcast	Boredom
Rubbing hands	Anticipation
Sitting with hands clasped behind head, legs crossed	Confidence, superiority
Open palm	Sincerity, openness, innocence
Pinching bridge of nose, eyes closed	Negative evaluation
Tapping or drumming fingers	Impatience
Steepling fingers	Authoritative
Patting/fondling hair	Lack of self-confidence; insecurity
Tilted head	Interest
Stroking chin	Trying to make a decision
Looking down, face turned away	Disbelief
Biting nails	Insecurity, nervousness
Pulling or tugging at ear	Indecision



**STEEPLING**

- Self Confidence (Intellectual Arrogance)



**HAND CLASP**

- Anxious, controlled



**NOSE TOUCH**

- Doubt



**'L' CHIN REST**

- Critical evaluation



**MOUTH BLOCK**

- Resisting speech



**ARMS UP**

- Reserved, defensive



**ARM/LEG CROSS**

- Closed, unconvicted



**LEAN FORWARD**

- Ready!



**LINT-PICKING**

- Disapproval



**LEAN BACK**

- Confident superiority



**FIG LEAF**

- Self-control, tense



**ARMS OUT**

- Open, sincere, conciliatory



**TABLE LEAN**

- Authoritative, involved



**LEAN ON**

- Unthreatened, casual belongingness



### 3 BASICS FOR MEETING PEOPLE IN BUSINESS ENVIRONMENTS

1. A genuine smile



2. Proper eye contact



3. A handshake



A comfortable, genuine smile and direct eye contact should always accompany a firm handshake.

#### The Smile

- Amongst the most recognized and remembered characteristic of a person is their smile. Professional success is often attributed to appearance, yet many people attempting to advance themselves, do not pay attention to their smile, which is of vital importance and instrumental in forming that crucial first impression.
- Billions are spent on clothes, cosmetics and allied products in an attempt to make us look more attractive and professional, be more competitive, feel better and become more successful. In fact, all have no bearing and cannot really alter the most characteristic we most value - a **genuine, open, welcoming smile**.
- A healthy, comfortable and genuine smile is one of the cornerstones for ensuring and projecting optimal self-confidence.



## Eye Contact

Of all the ways we communicate with people, eye contact is the most powerful. How we look at other people, meet their gaze and look away can make all the difference between an effective encounter and one that leads to embarrassment or even rejection. Whether it's an interested look, hostile stare, nervous glance, prolonged look or a refusal to look altogether, the way we make eye contact reveals our interest, or lack of, in the other person and the situation.

- Looking at people and making eye contact are the first steps toward striking up relationships and making positive impressions.
- Making eye contact for too long a duration can be seen as threatening.
- Failing to look at others causes suspicion as to what feelings or thoughts are being hidden.
- **The ability to look someone in the eye is directly related to honesty.**
- Refusing to make eye contact also sends messages of arrogance and contempt - this tells the other person that they are insignificant or uninteresting - a non-person.



There are some subtle rules to eye contact and the normal “looking time” differs in various settings and circumstances. For instance, in an elevator, on a bus or train, or as a pedestrian on the street, eye contact can be made, but should be broken immediately, for if you do not know someone, any glance longer than a brief one will become a sign of rudeness or unwarranted inquisitiveness. In general conversation, you can make eye contact for a few seconds at a time before breaking it. And in public speaking situations, glances of even longer duration are vital to getting your message across.

In a normal conversation between two people, eye contact plays an important role as an indicator of taking turns to speak. To start a conversation with someone, you need to first establish eye contact. If that person returns your eye contact and looks back, “permission” has been granted to begin speaking.

**As a speaker** in a conversation, you look intermittently look away from the listener glancing back to check that what you are saying is being understood and digested. If you're speaking to a group, eye contact should be maintained with all sets of eyes to check that you are maintaining their interest.

**As a listener**, you look at the speaker with greater consistency to show your responsiveness and interest. Listeners typically look at the speaker about 75% of the time in glances lasting from one to ten seconds. If you want to make a verbal contribution, it's important that you re-establish eye contact with the speaker.



In conversations with a group of people, you have to signal to the others that you want to speak. If people do not notice, a shift in your position will help focus attention towards you. In public speaking situations, skilled speakers look directly at their audience when they want to emphasize a point or display conviction. At other times, they sweep with audience with their eyes taking a few seconds to "click" with each set of eyes. Their goal is to appear as though they are having a mini-conversation with each member of the audience.



The basic components of eye behavior are easy to master, once you know how they work. It is important not to make eye contact look deliberate or controlled. The goal is always to use your eyes in a relaxed way so that you make others feel comfortable.

### Handshakes

Handshakes are universal. Employed all over the world, they have become the truly international form of greeting. Historians and academics even keep a record of famous handshakes as milestones in our history and indeed there are some famous handshakes that are watched and celebrated by countless people and pass into the history books as epoch making.

Some such renowned handshakes have even become part of folklore such as Dr. Stanley meeting Dr. Livingston in a remote uncharted part of Africa after seeking him out for ages, followed by the words "Dr. Livingston I presume?" a line that has become a household quote for posterity. In Africa, at Ujiji, now in Tanzania, at the place where they met, a statue has even been erected depicting this famous meeting by portraying the two of them shaking hands.

In the more recent past some of the famous handshakes marking a watershed in history have been President Nixon and Premier Zhou-Enlai, Presidents Reagan and Gorbachov signaling glasnost and early this year, President Musharraf offering his hand to Prime Minister Vajpayee, a handshake which was on the front page of newspapers worldwide.



Left: The first handshake by a US President on Chinese soil - President Nixon and Premier Zhou-Enlai at Beijing Airport, February 21<sup>st</sup> 1976.



Right: President Musharraf's famous, unexpected 'hand of conciliation' offered to Prime Minister Vajpayee, at the SAARC Summit Katmandu, January 2002.

Handshakes are critical in forming first and lasting impressions. In business, the handshake is the correct manner of introduction and is the only accepted form of physical contact for both men and women.

## Proper Handshakes

- Always come with eye contact and a smile.
  - Are always with the right hand.
  - Are always firm but never painful.
  - Last for 2 to 3 seconds.
  - Take only 2 or 3 “pumps”.
  - Begin and end crisply.
  - Do not continue through the full introduction.
- 
- Are always with the hand held upright - your hand should never be either below or above the other’s as these convey submissiveness or dominance.



**Important Note for Gents:** In India, when you meet a lady you **do not** extend your hand immediately for a handshake, but **wait for the lady to offer her hand first**. If she does, you can respond with yours but you must wait for her to do so first, as all ladies are not comfortable with this and many prefer no touch or contact when meeting others. While this may not apply to all cultures it is of great importance in India. **Please be very aware of this.**

However, in other cultures especially in USA and UK, the only correct protocol is to practice **gender-neutral etiquette**. In other words both ladies and gents are treated in the same manner. Giving any preferential treatment to someone solely because of their gender is considered to be chauvinist and condescending and people can take serious offence at such behavior.

## Being Gender-neutral

1. Shake hands with everyone - men and women - the same way. The one hand, straight up-and-down handshake is the most effective and professional.
2. Women should stand when introduced, as men do, in a one-on-one encounter or meeting environment.
3. Use your full name when introducing yourself. Don't say "Ajay in networking." Full names give you more credibility and identity as a professional.
4. It is proper to address women as "Ms." in a spoken or written communication. The woman may then advise you to say "Mrs." or "Miss" if she prefers it.
5. Introduce people in business based on rank, not gender.
6. Avoid touching people, beyond the one-hand professional handshake.
7. Avoid showing too much skin in any business-related situation, whether it is dress-down day or the company cocktail party. Short shorts, sleeveless shirts, tank tops, sandal-like shoes or open backs are not appropriate for business-related environments.



8. People open doors for people, not necessarily men opening doors for women. If someone opens a door for you, however, you should not protest this act of politeness.
9. The host of a business lunch, the one who did the inviting, pays for lunch regardless of gender.
10. Avoid saying "Dear", "Buddy", and "Mate" to people in the work environment and over the telephone.



### Never Ever:

- Offer a limp hand with no pressure - this conveys a lack of interest/confidence and is perceived to be “slimy”.
- Keep your hand still when shaking - you must “pump” the other person’s hand 2 or 3 times.
- Use too much force - only enough to be firm and warm.
- Allow your hand to be below the other person’s while pumping - this conveys that you are submissive.
- Allow your hand to be above the other person’s while pumping - this conveys that you are dominant.
- Keep pumping a person’s hand throughout the introductions - never use more than 2 or 3 pumps.
- Offer your hand for a handshake if it is wet or dirty. Excuse yourself from shaking hands and explain the reason why.
- Ignore an outstretched hand offered for you to shake - this is insulting to the other person.

### When to shake hands

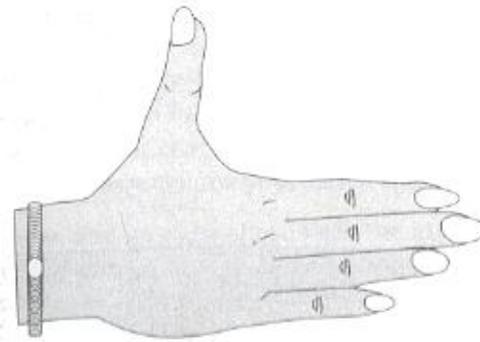
#### When:

- Greeting friends, acquaintances, colleagues - anyone already known to you.
- Someone offers his/her hand to you.
- You first meet someone.
- Greeting guests.
- Greeting your host or hostess.
- Offering congratulations.
- Offering condolences/sympathy.
- Saying goodbye.
- Concluding an official business meeting.

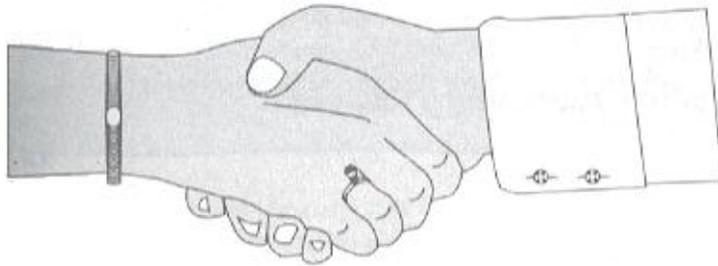


## The Proper Handshake

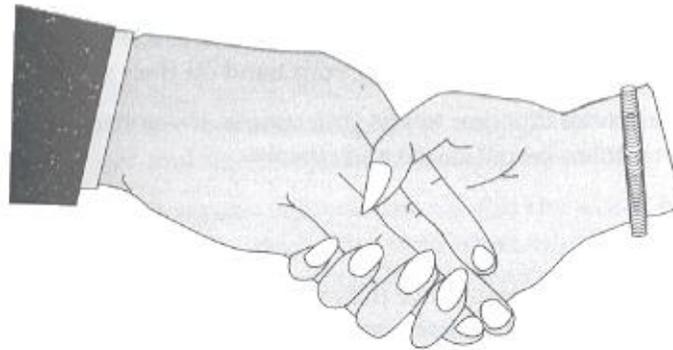
Start the handshake with your fingers together and your thumb up.



The meeting of hands should be web-to-web, with a firm but not crushing grip.



Never offer only your fingertips. This results in a weak, limp handshake and portrays a lack of interest and commitment.



Keep your fingers and thumbs up. Take the web of your hand (the part where the thumb joins the first finger), up to the web of the other person's hand to make sure you do not shake hands using only your fingers. Shaking hands with the webs of both persons intertwined also prevents one person from crushing another's knuckles.



### **A couple of tips:**

While at a reception or function, when you are offered a drink of anything cold, keep your drink in your left hand. Thus, when you have to shake hands with someone, you will not offer the person a cold or wet hand.

Don't rock or sway when shaking hands, save those movements for the dance floor!

## INTRODUCTIONS

Introductions project information. Besides the obvious elements of name, title, and affiliation, an introduction conveys a level of respect and reflects how the person making the introduction views the other person's status. Mastering the art of introductions will help put you and the people you are introducing at ease. Learning the basics - and they are not very difficult - is the first step.

- **The most important point about introductions is to make them.** Failing to do so causes embarrassment and discomfort. If given a choice, most people would prefer you to make the introduction incorrectly, even if you forgot their name, rather than stand there unacknowledged and disregarded.
- **The second important point in any introduction is the order of names.** The name of the person being introduced is mentioned last, and the person to whom the introduction is made is mentioned first.



In business, introductions are based on hierarchy. Simply put, persons of lesser authority are introduced to persons of greater authority.

For example, you would say, "Mr./Ms. Greater Authority, I would like to introduce Mr./Ms. Lesser Authority." However, the person holding the highest rank may not be Mr./Ms. Greater Authority.



**Very Important:** A client, always takes precedence over anyone in your organization.

Some examples:

**Introducing someone from your firm to a client or customer:** "Mr. Khanna, this is Mr. Apparao, our Sales and Marketing Manager. Mr. Khanna is our client from Madurai."

**Introducing a junior executive to a senior executive:** "Example: Mr. Senior Executive, I'd like to introduce Mr. Junior Executive."

**Introducing a junior person (Mr. Khanna) to a senior (Ms. Smith):** "Ms. Smith, may I introduce my colleague Mr. Gupta?"

### Using Titles

Rank and status, a person's place in the hierarchy of a company are essential to corporate culture so care should be taken when referring to a person's title. Even if you normally call your manager by his/her first name when alone, when in the company of others show respect by saying "Mr." or "Ms." (or "Mrs." or "Miss" if you have been asked to).

### The Nuances

As you are mentioning the names of each of individual, look at him or her. This focuses attention on them and makes them feel important. Once you have introduced one people to each other, a conversation has begun and everyone is at ease, you may excuse yourself if you need to.

When introducing people to others always clarify their relationship to you; it avoids any possible embarrassment that could result from inadvertent comments. Including a tidbit of information that might start the conversational ball rolling is always a good idea.

### Introducing Yourself

If no one introduces you, step in and introduce yourself. Someone may be too embarrassed to admit forgetting a name or may be distracted by other matters. **Feeling offended because you were not introduced only puts you at a disadvantage.** Introduce yourself by extending your hand, smiling and saying something like, "Hello, I'm Danny D'souza, Rajiv Sharma's colleague."



- If you have a long name which maybe difficult for others to say and remember it is acceptable to offer them an alternate. Example: "Hello. My name is Surindernath Venkatarajakrishna but please call me Venki - it's easier."
- Be clear and concise in your introduction; you will only alienate a new acquaintance if you ramble on about your life history or, worse, your problems or illnesses. If you expect people to respond favorably to your introduction, leave your problems outside the workplace door.
- Make sure your tone is engaging and then, construct an introduction that is interesting and catchy, yet still professional. Think of it as a one or two sound bite commercial. (A sound bite, the length of time available in television to engage viewers` attention before they tune out, has decreased to 7-10 seconds currently because we are all so overexposed to visual and oral stimuli.)
- Try to gauge information that will be of interest to the others. At business functions, it would be appropriate to mention where you work. However, just saying "I'm in PR at Krishna Finance" will not stir a great deal of interest or conversation whereas, "I try to attract investment in Krishna Finance by working on the company's press releases and annual reports" might be more interesting.

### Never focus too much attention on yourself with grand pronouncements.

At functions that are not strictly business events, people are not forthcoming with their job information because many people feel that they are not defined by employment. At an organized event, such as an association fund-raiser, you can mention your connection to the association.

Or, if you have a mutual interest, mention that as long as you phrase it to keep the focus is on the other person. For example, "Mr. Bhandarkar tells me that you are a member of the Global Business Association. I'm also involved in international trade so I'd be interested in learning how the association has benefited you."

At any business meal, always introduce yourself to the people sitting next to you to open the way for conversation - few people want to deal with someone who comes across as aloof or uninterested. Not introducing yourself could cost you a valuable business lead.

## Some Tips



Saying things like, “Rajan works for me” or “Rajan works for my division”, sounds like you are attempting to establish your superior status or are a dominating person. Always say, “Rajan works with me” or “Rajan is with our division”.

Treat both people in an introduction equally. Do not say, “Mr. Pai, I’d like you to meet Raman”; If you are being formal with one, do not be informal with the other.

## Responding to Introductions

The way you respond to someone else’s introduction is just as important as making the introduction. In response to introductions, simply say “hello” or “I’m pleased to meet you”. Add a phrase like, “I’ve heard so much about you, Mr. Peterson,” only if it is true and if it is complimentary.

“How do you do?” for peers or “How do you do sir?” for seniors is the customary response to a formal introduction. Never use first names until and unless the person to whom you’ve been introduced has indicated that the familiarity is preferred.

## Introductions at Functions

At functions and gatherings, it is not necessary to introduce a newcomer to everyone in the room. Introduce that person to the closest group of people by saying the newcomer’s name first and then giving the names of the others. Ask the members of the group to introduce themselves if you cannot remember everyone’s name. Make sure from time to time, though, that the guest is circulating.



At any function, the host should meet all the guests to make them feel that their presence matters. At many business functions, guests may not know the host. It is a good idea and common practice to appoint several representatives of the corporation to stand by the door to act as greeters when guests arrive. The greeters introduce themselves and escort the guests to the host or senior executives, make the introductions and then escort the guests to introduce them to several other guests while the host remains free to greet new guests.

## Always stand up for introductions

Everyone should rise to greet newcomers at both offices and functions. At a very large function, only those nearest the newcomer would rise and say hello. If you are wedged into a tight position in a crowded table or restaurant, there may not always be sufficient room to stand properly, but you should at least make the attempt to do so. By remaining seated you will be perceived as aloof and uninterested. In the office, always rise and turn round from your workstation or come around from behind your desk to greet visitors.

## Remembering Names

- If you forget someone’s name when making an introduction, try putting the other people at ease rather than concentrating on your own embarrassment.

- Remain calm; if you fall apart, the person whose name you forgot may feel obliged to put you at ease, compounding your error.
- Be straightforward yet tactful in admitting your memory lapse.



By saying, "I've forgotten your name," you imply the person wasn't worth remembering. "I've just drawn a blank," or "my memory seems to be failing" denotes a more temporary condition that doesn't have the same insulting implications. If you can't remember someone's name, but you remember an interesting point about him or her, cite it. You might say, "I clearly remember our conversation about Chinese food, but your name seems to have temporarily slipped my mind. Please help me out."

Then, get off the subject of the memory lapse and onto something more interesting to everyone. There is no need for profuse apologies - this only makes everyone uncomfortable. The sooner you forget about it, the sooner everyone else will...and the happier everyone will be.

When you are introduced to someone, say the person's name, and then repeat it during the conversation. Not only do you project a genuine interest in someone by repeating his or her name, but the repetition will also help imprint the name in your memory.

### **Introducing a Speaker**

Speaker introductions should be brief, 60-90 seconds. Include the speaker's name (pronounced correctly), the speech topic, their background and credentials that relate to the topic and mention how the audience will benefit from the speech. The final sentence of your introduction should repeat the speaker's name adding the speech title.

Don't share your personal anecdotes, reveal the speech content or embarrass the speaker in any way.

Stay at the lectern or dais until the speaker reaches it, shake hands, and then exit, if possible in the opposite direction from the speaker's approach.

At the conclusion, meet the speaker at the lectern and shake hands again as the speaker leaves. Offer a few summary comments referring to the speech's ideas and how they have enlightened you and the audience, along with words of thanks and appreciation.



## CONVERSATION MANAGEMENT

Many conversations meander and drift along; in business, this is wasteful; as a manager, you seek communication rather than chatter. To ensure an efficient and effective conversation, there are three considerations:



**You must make your message understood**

**You must receive/understand the intended message sent to you**

**You should exert some control over the flow of the communication**

### **Ambiguity Avoidance**

In a business environment where you are concerned with getting things done, your view of words should be pragmatic rather than philosophical.

If your manager gives to you an instruction, which contains an ambiguity, which neither of you notice and which results in you producing entirely the wrong report or product, who is at fault? The answer is: it doesn't matter. Your time has been wasted, the needed report or product is delayed (or dead); attributing blame will only be a defensive exercise but it does not address the problem. In everything you say or hear, you must look out for possible misunderstanding and clarify the ambiguity.



One of the greatest difficulties is that words often have different meanings depending upon context and/or culture. Thus, a "dry" country lacks either water or alcohol; a "funny" meeting is either humorous or peculiar; a "couple" is either a few or exactly two. If you recognize that there is a potential misunderstanding, you must stop the conversation and ask politely for the valid interpretation.

Another problem is that some people simply make mistakes. Your job is not only to spot ambiguities but also to counter inconsistencies. Thinking over several alternatives you may suffer momentary confusion and say one of them while meaning another. This happens to everybody at some stage or another and is an area that must be guarded against. Focus and concentration are the main weapons against such confusion.

Finally, of course, you may simply mishear. The omission of a simple word could be devastating. For instance, how long would you last as an explosives engineer if you failed to hear a simple negative in: "whatever happens next you must [not] cut the blue wire?"

So, the issue is this: the word has multiple meanings, it might not be the one intended, and you may have misheard it in the first place - how do you know what the speaker meant?

### **Rule 1: Play Back for Confirmation**

Simply put, you ask for confirmation. You say "let me see if I have understood correctly, you are saying that..." and you **rephrase** what the speaker said. If the original speaker acknowledges this "play back" version as being correct, then you have a greater degree of confidence in your own understanding. It is vital that you rephrase what was said as merely repeating the statement will never bring out any inconsistency.



### **Rule 2: Write Back for Confidence**

For any important message or decision, there should be a clear, concise and verified statement of what was said; without this someone will get it wrong. If your time and effort depend upon it, you should write it down and send it to everyone involved as a double check. This has several advantages:

Further clarification - is this what you thought we agreed?

Consistency check - the act of writing may highlight defects/omissions.

A formal stage - a statement of the accepted position provides a springboard from which to proceed.

Evidence - hindsight often blurs previous inconsistencies and people fail to recall their previous errors.

### **Rule 3: Give Background for context**

When speaking yourself, you can often counter against possible problems by adding information, and thus providing a broader context in which your words can be understood. Hence there is less scope for alternative interpretations. When others are speaking, you should ask questions yourself to establish the context in which they are thinking.

### **Some Practical Points**

As with all effective communication, you should decide (in advance) on the purpose of the conversation and the plan for achieving it. There is no alternative to this. Some people are proficient at "thinking on their feet" - but this is generally because they already have clear understanding of the context and their own goals. The following are a few techniques to help the conversation along.

### **Assertiveness**

The definition of to assert is: "to declare; state clearly". This is your aim. If someone argues against you, even loses their temper, you should be quietly assertive. Much has been written to preach this simple fact and commonly this is a three-fold plan of action:

1. Acknowledge what is being said by showing an understanding of the position, or by simply replaying it (a polite way of saying "I heard you already")
2. State your own point of view clearly and concisely with perhaps a little supporting evidence
3. State what you want to happen next (move it forward)

Thus we have something like: yes, I see why you need the report by tomorrow; however, I have no time today to prepare the document because I am in a meeting with a customer this afternoon; either I could give you the raw data and you could work on it yourself, or you could make do with the interim report from last week.

You will have to make many personal judgment calls when being assertive. There will certainly be times when a bit of quiet force from you will win the day but there will be times when this will get nowhere, particularly with more senior management. In the latter case, you must agree to abide by the decision of the senior manager but you should make your objection and reasons clearly known. For yourself, always be aware that your subordinates might be right when they disagree with you and if events prove them so, acknowledge that fact gracefully.

### **Confrontations**

When you have a difficult encounter, be professional, do not lose your self-control because, simply, it is of no use. Insults are ineffective. If you call people names, then they are certainly not going to actually listen to what you have to say; in the short term you may feel some relief at "getting it off your chest", but in the long run you are merely perpetuating the problem since you are not addressing it. This is common sense.



There are two implications. Firstly, even under pressure, you have to remember this. Secondly, what you consider fair comment may be insulting to another - and the same problem emerges. Before you say anything, stop, establish what you want as the outcome, plan how to achieve this, and then speak.

Finally, if you are going to criticize or discipline someone, always assume that you have misunderstood the situation and ask questions first which check the facts. This simple courtesy will save you from much embarrassment.

### **Seeking Information**

There are two ways of phrasing any question: one way (the closed question) is likely to lead to a simple grunt in reply (yes, no, maybe), the second way (the open question) will hand over the speaking role to someone else and force them to say something a little more informative.

Suppose you are reviewing a project with Vijay and it goes something like this:

"Have you finished project X Vijay?"  
"Yes"  
"If everything written up?"  
"Nearly"  
"So there is documentation left to do?"  
"Some"  
"Will it take you long?"  
"No, not long"



Before your fingers start twitching to place themselves around Vijay's neck, consider that your questions are not actually helping the flow of information. The same flow of questions in an open format would be: what is left to do of project X, what about the documentation, when will that be completely finished? Try answering Yes or No to those questions.

Open questions are extremely easy to formulate. Establish in your own mind the topic/aim of the question and then start the sentence with the words:  
WHAT - WHEN - WHICH - WHY - WHERE - HOW

### **Let Others Speak**

There is more to a conversation than just the flow of information. You may also have to win that information by winning the attention and confidence of the other person. The most effective way is to give people your interest. To get Vijay to give you all his knowledge, you must give him all your attention; talk to him about his view on the subject. Ask questions: what do you think about that idea, have you ever met this problem before, how would you tackle this situation?

**Silence can be very effective** - and much under-used. People are nervous of silence and try to fill it. You can use this if you are seeking information. You ask the question, you lean back, the person answers, you nod and smile, you keep quiet, and the person continues with more detail simply to fill your silence.

#### **To Finish**

At the end of a conversation, you have to give people a clear understanding of the outcome. For instance, if there has been a decision, restate it clearly (just to be sure) in terms of what should happen and by when; if you have been asking questions, summarize the significant (for you) aspects of what you have learnt.

### **DEALING WITH INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS**

It's easy to be critical and criticize someone. However, constructive criticism - the refined and most effective means of critical feedback - is like an art when compared to faultfinding, caustic remarks and negativity. Nothing makes most people bristle more quickly than unfair, unskilled or uncalled-for criticism. Yet there are times when offering constructively critical feedback is essential to success relationships.

**Consider the relationship.** Constructive criticism is employed in innumerable situations - an employer criticizing an employee, a supervisor criticizing a direct report, a project leader criticizing a team member, a colleague criticizing a peer, or any number of different cases? Some approaches for offering constructive criticism can be applied in all cases, and in all cases success depends on the agreements that are in place - and understood by both parties.

For example, an employer criticizes an employee's performance on the basis of the agreements made at the start of the relationship regarding about the employer's expectations and how the employee will fulfill these. A colleague criticizing a coworker can require a more delicate approach, because the same assumptions regarding authority are not in place.

**Review assumptions.** Most people automatically assume that they are right and others are wrong and spend all their energy and time in correcting others. However to those listening to such people, it appears more like criticism that is unproductive and demoralizing. It is useful, before you criticize someone, to review the assumptions you may be making about the relationship, expectations or how the person is approaching a project or situation.

For example, if you're about to criticize someone for "never listening," your assumptions might include your perception that you've been clear in your. In fact, this may not be true. Exploring potential assumptions can help set the foundation for a more positive discussion or feedback-sharing session.

**Relax and center before meeting.** If you are anxious about providing critical feedback, or feeling frustrated or resentful about another person's behavior or performance, you will head into a feedback-sharing discussion in a state of stress. The better choice is to take a few minutes to relax, breath slowly and deeply, remember our highest intentions for the meeting and for sharing our feedback.

Whether you count to 10 or borrow a few relaxation or mindset management tips from your favorite athlete or self-help book, making an effort to relax and center will make a positive difference in the tone of your meeting, and you'll be more likely to be skillful rather than reactionary in your discussion.

**Share intentions.** Before offering criticism, check your own intentions for wanting to let someone else know what they've done wrong or what could be refined in their behavior or performance. This provides a good litmus test for whether the issue under criticism is really a

matter of preference, work style or worse, your own problem. Then preface your criticism by sharing your intentions. For example, you might say, "My intention for wanting to talk with you is that I want our group's work to be excellent, and something we can all be proud of".

**Clarify expectations.** Murky or unvoiced expectations create problems when it's time to provide feedback, including constructive criticism, of someone else's behavior or performance. In addition to sharing your intentions for the discussion, you might want to share your perspective on how you understand any working agreements or your own expectations for the situation or the other person's performance or behavior. Doing so might sound something like, "My understanding of the project is that you were going to be handling meeting logistics by Friday afternoon and forward that information to me."

**Ask questions (and listen to the responses).** Another useful way to collect information that will help you to unveil unclear expectations, misperceptions or lack of clarity is to ask questions. The opposite, of course, is doing all of the talking yourself, which is assuming that you're correct in your perception of the situation. Before providing constructive feedback, you need to ask questions and learn more about how the other person has understood his/her role and assignments, how they have understood any agreements, what they thought you or others expected of him/her, and how he/she feels about his/her performance to date. Often, as you listen to someone's responses to questions, you will have at least one "Aha!" moment that enriches your own understanding, which then allows you to provide more constructive feedback.

**Speak respectfully.** Nothing is worse than being yelled out, scolded, or just "talked at." And all of those seem even less constructive if you feel that what's coming at you is biased, inaccurate or unfair, and that you've not been offered a chance to share your perspective on the matter. In any discussion, and particularly one where you'll be offering criticism, it's important to listen, to ask questions, to ensure that you've made clear that what you're sharing is your perspective rather than a judgment or indictment of the other person. It's much nicer to participate in an information-sharing dialogue - where both people get to speak and listen - than it is to feel like you're facing an interrogation.

**See the positive as well as the negative.** Studies show that many people feel criticized, bullied or ostracized more than appreciated at work, and a fair percentage of people leave their place of employment because of such interpersonal problems with supervisors or colleagues. Before a meeting where you'll be providing feedback to colleagues, a good practice is to make a list of things that you really appreciate about the individual with whom you'll be sharing feedback - positive attributes only. Then, once you've shared your intentions about the meeting, share the "what I really appreciate about you and your work" list before moving on to constructive criticism. You can also end the meeting with a recap of positive thoughts.

## USING RIGHT WORDS

### Less Is More

A good writer is like a sculptor. Sculptors use less and less to express more and more. They cut away unless words and make every word count. In writing, as in all art, 'less is more'. Some tips for effective writing.

1. Use graphic rather than abstract words, e.g., 'scooter' rather than 'vehicle', 'jackal' rather than 'animal'.
2. Use one syllable words rather than two syllable words, two syllable words rather than three etc. example: 'blood, sweat, tears' rather than 'sacrifice, perspiration, sorrow'.
3. Use the active voice rather than the passive; e.g., not, 'The tire was fixed by me', but 'I fixed the tire'.
4. Lean on the verbs and nouns; reduce adjectives and adverbs. Choose strong graphic verbs, e.g., 'Ravi wrestled with the problem.' A well - chosen verb makes an adverb unnecessary.
5. Make each word count. Edit ruthlessly. Don't use two words where one is sufficient.
6. Keep sentence short. Brevity and clarity are the thing.
7. Concentrate on paragraph development. One paragraph, one idea. Clear writing comes from clear thinking.
8. Relate to the experience of the reader; e.g., if your readers are fishermen, then refer to fish, wind, nets, sea and sand.
9. Write not to *impress*, but to **express**.
10. Be reader oriented. The reader's interest tires quickly. Be personal, ask use questions of reader, exclamations.
11. Writing is hard work. You have no tone or gesture to help you. 'Good sentences are not written, they are rewritten'.
12. Every language has its own music. Read your work aloud to see whether it has the correct 'feel'.

### Using Long Words

One of the little understood paradoxes in communication is that the longer the word, the shorter the explanation. The more meaning you can pack into a single word, the fewer words are needed to get the idea across.

Big words are resented by persons who don't understand them and, of course, very often they are used to confuse and impress rather than clarify. But this is not the fault of leaning or language; it is the arrogance of the individual who misses the tools of communication.

The best reason for acquiring a large vocabulary indeed is that it keeps you from being long - winded: a genuinely educated person can express himself tersely, tightly and trimly. If he does

not do so, it is because he is using education to befuddle or intimidate his audience, and not to enlighten.

For example, if you don't know, or use, the word "imbricate", you have to say to someone, "having the edges overlapping in a regular arrangement as tiles on a roof, the scales on a fish or sepals of a plant." More than 20 words to say what can be said in one.

The whole power of a language depends upon how much meaning can be packed into a single word, just as power of a hose depends on how much water pressure can be packed into it "Treason" says in two brief syllables what would otherwise be weakly conveyed by "the violation of allegiance towards one's country, especially by waging war against it or purposefully acting to aid its enemies."

Very often, of course, the short word is the best and most effective. But short words, can be more dangerous than long ones, for they can be twisted to mean almost anything, whereas the long word, properly used, means only what it says and nothing more or less. This is why the doctor tells you that you have a 'bug' when he does not know what it is. If he did, he would use a much longer term.

## HOW TO WRITE RIGHT

It is estimated that up to 30% of work-time is engaged in written communication. Thus it is absolutely vital for you as a to actively develop the skill of writing; not only because of the time involved in writing, but also because your project's success may depend upon it. Indeed, since so much of the communication between you and more senior management occurs in writing, your whole career may depend upon its quality.

In a business context, writing has two major roles:

1. It clarifies - for both writer and reader
2. It conveys information



It is this deliberate, dual aim, which should form the focus for all your writing activity.

There are many uses for paper and virtual paper within an organization; some are inefficient - but the power of paper must not be ignored because of that. In relation to a project, documentation provides a means to clarify and explain on-going development, and to plan the next stages.

If you are having trouble expressing an idea, write it down - you and others will then understand it. It may take you a long time to explain something "off the cuff", but if you have explained it first to yourself by writing it down - the reader can study your logic not just once but repeatedly, and the information is efficiently conveyed.

### Forget the Past

Professional writing has very little to do with the composition and literature learnt at school. The objectives are different and the audience has different needs.

English at school has two distinct areas of focus: the analysis and appreciation of the great works of literature, and the display of knowledge. It is all a question of aim. A novel entertains. It forces the reader to want to know what happens next. On the other hand, a business report is primarily designed to convey information. The businessperson's job is helped if the report is interesting; but time is short and the sooner the meat of the document is reached, the better.

The novel would start: "Sir John lived in a fifty-five room mansion with a retinue of domestic help, ably led by his crusty and completely trustworthy butler."

The business report however, would start (and probably end): "The butler killed Sir John with a 12 inch carving knife".

In school we are taught to display knowledge. The more information and argument, the more marks. In business and industry, it is totally different. Here the wise person must extract only the significant information and support it with only the minimum-necessary argument. The expertise is used to filter the information and so to remove inessential noise. The businessperson as an expert provides the answers to problems, not an exposition of past and present knowledge: we use our knowledge to focus upon the important points.

When preparing any document, follow this simple procedure:

1. Establish the Aim
2. Consider the Reader
3. Devise the Structure
4. Draft the text
5. Edit and Revise

### **1. Aim**

You start with your aim. Every document must have a single aim - a specific, specified reason for being written. If you cannot think of one, do something useful instead; if you cannot decide what the document should achieve, it will not achieve it.

Once you have established your aim, you must then decide what information is necessary in achieving that aim. The reader wants to find the outcome of your thoughts: apply your expertise to the available information, pick out the main facts which are relevant, and state them precisely and concisely.

### **2. The Reader**

A document tells somebody something. As the writer, you have to decide what to say and how best to say it to the particular audience; i.e consider the reader.

There are three considerations:

- a) What they already know affects what you can leave out.
- b) What they need to know determines what you include.
- c) What they want to know suggests the order and emphasis of your writing.

For instance, in a products proposal, marketing will want to see the products differentiation and niche in the market place; finance will be interested in projected development costs, profit margins and risk analysis; and R&D will want the technical details of the design. To be most effective, you may need to produce three different reports for the three different audiences.

The key point, however, is that writing is about conveying information - conveying; that means it has to get there. Your writing must be right for the reader, or it will lost on its journey; you must focus upon enabling the reader access to the information.

### **3. Structure**

Writing is very powerful - and for this reason, it can be exploited in business. The power comes from its potential as an efficient and effective means of communication; the power is derived from order and clarity. Structure is used to present the information so that it is more accessible to the reader.

In all comes down to the problem of the short attention span. You have to provide the information in small manageable chunks, and to use the structure of the document to maintain the context.

While still considering the aim and the reader, the document is broken down into distinct sections that can be written (and read) separately. These sections are then each further broken down into subsections (and sub-subsections) until you arrive at simple, small units of information - which are expressed as a paragraph (or a diagram).

Every paragraph in your document should justify itself; it should serve a purpose, or be removed. A paragraph should convey a single idea. There should be a statement of that key idea and if possible some of the following:

- A development of the idea
- An explanation or analogy
- An illustration (if applicable as in the case of a design or engineering project)
- Support with evidence
- Contextual links to reinforce the structure

The judicious use of diagrams can greatly boost the effectiveness of your document and when used appropriately are often much better than written text. Not only do diagrams convey some information more effectively, but often they assist in the analysis and interpretation of the data. For instance, a pie chart gives a quicker comparison than a list of numbers; a simple bar chart is far more intelligible than the numbers it represents. Due care must be given to add informative labels and titles, highlight any key entries.

#### **Draft, Revise and Edit**

When you have decided what to say, to whom you are saying it, and how to structure it; say it - and then check it for clarity and effectiveness. The time spent doing this will be far less than the time wasted by other people struggling with the document otherwise.

The following are a few points to consider as you wield your red pen.

#### **Layout**

The main difference between written and verbal communication is that the reader can choose and re-read the various sections, whereas the listener receives information in the sequence determined by the speaker. Layout should be used to make the structure plain, and so more effective - it acts as a guide to the reader.

Suppose you have three main points to make; do not hide them within simple text - make them obvious. Make it so that the reader's eye jumps straight to them on the page. For instance, the key to effective layout is to use:

- **Informative titles**
- **White space**
- **Variety**

#### **Style**

People in business do not have the time to marvel at your florid turn of phrase or flowery expressions. They want to know what the document is about and what it says; there is no real interest in style, except for ease of access.

In some articles a summary can be obtained by reading the first sentence of each paragraph. The remainder of each paragraph is simply an expansion upon, or explanation of, the initial sentence. In other writing, the topic is given first in a summary form, and then successively repeated with greater detail each time. This is the pyramid structure favored by newspapers.

A short and simple document will always be read. This has led to the "memo culture" in which every communication is condensed to one side of A4. Longer documents need to justify themselves to their readers' attention.

### **The Beginning**

Imagine a busy person who has a lot to do today: she has to prepare for a meeting tomorrow morning with the regional VP, a call to make to the German sales office, several letters to dictate concerning safety regulations, and this month's progress report has failed to reach her. She is busy and distracted. You have possibly 20 seconds for your document to justify itself to her. If by then it has not explained itself and convinced her that she needs to read it, she will tackle something else. If she is a good manager, she will insist on a rewrite; if not, the document may never be read.

Thus the beginning of your document is crucial. It must be obvious to the reader at once what the document is about, and why it should be read. You need to arrest the readers attention.

Unlike a novel, the business document must not contain "teasing elevations of suspense". Take your "aim", and either state it or achieve it by the end of the first paragraph. For instance, if you have been evaluating a new software package for possible purchase then your reports might begin: "Having evaluated the Talwar package, I recommend that ...".

### **Simple Errors**

For important documents, there is nothing better than a good, old-fashioned proofread. For example, the following is an extract from a national advertising campaign/quiz run by a famous maker of Champagne:

*Question 3: Which Country has one the Triple Crown the most times?*

Won understands the error, but is not impressed by the quality of that company's product!

### **Sentence Length**

Avoid long sentences. We tend to associate "unit of information" with "a sentence". Consequently when reading, we process the information when we reach the full stop. If the sentence is too long, we lose the information either because of our limited attention span or because the information was poorly composed to start with and might, perhaps, have been broken up into smaller, or possibly better punctuated, sentences which would better have kept the attention of the reader and, by doing so, have reinforced the original message with greater clarity and simplicity. Get it?

### **Word Length**

It is inappropriate to utilize verbose and bombastic terminology when a suitable alternative would be to: keep it simple. Often the long, complex word will not be understood. Further, if the reader is distracted by the word itself, then less attention is paid to the meaning or to the information you wished to convey.

### **Wordiness**

When one is trying hard to write an impressive document, it is easy to slip into grandiose formulae: words and phrases which sound significant but which convey nothing but noise.

You must avoid these at all costs. So: "for the reason that" becomes "because"; "in connection with" becomes "regarding"; "in view of the fact that" becomes "since"; "within a comparatively short period of time" becomes "soon".

Often you can make a sentence sound more like spoken English simply by changing the word order and adjusting the verb. Thus: "if the department experiences any difficulties in the near future regarding attendance of meetings" becomes "if staff cannot attend the next few meetings". As a final check, read your document aloud; if it sounds stilted, change it.

### **Conclusion**

Writing is a complex tool, you need to train yourself in its use or a large proportion of your activity will be grossly inefficient. You must reflect upon your writing lest it reflects badly upon you.

Put in a nutshell, strive for the 3 magic C's: **Clarity, Comprehensiveness, Conciseness.**



## TELEPHONIC COMMUNICATION

Telephone etiquette is one of the most critical areas of any office, though it is often one of the most neglected. It forms the basis of initial and long lasting impressions of the office by clients and is also an integral part of maintaining and improving intra-office communication.

Just as first impressions are essential in personal professionalism and success, telephone communications are essential in the impression created about your organization.

There are set rules and manners to telephone etiquette and adhering to these ensure that a professional image of your company is maintained.

Incoming calls should be answered:

- \*Promptly
- \*Personally, whenever possible (use voice mail only when necessary)
- \*Courteously
- \*Professionally



### Appropriate Greetings

"Good morning, this is Sunil Joshi, may I help you?"

"Good afternoon, Finance Division, Sunil Joshi speaking, may I help you"

### Good Telephone Habits

1. Answer every phone call promptly on the first or second ring. A maximum of three rings is the outside limit within which a telephone should be answered.
2. Treat every call and caller as important. Give the caller your undivided attention. Treat the telephone as a task in itself; don't be distracted by work on your desk.
3. Answer the phone with a smile; it actually does help convey a cheerful attitude. There is no need for you to transfer any of your bad feelings to the caller.
4. Do not eat or drink while answering the phone. Needless to say, do not chew gum.
5. Make sure you know which line is ringing before you pick up the phone.
6. Keep your telephone message pad and a pen handy so they can be easily reached.
7. Personalize your conversation by using the caller's name; "Yes, John, I'll be happy to send you an application," or "Thank you for calling, Mrs. Nair."
8. When taking messages for another person, make complete notes:
  - The caller's full name, spelled correctly (ask for correct spelling if in doubt).
  - The caller's department, institution, agency or firm.
  - The caller's complete phone number (include area code).
  - The nature of the call.
  - The date and time call was taken.
  - Your name or initials.

9. If you need to put a caller on hold immediately upon answering the phone, ask their permission before you put them on hold. Many callers would rather try calling again than being put on hold.

10. When you have several incoming calls simultaneously, don't panic. Handle the situation in the following manner:

Ask someone in the vicinity to help you by answering one of the calls, if someone is available.

Calmly excuse yourself: "Good Morning. May I put you on hold a moment while I answer the other phone? (or, Will you please excuse me a moment while I answer the other phone?) Thank you." Put them on hold.

Answer the other call and ask them if you may put them on hold.

Return promptly to the original call - remember you've asked someone to hold on for just 'a moment'.



11. When it's necessary to direct a call to a co-worker request the caller's name before transferring the call. Notify the co-worker of this so that he or she can be ready when he or she picks up the phone.

12. Be tactful when co-workers are away from the office. Don't say that someone is "out for coffee," or "on a break." Say the person "is away from his/her desk (office) now. May I take a message?"

13. Be a good listener; make notes while the caller is speaking. If you are going to put a caller on hold, make a note of which line you are on.

14. Avoid jargon, technical expressions and acronyms that may confuse the caller.

15. Use businesslike phrases instead of slang. Say "Yes," "Certainly" and "Of course," instead of "OK," "Yah," and "Uh-huh."

16. When placing calls, identify yourself and the office. "This is Anjali Mehta in the Research Division."

17. If it is necessary to leave the line, explain the reason and excuse yourself. Always place the caller on hold, do not just cover the mouthpiece with your hand. Thank the caller when you return. If it will be longer than one or two minutes, ask to return the call.

18. If a customer is talking with you in person and the phone rings, excuse yourself to the customer and answer the phone. Ask the caller to wait a moment or offer to return the call.

19. If a customer approaches while you are on the phone, excuse yourself briefly from the caller and acknowledge the visitor. Ask if the visitor can wait a moment while you finish the call.

## 20. Always let the caller hang up first.

### Telephone Etiquette at a Glance

	This is the right way. . .	This is not acceptable. . .
Person called is available	*May I tell her who's calling? or, *May I tell him what your call is in reference to?	*Hang on, he's here *I'll get her.
Person called is not available	*Mrs. Doe is taking another call right now. Would you care to hold? or, *Mr. Smith isn't available right now. May I or someone else help you? or, *Mrs. Williams is away from her desk. May I take a message? Or would you like her voice mail?	*She's busy talking now. *Could you call later? *He's not here.
Leaving the Line	*Would you mind waiting while I check, please? or, *It will take about a minute. Would you like to wait or shall I call you back? (wait for an answer)	*Hang on. *Just a minute. *Let me look around for it. *Hold on, I'll see what I can do.
Returning to the Line	*Thank you for waiting, I have that information. *I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. I can help you now. *I'm afraid I could not locate the information. May I please call you back in a little while after I have done so?	*Okay, the date on that was June 18. *Are you still there? *I can't find it. Can I call you back?
Completing the Conversation	*Thank you for calling, Mrs. Gupta. I'm glad I was able to help you. Goodbye. or, *You're welcome, Mr. Patel, goodbye.	*Bye now *O.K. So long.

### Telephone Impressions

How do you "look" (sound) to the customer? Are you able to convey your thoughts accurately in order to achieve our objective?

#### 1. How to project sincerity over the phone:

- Use natural vocabulary and tone of voice.
- Keep your voice clear, inflection up and tone bright.
- Avoid extravagant claims, obvious exaggerations, etc.
- Relate what you are saying to the caller's needs and view point.



#### 2. How to project a friendly, caring quality:

- Use tone and manner that are warm and cordial. Smile, identify yourself, as well as the caller, with warmth and interest.
- Do not be formal or inflexible.
- Do not rush. Pace yourself to what the caller says.
- Be attentive. Respond to what the caller says.
- Be courteous.

### 3. How to show responsiveness:

- Answer the caller's questions, clearly and to the point.
- Get your facts straight by checking with the caller. Ask questions.
- Do not sound as if you are reading something or saying it from notes.
- Always listen to what you are saying and what it means, especially to the caller.
- Do not speed or rush over points familiar to you, but unfamiliar to the caller.
- Avoid soft, low pitch speech.

### 4. Ways to avoid sounding mechanical:

- Guard against a tired tone of voice, giving the impression of someone bored with doing the same job again and again.
- Vary your phrasing from call to call.
- Let your delivery develop, as much as possible, out of the response from the caller.

### 5. Some skills that will make you a professional:

- Answer the phone before or during the second ring.
- Hold the mouthpiece about an inch from your lips.
- Never slam the receiver down.
- Always let the caller hang up first.



### How to Handle an Angry Caller

Sooner or later, everyone who regularly uses a business telephone has to deal with an angry caller. The way you handle this situation is important both to you and your organization.



1. Remember that your instinctive reaction to someone who starts to "chew you out" is to get pretty huffy yourself. That is the worst thing you can do.
2. Listen carefully and do not interrupt. Do not argue or contradict. Agree if you can without misleading. Let them know you understand the cause of anger and perhaps even feel the anger is justified.
3. If you or the office is at fault, admit it but do not dwell on it. Nothing will lower an angry caller's temperature faster than honest acknowledgment of an error.
4. Do everything you can to correct the trouble that produced the storm. If immediate action is impossible, indicate that the matter will be looked into promptly and followed with a reply. Thank the caller for bringing it to your attention.



A calm, reasonable approach to an angry caller can have the following effect:

- Prevent the situation from worsening.
- Solve the problem with a minimum of delay.
- Help to avoid undue stress and resentment from both parties.
- Create a positive image as capable, helpful, friendly and resourceful.

## E-MAIL COMMUNICATION



### **Don't Be A Novelist**

Messages should be concise and to the point. Think of it as a telephone conversation, except you are typing instead of speaking. Nobody has ever won a prize for literature for a telephone conversation nor will they win one for an e-mail message.

Its also important to remember that some people receive hundreds of e-mail messages a day so the last thing they want to see is a message that's long and rambling.

### **Too Much Punctuation!!!**

Don't get caught up in excessive punctuation. Some people put a dozen exclamation points at the end of a sentence for added emphasis. This is highly incorrect and rude. Exclamation points are just another form of ending a sentence.



If something is **important** it should be reflected in your text, not in your punctuation.

### **It should be just plain text.**

Using HTML to format messages so that they have fancy fonts and colors is asking for trouble. There are lots of e-mail clients (and some servers), which cannot handle messages in these formats. The message will come in as utter gibberish or in the worst case, crash the e-mail client. This does happen.

### **Subject Lines**

A subject line that pertains clearly to the e-mail body will help people mentally shift to the proper context before they read your message. The subject line should be brief (as many mailers will truncate long subject lines), does not need to be a complete sentence, and should give a clue to the contents of the message.

### ***For example:***

Subject: home inspection scheduled for Tuesday

Dear Sunil,

The buyers have scheduled the home inspection for 3:00 this Tuesday afternoon, if that is all right with your seller.

For time-critical messages, starting with URGENT: is a good idea (especially if you know the person gets a lot of email):

Subject: URGENT: home inspection must be rescheduled

Dear Sunil,

The buyer must leave town on a business trip and asks if the inspection can be rescheduled for the following day, Wednesday at 4:00.

**Be careful not to use 'URGENT' often, else your credibility will be ruined.**

For requests, starting with REQ: can signal that action is needed:

Subject: REQ: Closing date has been set

The closing date for has been set for 2:00 p.m. at Hari Bhavan, Santhome Road. If you or your agent cannot attend, please let me know immediately and we will suggest suitable alternatives.

If you are offering non-urgent information that requires no response from the other person, prefacing the subject line with FYI: (For Your Information) is appropriate, as in:

Subject: FYI: Bakshi Report

The report seems to have been very well received though we will have to wait to hear from them officially.

#### **Avoid Abbreviations**

Abbreviation usage is quite rampant with e-mail. In the quest to save keystrokes, users have traded clarity for confusion (unless you understand the abbreviations). **At the very most, use only abbreviations that are already common to the English language, such as FYI and BTW.** Beyond that, you run the risk of confusing your recipient.

#### **Salutations**

If you normally address a person by letter as Miss/Mrs./Ms./Mr. then that's the way to would initially address them in e-mail. If you normally call them by their first name then "Dear Anand" is appropriate. If you are unsure, stick to the formal salutation.



#### **Signatures**

On a paper document you would typically close the document (after your signature) with your name and title such as:

Anand Mishra

Senior Networking Engineer

In e-mail messages, include the same information (minus the signature) at the bottom of your messages, together with your company name. Many companies use abbreviated names or numbers for employee e-mail addresses and those abbreviations or numbers will mean little to someone not familiar with their significance. It is also recommended to include your e-mail address in this information.

You will sometimes run across a user's signature that contains a quote (such as "...the secret to life is that there is no secret.") after the person's name. This has become a fairly common practice but is really not recommended in business.



You will also come across signatures that contain images built out of keyboard characters. These are also to be avoided in business/work e-mails.

#### **Quotes**

Nothing is more wasteful than to reply to an e-mail by including a complete copy of the original with just the words "I agree", "Okay" or "Ditto" at the bottom.

The correct method is to use quoting. Example:

>and do you agree with the proposal to hire Mr. Roy to handle our legal services?<

Yes. Please make the necessary arrangements.

The '>' in front of the text indicates to the recipient that this is quoted material from his/her last e-mail message. The second sentence is your response to the quoted material. The key with quoting is to include enough material in the quote so that it will be relevant to the recipient. Imagine that the original message was a hundred lines long and the only question that required a response was located in the last sentence. Why send the whole message back in the reply? That would cause the recipient to scroll through the hundred-line message again just to find your response at the bottom.

This is a very important aspect as many people have formed the habit of replying to a message by hitting the 'Reply' key without bothering to delete the entire previous message. This is also extremely vexing to the recipient as he or she already has their copy of the message they have sent you and do not need another unnecessary copy.

### **Save A Tree**

One of the goals for e-mail usage is to eliminate (or greatly reduce) the shuffling of paper, but what chance does that have if a significant number of people are going to print every message they receive. This does not mean that all messages should not be printed. However far too many messages are printed for no reason.

### **Privacy**

**There is no such thing as a private e-mail.** With some e-mail systems, the e-mail administrator has the ability to read any and all e-mail messages and companies do monitor employee e-mail.

**E-mail software is like all software in that occasionally things go wrong.** If this happens, you may end up receiving e-mail meant for another person or your e-mail may get sent to the wrong person. Either way, what you thought was private is not private anymore.

**Somewhere in the world there is a person (usually a hacker) who is able to read your e-mail if he/she tries hard enough.** Usually, there are security measures in place to prevent this from happening, but no security is one hundred percent hacker-proof.

**Do not send anything by e-mail that you would not want posted on the company bulletin board.** If it's safe enough for the bulletin board, it's safe enough for e-mail. If you are debating whether or not to send something personal by e-mail, either deliver it by hand or send it by snail mail.

### **Flames**

To be flamed means that you've sent e-mail to a person that has caused that person to respond in many, not-so-nice words. It's basically a verbal attack in electronic form.

Sometimes the reason for a flame is quite obvious but in other cases you just never know. You might send what you think is a harmless e-mail to ten people. Nine people may respond in a rational tone while the tenth sends you a flame. Remember that everyone sees the world differently

What do you? The best way to respond to a flame would be to ignore it and go about your life as logical and rational human being. If this is not your first reaction, it probably will be after you've been flamed a couple dozen times. You will find out that responses just aren't worth the effort

If you do choose to respond you will probably end up in what is known as a "flame war". This is where two or more people end up exchanging flames for an extended period of time, usually to the point that users start making really personal and nasty comments. At some point, all those

participating in the war will eventually forget what originally started it and go back to being normal human beings.

**Avoid getting Flamed**

**Never send e-mail in all UPPER CASE.** Use of upper-case words is the equivalent of shouting in some one's ear.

**Never make a comment about grammar or punctuation.** Nobody wants to feel like they are exchanging e-mail with their schoolteacher.

**Sending mass e-mails.** This will generate more flames than the devil himself. Think about the amount of junk mail you receive everyday by snail mail. Even though you don't want it, you find you must look through all of it because somewhere in that stack of unwanted advertisements and wasted paper could be your monthly water bill. The same principle applies to the e-mail. Would you want to search through a mailbox full of advertisements simply to find that all-important message from your boss?