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Avoid These Common Communication Mistakes

In both our personal and work lives, there are times when we connect with other people and make them happy to communicate with us. In these instances, there is a free flow of information where both parties leave the communication with positive feelings. Then, of course, there are times when obstacles get in the way of effective communication, and we leave with a mediocre or negative impression about what just took place.



To a large extent, your success as a communicator is a result of certain strategies that you may be employing, either consciously or without much thought. There's a lot at stake when you communicate. If you want positive personal relationships or a successful marriage, the effectiveness of your communication will likely determine the type of person you attract as well as the fulfillment you get from your marriage.

In business, the effective communicators are the ones who will be respected and promoted to leadership positions. In sales, good communicators are more persuasive, establish rapport and sell more than those with weak skills. To be effective, it's imperative to follow sound communication strategies.

However, even the most skilled among us sometimes communicate in ways that turn people off. The following are some communication "killers" to watch out for. By avoiding these traps, we can build rapport, leave a positive impression on others, and make communicating with us a valuable experience.

1. Making the other person "wrong." Too many people view communication as an argument, where the objective is to prove that they are "right" and that the other person is wrong. The other person will always resent your attempt to establish that he or she is wrong.

Think about it: how do YOU like it when someone tries to prove that you are wrong? I'll bet that you resent it when a co-worker or family member plays this game with you. Many times we assert that we are right in matters of opinion, where there really is no right or wrong. Even if you are quoting a statistic and you know the other person is mistaken, you gain little by insisting that he or she is wrong.

Granted, there are some instances where it is important to point out another person's error - such as when someone insists the meeting is on Monday and you know it is on Tuesday. However, this is the exception and it's far better to make your point without setting up winners and losers.



2. Talking too much about yourself. Just about everyone falls into this trap. You get in a discussion with someone and you dominate the conversation by talking about yourself, while allowing the other party very little opportunity to speak. When you talk only about yourself without letting the other party participate, you give the message that you don't care about the other person.

This creates resentment and that person will not look forward to communicating with you in the future. On the other hand, when you listen to someone else, that individual feels validated and important. In your upcoming conversations, make a note of the percentage of time you are speaking, as opposed to listening.

Remember this illustration: we are born with two ears and one mouth, and should strive to use them in that proportion. When you listen twice as much as you speak, the other person will have a positive impression of you and will often feel that you are an interesting conversationalist, even though you did very little talking.

3. Interrupting. This is one of the most common communication blunders. We start out listening to someone but then we begin to think of what we're going to say next and we tune them out. When we have our thoughts ready to launch, we break into the discussion and start talking. This is insulting to the other party as you did not let that person complete his or her comments. Discipline yourself to let others finish their thoughts before you chime in with yours.

4. Changing the subject abruptly in a group discussion. This is a variation on interrupting. You're talking about your recent vacation with a group of friends when someone cuts you off and says something like, "Did you see the baseball game last night?" How does that make you feel?

In most cases, the person cutting you off wants to steer the discussion back to a topic where he or she can re-assume command of the discussion and dominate once again. Sometimes, the person who cut you off just has a limited attention span and needs to keep changing subjects. Regardless of the motive, it's rude.

5. Talking too much about the negative. People are bombarded with negative news from the media. Terrorism, violent crime and natural disasters are just a few of the topics that receive many hours of daily coverage. Then there's the negative "drama" in your personal life – your disappointing relationships, unfulfilling career, or bouts with illness.

While it's only natural to share your life experiences with others, especially friends and co-workers, you don't need to tell them everything that's wrong. What makes you think they want to

hear about your dysfunctional family or the fact that you're not appreciated at work? People have enough troubles of their own without hearing your tales of woe. Keep your conversations uplifting and others will look forward to speaking with you.

6. Treating your cell phone as more important than the person you're speaking to. More and more people feel the need to be "connected" with the world 24/7. These individuals are slaves to their cell phones. It doesn't matter whether you're in the middle of a conversation or meeting with them. If their phone rings or shows a message coming in, they immediately divert their attention away from you. The message they're giving is that the incoming communication is more important than anything you have to offer. Unless you are expecting an emergency message (which is rarely the case), turn off or ignore your phone when meeting with others. You'll have plenty of time to examine those messages later.



7. Looking for more "important" people. This usually happens at networking events. You're engaged in a discussion with someone when you see a person you perceive as "more important" than the person you're currently talking to. Your eyes dart toward the "important" person and all you want to do is break away from the existing discussion and approach the person you perceive as more valuable. This is an insult to the person you're talking to.

If you feel you must interrupt the conversation to seize an opportunity to speak to someone else, explain the situation and promise the person that you will be back to resume your conversation with him or her. Then make sure to get back to that person after your other discussion is complete.

If you are guilty of any of the communication mistakes above, keep these in mind and work to improve your communication skills. These are not simple habits to break and you'll need to be vigilant. But you can become a more effective communicator and watch as other people respect you more – and your personal and professional relationships improve.

Too Little Sleep Can Damage Your Physical and Mental Health

If you think cutting back on your sleep (less than the nightly 7-8 hours of sleep recommended for adults) won't harm your health, think again. Growing scientific evidence suggests that too little sleep or erratic sleep may harm your health, mood and productivity at work.

Sleep and your appetite - A study from the University of Chicago found that lack of sleep makes you want to eat more. The reason? Sleep loss appears to trigger changes in hormones that regulate appetite and stimulate hunger for high-calorie foods like cookies and chips. According to another study, people who get less than the recommended seven to eight hours of sleep a night are up to 73% more likely to be obese.

Sleep and your physical health - According to the Harvard-run Nurses' Study, failing to get enough sleep heightens the risk for a variety of major illnesses, including heart disease, cancer and diabetes. A report from the study summarizes that a sleep deficit may put the body into a



state of high alert, increasing the production of stress hormones and driving up blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart attacks and strokes. Additionally, people who are sleep-deprived have elevated levels of substances in the blood that indicate a heightened state of inflammation in the body, which is now also recognized as a major risk factor for heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes.

Sleep and your mental health - It is well-known that sleep problems can be a key sign of depression. However, the latest medical research now reports that the reverse is also true - sleep disorder can actually trigger depression or other mood disorders. The explanation? Sleep, mood and mental/emotional behaviors all share a complex mix of chemistry in the brain. Disordered sleep appears to set off an array of forces in the brain and nervous system that can result in a depressed mood, major depressive episode or other mood disorder.

Sleep and your productivity - According to a Better Sleep Council survey, sleep-deprived workers reported the following as work-related consequences from lack of sleep:

- 31 percent reported a decline in quality of work
- 31 percent reported impaired thinking or judgment at work
- 30 percent reported trouble retaining information

The survey summarized that "sleep deprivation impacts your alertness, your productivity and your ability to socially interact with co-workers."

What to do

If you have difficulty with your sleep for any reason, take action. Most sleep difficulties are either caused or reinforced by lifestyle habits or behaviors that are antagonistic toward good, restful sleep habits. There are many resources at your local book store, library or online (National Sleep Foundation website: www.sleepfoundation.org) that are filled with information and tips about how to get adequate sleep.

Forgiveness - Good for Your Health and Happiness

If you find yourself unable to forgive those who have hurt you - no matter how small or major the offense - think again about what you are actually doing to yourself. Holding onto bitterness, pain, blame, anger or hostility is a form of internal stress that can undermine your health and quality of life. When we're unforgiving, we are the ones who pay the price over and over.



Forgiving lowers stress

In a 2001 study of college students, study subjects were instructed to either dwell on the injustices done to them, or imagine themselves forgiving their offenders. Those who focused on unforgiving responses showed signs of increased stress - their blood pressure surged, heart rate increased, facial muscles tensed, and their negative feelings escalated. Conversely, forgiving responses induced calmer feelings and physical responses.

According to the latest medical research, forgiveness can lead to:

- reduced stress and hostility

- fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety and chronic pain
- lower risk of alcohol and substance abuse
- improved heart function / lower blood pressure
- improved relationships
- improved sleep

Learning to forgive

Forgiveness is not excusing someone else's wrong behavior, nor does it necessarily include reconciliation with the person who wronged us. Forgiveness means no longer dwelling on the wounds that keep us tied to the past. By learning to forgive, you take responsibility for how you feel and take back the power from others to keep hurting you.

The process of forgiveness begins by recognizing, accepting and working through angry and hurt feelings. Journaling, writing letters (even if they are unmailed), or talking with a trusted friend can be helpful. Seek out information or books about "how to forgive" or seek the help of a therapist or other mental health professional to help you through the process of forgiveness.

For Your Information

HAPPINESS BOOSTER

Live with purpose. People who strive for something personally significant - whether it's learning a new skill, raising a good family, or changing careers - are happier than those who don't have strong dreams or aspirations. Pick one or more significant goals and devote time and effort pursuing them.



STRESS MANAGEMENT TIP

Block out time in your daily schedule to take a break. A Harvard Medical School study concluded that as little as 10 to 15 minutes a day of private time can cut down on stress, headaches, colds, poor sleep and increase your productivity.

BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY

To help keep balance in your life, ask yourself these questions:

- Can success in one area of my life compensate for failure in another?
- Can success in my profession compensate for a broken marriage, ruined health, or failure as a parent?

Identify your various roles and attach a level of priority to each. Use this as a guide toward making intelligent decisions on where to put your focus.

Employee Assistance Program Services

PROVIDED BY YOUR EMPLOYER FOR YOU AND YOUR DEPENDENTS

Your Employee Assistance Program is a prepaid and confidential program designed to help employees and their dependents resolve problems which may be interfering with their personal, work or home life. EAP Consultants offers help for marital and family issues, substance abuse, job concerns, emotional problems, life adjustments, legal issues, financial matters, and elder care and child care referrals.

If you're experiencing problems which are causing concern, you and your EAP Counselor can work as a team to find solutions.

For assistance, call EAP Consultants at: **800-869-0276** or request services by secure e-mail on the Member Access page of our website at <http://www.eapconsultants.com/>.