

Upgrade Your Social Skills

With rapidly advancing technology at the helm, the way we communicate has – for better or worse – transformed significantly in recent decades. Long gone are the days of handwritten letters. And, it seems that face-to-face interactions and phone calls have become less frequent. Instead, we opt for more passive and, at times, more convenient communication methods like writing emails, sending text messages, and catching up with friends through social media. For all of the incredible benefits that a digital world affords us, the lack of authentic interaction could be hindering our socialization and communication with others. Keep reading for tips on strengthening your social skills and connecting more meaningfully.

Connect on a personal level. Remember that on the other end of every email, text, and phone call is a person. For instance, when it comes to work-related interactions, let the person know that you see them as more than just words on a screen or a voice on a call. Showing interest in them, their day, or personal life can go a long way to a more meaningful relationship. Before getting off the phone with someone, ask, *“How’s everything else going? Are you planning any time off for a vacation this year?”* or conclude an email exchange with a reference to something mentioned in an earlier conversation, like, *“Good luck to Madison at her karate tournament this weekend!”*

Choose clarity over brevity. It’s tempting to respond quickly, especially when communicating via email and text messaging. And while long emails and texts aren’t always appropriate, being *too* brief can lead to miscommunication and excessive back and forth to confirm or clarify. Additionally, the use of abbreviations and non-standard grammar, spelling, or punctuation can come off as unprofessional or give the impression that the recipient, or the matter at hand, doesn’t warrant your time or full attention. Hence, be sure that the message you’re sending can be clearly understood, and, if you find yourself typing a long paragraph, maybe just pick up the phone.

Practice more patience. Technology has afforded us so much ease that we’ve come to expect speed, convenience, and accuracy from almost everything in our lives. In a society of insta-everything, such high expectations have caused us to lose our patience. If you feel yourself getting grumpy when you’re waiting in line, irritated that your food hasn’t arrived yet, or frustrated when someone doesn’t reply right away, consider the other side of the situation. Try to have compassion instead of taking it personally or taking it out on the cashier, server, or your coworker. Maybe the store is unexpectedly short-staffed today, the restaurant’s ticketing system went down, or your coworker got pulled into an unplanned meeting.

Focus on one person or issue at a time. With so many daily demands at work and home, we often resort to multitasking. The problem is that unless you’re a computer, there’s no such thing, and doing several things at once means that none of tasks or coworkers that stop by get your full attention. Not only does this lead to more mistakes at work, it diminishes the ability to truly connect with others. Address one work task, coworker, or issue at a time to ensure you respond thoughtfully and appropriately. And when you’re enjoying time with a friend, prioritize them, not what’s happening on your phone. Be respectful and put your phone on do not disturb or put it out of sight.

Mix up your method. As with anything, repetition gets old after a while and can create stagnation. The same goes for communication and relationships. Email is a necessary part of our work lives, but it shouldn’t be your only mode of communication. Instead, pick up the phone now and again, plan a video conference, or an in-person meeting. Having a live discussion can lead to more personal, productive interactions and may help you become a more well-rounded communicator.

How we communicate has changed quite a bit over the years, but the importance of good communication and social aptitude hasn’t. Contact the EAP for a check-up of your skills and to receive resources, more information, or expert guidance from one of our licensed counselors. The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to federal employees at no cost.

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