

10 Simple Secrets of Great Communicators

You Can Improve Your Workplace Communication Skills with These Tips -

Would you like to become an excellent communicator? Convincing reasons exist for why you will want to enhance your ability to communicate effectively.

You will create more opportunities to accomplish your work mission. You will build better and more rewarding relationships with your coworkers and manager. You will achieve more goals with less energy and reduce the opportunity for misunderstandings and cross-purposes.

Great communicators are viewed as successful individuals by coworkers. They become go-to people in an organization because people equate efficacy with effective communication. Great communicators contribute more in their organizations and receive more opportunities for promotion and recognition in their careers. Are you motivated and excited to learn the secrets of great communicators? Here are ten of them.

1. Build the Relationship First—Always

When a great communicator approaches a coworker, he takes the time to say, “good morning” and “how’s your day going?” “Did you have a great weekend?” The effect of the relationship-building forays is incalculable. He sends the message, each time he communicates, that he cares about the receiver of the message. He demonstrates that, no matter how busy or over extended he is, he has time to care about you.

When I worked at the phone company, I was reminded of this secret—loudly. One morning, I answered an internal phone call, “Albert Mensah, how can I help you?” My caller’s response was a silent pause, and then he said, “Hi Albert, how’s your day going? Has it been a good week since we met on Monday?” Something about the way he deliberately slowed our entry into the business discussion got my attention.

Practicing this behavior was difficult for me at first because my tendency was to jump right into the business discussion, but I've never regretted that I took the time to remind myself. My internal call greeting became, "Hi, this is Albert."

Build the relationship first for successful communication. For even more successful communication, continue to build the relationship in all interactions in any setting over time. Goodwill has an accumulative effect.

2. Know What You're Talking About

Obtain the knowledge, insight, and forward thinking ability necessary to earn the respect of your colleagues for your industry or subject area expertise. Your coworkers won't listen if they don't believe that you bring expertise to the table. Your successful coworkers spend time with you because they respect your knowledge and the value that you bring to the conversation.

They won't respect or listen to, let alone be influenced by, individuals who do not know what they are talking about. So, when you think about secrets of great communicators, subject matter expertise may head the list.

3. Listen More Than You Speak

I received feedback recently that a manager held a performance development planning meeting with an employee and talked 55 minutes of the hour. This is an egregious example of a manager dominating a discussion, but it serves as a reminder. Great communicators listen more than they speak. When they speak, they are frequently asking questions to draw out the knowledge and opinions of their coworkers.

When you allow yourself to listen, you often hear what is not being said. You can read between the spoken lines to understand the whole context of the other person's thinking and needs.

This does not mean that they never speak, but it places the emphasis on using the knowledge of the team. It affirms for the team members that their opinions matter and they are valued. It marks you as a great communicator who cares about what others think.

4. Focus on Understanding What the Other Person Is Saying

When a colleague is speaking, don't spend the time preparing your response in your mind.

Instead, ask questions for clarification and to make certain that you thoroughly understand what the other person is communicating. Focus your mind on listening and understanding.

If you find yourself (and that little voice in your head) arguing, prepping your response, or refuting what your colleague is saying, you are not focused on thoroughly understanding her communication. You have stopped listening and have refocused the discussion on your needs.

5. Use a Feedback Loop

Say, "here is what I heard you say" and repeat the gist of the content of the message that you received from the other person's communication. Don't ascribe meaning to your coworker's communication. You are using a feedback loop to check your understanding and to make sure you shared meaning.

When you check your understanding, you avoid miscommunication and misunderstanding. You circumvent hard feelings and protracted explanations about what your coworker meant.

6. Listen to the Nonverbal Communication the Other Person Exhibits

Nonverbal communication is a powerful voice in any interaction. The voice tonality, body language, and facial expressions speak more loudly than the verbal communication (sending) or the actual words in many communication exchanges. Your coworker's posture, how he holds the whiteboard marker, and his distance from you as he speaks are all powerful messengers.

This is why you find that great communicators seek in-person interaction. They know the amount of information that they lose when they communicate via email, phone, IM, or texting. The youngest generation at work may not recognize the importance of talking with coworkers in person.

They are enculturated to use electronic methods, and this must change. For facts, these methods work. If you want information that is richer and deeper, and for discussion and exchange, you seek out your coworkers. Great communicators listen with their eyes.

7. Watch for Patterns, Inconsistencies, and Consistencies

In any communication, the opportunity for misunderstanding is ever present. A key indicator that your coworker is not stating her true feelings or that she is going along with the group, rather than agreeing with the decision, is a combination of factors that you can observe.

You want to watch for patterns (is this how your coworker typically reacts) and inconsistencies (is this consistent with what you expect from this person).

You also want to watch for matching words, message, the tone of voice, and body language. If any of these verbal and nonverbal communication factors are inconsistent or sending different messages, communication failure is imminent.

Coworkers tend to listen to the nonverbal communication over the verbal. If you are coaching an employee who sends contradictory messages, this is a powerful

factor in the misunderstanding that can happen with coworkers. It's simple, preventable, and often overlooked as a key factor.

8. If Something that another Employee Is Doing or Saying Bothers You, It's Your Issue

You are the person who is bothered by the action or communication of your coworker. His actions or communication may have triggered your reaction, but the response belongs to you. You will never effectively communicate if you are pointing your finger and trying to make it your coworker's issue. He was just trying to communicate.

You need to take responsibility for owning your own emotional reactions. Use "**I**" **messages** to demonstrate that you know that you are responsible for the reaction. For example: "You really messed up that customer interaction" is much less effective and honest than, "I was upset watching you interact with that customer for these reasons..."

You-ing a coworker is rarely effective communication. You will most likely receive a defensive response which makes the communication fail. Delivering an honest **I message** instead is powerful.

9. Wait to Give Critical or Controversial Feedback

If you are going to say anything critical or controversial, or if you're angry or emotional, wait 24 hours before you say it, send it, or post it to see if you still feel that way. Pausing before communicating is an under-appreciated skill of great communicators. You don't need to communicate what you think or feel immediately. In fact, your communication will be more powerful and thoughtful if you allow the circumstances to marinate for a period of time.

In this era of immediate and constant communication, thoughtful communication goes by the wayside. The instantaneous reaction is promoted and reinforced. It is often ineffective and demeaning. Great communicators collect their thoughts and develop significant "I messages."

10. Open Your Mind to New Ideas

New ideas live or die in their first communication to a person who has power in an organization. Using the other communication skills presented here, you can make a new idea flourish or fail in an instant.

Rather than immediately rejecting a new idea, approach, or way of thinking, pause and consider the possibilities. Consider what might work in your organization rather than what will fail. Think about the possibility rather than the impossibilities.

Don't be guilty of the lethal sins of rejecting, putting down, or diminishing an idea before it has been articulated and explored. No, you didn't try the idea already and it failed. Circumstances change. You can never repeat the exact circumstances of the first try. Great communicators listen for opportunities and pursue them.

All Communication Will Go Better if Your Coworker Trusts You

It is not enough to be a good listener and to draw out the other person's opinions. They will not level with you or share their real thoughts if they don't trust you.

You gain trust in your everyday interactions with people when you tell the truth—even when it's difficult. When you consistently exhibit integrity and trustworthiness in your daily interpersonal conversations and actions, you build your ability to be an excellent communicator.

The coworkers with whom you interact will open up to you. They will be more likely to problem solve with you without concern for losing, and they won't fear to look bad, stupid, or uninformed if they trust you. Do you see the power of communicating when you have the other party's trust? It's amazing.

If you work to enhance your own communication by practicing these skills and taking these actions, you can become a great communicator. Becoming a great communicator will enhance your career, make your days at work rewarding and fulfilling, and reinforce positive relationships with coworkers who love to work with you. Can it get any better than that?

Albert Mensah