

## ***Communicate with Clarity***

Communication is at the very core of everything we do and is fundamental to our personal success and our business success. Communication is also crucial in the general flow of daily life. Whether it's through the words we speak, the messages we write, our body language, or even the blinkers on our cars, we are constantly interacting with the world around us. Everything we do and say – and also what we don't – conveys some kind of message, yet often, we aren't conscious of *how* we interact from one moment to the next or the effects that can have on our relationships, productivity, expectations, and stress level. Keep reading to see how interacting with intention leads to more effective communication.

### **Get to the point**

In communicating with others, it's best to get to your point quickly. As some would say, *don't bury the lede*. Whether it's a request via email, a meeting you've called, or a quick stop at a coworker's desk, try not to give unnecessary information or provide backstory unless these details are absolutely pertinent or specifically requested.

When writing an email, sum up the purpose of your message with a single sentence at the beginning, or use bullet points to provide a quick snapshot of information as opposed to a series of paragraphs. If you like providing details or truly feel that others should have all of the particulars, add them at the end below your leading sentence or after your bullets. Not only does this allow you to cater to those who want all of the information *and* to those who are short on time, it also serves as a reference that recipients can go back to as needed.

### **Practice active listening**

One of the most intentional ways to interact with others is by being a good listener. It's not enough to simply hear what someone says, you must also take in, process the information, and respond thoughtfully. One way to find out whether you're a good listener is by asking yourself the five questions below.

*When someone is speaking to you, do you:*

- Begin forming your response before the person has finished?
- Find your mind wandering?
- Feel impatient or bored?
- Cut the person short or complete their sentences?
- Relate your own experience without acknowledging what the person has said?

Survey adapted from [MindfulSpring.com](https://www.MindfulSpring.com)

If this sounds like you, try to catch yourself the next time. Set aside your brain's inner chatter and shift your attention back to what the other person is saying. Active listening is about showing the other person you care by giving them your undivided, quiet attention as they speak. It's about acknowledging their opinions and feelings or validating their experience and letting them finish talking before giving a response (if one is warranted). Active listening does not necessarily mean you agree with what the other is saying; however, it does show respect if you listen and consider the other person's view.

### **Mitigate misunderstandings**

We've all known the frustration that occurs when one email becomes a swirl of back and forth to clear up some confusion, or the disappointment that comes when the end product we receive doesn't meet our expectations. Often, these experiences stem from unintentionally poor or vague communication. Be mindful as you provide information to others and leave nothing up to interpretation.

One option, as you describe a situation, is to use a person's or thing's name instead of pronouns – like *she*, *him*, *it*, *this*, or *those* – which could refer to anyone and everything. Also, make sure to take time to read the entire email in order to answer all the questions the other person asks. Additionally, consider going to speak to that person at their desk, or pick up the phone to speak with the person directly as a way to resolve misunderstandings.

**Assume nothing**

You're likely familiar with the cardinal rule about never making assumptions, and it especially applies when it comes to clear, intentional communication. Verify crucial details like dates and times and locations if they are unclear, incomplete, or missing. Repeat back what you think you heard or restate your understanding of a discussion. Before leaving a conversation about a project or task, for example, confirm the end goal and your role, and go through what you believe are your actions items. And finally, don't assume that you can always read a person's tone in written correspondence – if you're unsure of the emotion or intent behind an email or text, call the person and ask.

To find out more about how you can become a more mindful communicator and improve your interactions, call the EAP today for helpful resources or to speak with a consultant.

The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to federal employees and their family members at no cost.

24 HOURS A DAY

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