



TRAINING | COACHING | CONSULTING | STRATEGIC PLANNING

What is Workplace Communication: Unlocking the Key

By Kris Schinke

A photograph of three business professionals in a meeting. A woman in a red dress is on the left, gesturing with her hand. A woman in a light-colored blazer is in the center, looking towards the man on the right. The man is wearing a grey suit and glasses. The background is a modern office setting with geometric patterns.

What is Workplace Communication?

OVERVIEW

Regardless of the reason to communicate, doing so effectively is an asset for our relationships, our experiences, our sense of well-being and accomplishment, and a plethora of other reasons. Understand your own style, including strengths and opportunity areas, and you have made a good stride forward in effectiveness.

Strong and effective communication skills are among the hardest to teach, yet also rank within the top human resource assets to possess. It all begins with understanding ourselves, our communication styles, and preferences, and why others may prefer something different.

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What is Communication?

“The imparting or exchanging of information or news”

We do this all day long, at home, at work, or anywhere else. Whether we are speaking, emailing, writing, signing, reading out loud, or gesturing, we are communicating. If we do this all day long, why are we not more effective?

What many don't realize is we all have different communication preferences, so if our preference is not met, we may not listen or respond. We may just tune out. Or become agitated and impatient. When this happens, we may become drained. None of these behaviors contribute to more effective communication.

In the context of workplace communication, this may be with internal customers, external customers or simply with each other. That includes up the chain of command, down the ranks and laterally.

John C. Maxwell states in his book, “Everyone Communicates - Few Connect”, “When you are trying to connect with others, it's not about you – it's about them. If you want to connect with others, you have to get over yourself. Connecting is the ability to identify with people and relate to them in a way that increases your influence with them”.

Three questions people are asking about you, according to Maxwell:

- Do you care for me?
- Can you help me?
- Can I trust you?

Maxwell goes on to suggest, people cannot succeed in life without communicating effectively. It's not enough just to work hard. It's not enough to do a great job. To be successful, you need to learn how to really communicate with others.

Good communication and leadership are all about connecting. If you can connect with others at every level – one-on-one, in groups, and with an audience – your relationships are stronger, your sense of community improves, your ability to create teamwork increases, your influence increases and your productivity skyrockets.

The following points can play an important role in the pursuit of effective communication and the ability to connect with others.

- Clearly telling another person (or group) what you think, feel, and want
- Standing up for your opinions, ideas, beliefs, and needs while respecting those of others
- Hearing what another person is really saying
- Constructively sharing your ideas and feelings



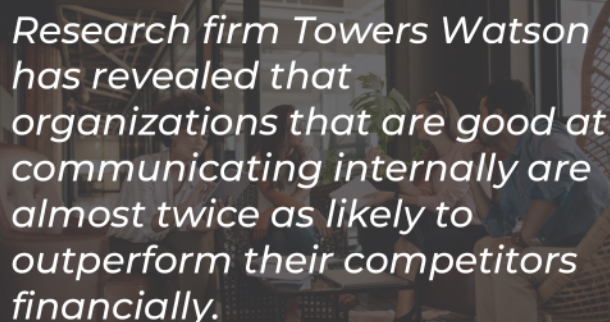


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Why is Communication Important?

In the context of business, the cost of a poor culture of communication can be steep. A poor culture of communication leads to conflict, inefficiency, dissatisfaction, and more; both internally (employees and shareholders) and externally (customers and suppliers). Ultimately this harms an organization's reputation, and bottom line.

An informed understanding of different communication styles empowers employees when interacting with not only each other, but importantly customers as well. A positive culture of communication means employees have the skills and experience to make the most of any relationship or event regardless of whether it is good or bad. This maximizes the benefits from the innumerable interactions that make up the everyday functioning of a business.



Research firm Towers Watson has revealed that organizations that are good at communicating internally are almost twice as likely to outperform their competitors financially.

Have you ever wondered why connecting with some people is easier for you than with others?

Maybe you have noticed that you relate better to colleagues who focus on areas such as dependability and stability. Or maybe you are more comfortable working with those who take a steady, sensible approach than those who fly by the seat of their pants.

Or maybe you relate best to people who are more supportive than competitive.

It all begins with understanding ourselves, our communication styles, and preferences, and why others may prefer something different.

Communication Strategies to Consider

Communication can take different forms including outbound (one-way), dialogue (two-way), and non-verbal (body language or visual). One can break this down even further to the different platforms of communication, but for the sake of this article micro detail won't be included.

Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills, meaning the quality of how we interact with others, are essential to hone. We can be easily, and likely, judged by how effective we are interacting with others, and having a reputation such as "difficult" will have a negative impact on our relations at work. The adage "treat others how you want to be treated" is a good rule of thumb to live by.

Interpersonal skills can include:

- What we say, and how we say it
- Body language, expressions, and tone of voice
- How well we listen and interpret what we hear

Social Skills

Social skills are another important set of skills to possess and facilitate interaction and communication with others by following social norms and relations.



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Social skills are critical in ensuring we can interact with others in forming and nurturing positive relationships, whether personal or professional. In today's online world of communication, social skills may be used less, although they are not less important to master.

Social skills can include:

- The ability to ask appropriate questions
- Giving and receiving compliments
- Making and maintaining eye contact
- Meeting and connecting with strangers
- Making small talk

Speaking Skills

Public speaking anxiety and fear impacts up to 75% of the general population and is known as the #1 fear in the world (National Institute of Mental Health). Speaking skills allow us to connect with others, influence decisions, motivate co-workers and subordinates, and share our opinions. It is recognized not all speaking is in front of a large audience, however, a trained public speaker will perform substantially better even with a small group, in a meeting, or even one-on-one. Like all other skills, speaking can be learned and takes discipline and practice.

Speaking well gives us credibility, and it is much more likely we can influence others when prepared, well spoken, and inspirational. Toastmasters International exists as a peer-led club where members learn to speak in front of others, are offered feedback for improvement, and graduate from a list of levels that lead to the ultimate designation, Distinguished Toastmaster.

Next to none of the 365,000 members (Toastmasters International 2020) join the organization to become professional speakers, but rather they want to improve their speaking skills for personal or professional development. Some keys to being a good speaker are:

- Engage your audience
- Be cognizant of body language
- Plan, and practice, your message or presentation
- Be clear and concise

Body Language

Body Language is non-verbal communication that impacts others more than us, since we are not always aware of how our body language is perceived. There are personalities who use a tremendous amount of body language when communicating by flailing hands and arms, pacing, and having an expressive face. Others, however, may prefer to avoid physical gestures and remain more neutral than expressive.

Regardless of our body language preference, which is not consciously preferred, by the way, it is an important area of awareness. Whether expressive and demonstrative, or closed and reserved, we must be aware of how our body language is perceived.

Remain aware of:

- Eye contact
- Personal space preferences
- Facial expression
- Posture and hand gestures


Image

Your personal image reflects your pride and self-awareness. A positive self-image contributes to improved confidence, a boost in social interaction, and demonstration of personal satisfaction. When we feel good, we send a non-verbal message suggesting that. We also demonstrate good judgement that our appearance is important to us, and we are willing to take the time and intent to look good.

Our physical appearance is the first thing others see, so it is natural that is how we are initially judged. That may not be considered correct, but it is reality. We do judge a book by its cover because it is subconscious. Your image can also reflect your personality, based on whether you look professional, mainstream, unique, or represent a certain fashion era. Although there is no right image, there is your image that reflects you.

Consider these suggestions when evaluating your image and personal brand:

- What story does your image suggest on every given day?
- Does it appear you have taken the time to select coordinates appropriate for the occasion?
- Are hair and nails well groomed, and shoes and clothing clean?
- Does your physical presence (i.e., posture, eye contact and handshake) suggest confidence?



A study by Arthur J. Gallagher and Co found that 60% of companies have not got a long-term internal communication strategy in place.

Organizations who are considering an internal communication strategy can consider asking their internal stakeholders what is currently going well, and what can be done differently. In the spirit of communication, this strategy should not be top-down since buy in and participation will not be optimum if at least some employees are not involved.

Strategy considerations:

- Frequency of messages, meetings, events, and other forms of communication such as newsletters or announcements
- Types of communication, using all available platforms to appeal to the generational demographics, including two-way feedback mechanisms
- Commitment to consistency of each channel
- Quality, acceptable language of content and expected turn around times
- How priority or emergency communication is shared
- Communications training workshops at all levels within the organization



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Of course, knowing the audience is an important factor for consideration. Once a strategy is in place, organizations should evaluate on an annual basis to ensure communication objectives are being met and the organization is keeping up with changing technology and workplace design. Leadership can learn a lot about the effectiveness of a communication strategy by “managing by walking around” and having face-to-face and open dialogue with employees to encourage feedback.

Researchers Dan and Chip Heath found that 63% of people who have seen a presentation are more likely to remember a story compared to 5% who will remember statistics that they heard in the presentation.

Communication Training

Strong and effective communication skills are among the hardest to teach, yet also rank within the top human resource assets to possess. According to LinkedIn Learning (2023), the following are the most in-demand and sought after skills, with Communication ranking #2.

1. Human Resources
- 2. Communication**
3. Management
4. Sales
5. Customer Service
6. Leadership
7. Training
8. Hiring

Training employees in basic communication skills creates a cycle of positive reinforcement throughout the business. Ultimately good communication has an impact on areas such as teamwork, customer service, leadership development, productive meetings, and morale.

Personality-based learning helps us all relate to the communication style we are most comfortable with, and ultimately are hard-wired to understand. Communication is a fundamental dimension of human nature and we have a natural propensity to be more fast-paced and outspoken, or cautious and reflective. Secondly, we may be naturally more skeptical and questioning, whereas others are more accepting and warm.

The **Everything DiSC Workplace®** is a personal development learning experience that measures an individual's preferences and tendencies based on the DiSC® model. This simple yet powerful model describes four basic styles and participants receive personalized insights that deepen their understanding of self and others, making workplace interactions more enjoyable and effective. The result is a more engaging and collaborative workforce, who communicates well, that can spark meaningful culture improvement in an organization.

The **Everything DiSC®** learning experience also deepens self-awareness, inspires appreciation of others, and fosters effective communication and collaboration. The training and personalized learning experience teaches participants to understand themselves and others, while learning to appreciate the different priorities, preferences, and values everyone brings to the workplace. Everyone can benefit from that, regardless of title or position, department, or function.



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Everything DiSC® connects people on a human level to deliver “A-ha!” moments that transform workplaces from talented individuals into collaborative, thriving cultures. Each workplace has unique needs. **Everything DiSC®** provides versatile tailoring features that allow each organization to easily design a customized program that is right for them.

The program also offers Comparison Reports between two individuals designed to help better understand one another and to build more effective working relationships. Motivation for each behavior is identified, benefits of working together, and roadblocks that may occur. This allows two individuals to discuss mutual tips to working most effectively together in areas such as risk taking, communication, pace, openness, and temperament.

A personalized learning experience can benefit every person in an organization given the ability to communicate more effectively – regardless of title or position, in building more effective relationships at work.

How to Connect with Others

Many people have found they do not really understand their work relationships and colleagues. They may have found themselves in conflict with others and not sure how to handle it. If we understand our own workplace personality, we can better understand how we relate to others and vice versa.

Participants are provided with valuable insights that unlock engagement and inspire effective communication and collaboration. Participants explore priorities that drive their behavior, learn what comes naturally and what might be challenging when interacting with others, and gain actionable strategies to strengthen their interpersonal skills at all levels in their workplace.

Understanding the **Everything DiSC®** program provides one with valuable insights that will help one better understand oneself and others, all while offering actionable ways to strengthen relationships in the workplace. Using a research-validated learning model, this training offers personalized insights for participants, helping one to discover how to better connect and effectively work with each other.

With **Everything DiSC®**, team members will be able to:

- Discover their DiSC® style
- Understand other styles
- Build more effective relationships
- Learn ideal communication skills for a variety of styles



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Conflict in the workplace can have a negative drain on culture and, according to a survey of Fortune 500 companies, 92% say improving their corporate culture would improve the value of their company.

A poor or weak company culture can:

- Negatively impact employee stress levels
- Increase employee turnover
- Harm customer service levels
- Hinder ideal communications
- Decrease company sales and profits

Engaged employees can help companies achieve a competitive advantage and that has a real impact on ROI (Return on Investment). Today's millennial employee expects their company (and their leaders) to care how they feel at work and may even decide on whether to accept a job offer based on what they perceive the culture to be.

What happens when a conversation gets emotional?

We avoid it because we may handle the situation poorly. Why? Because our mind fills with "automatic responses", and these are often negative. That is what conflict does to us; we assume it will be negative. Conflict is good, as long as it is productive. We can train ourselves to keep these automatic thoughts positive by thinking about the situation with empathy and understanding and giving someone the benefit of the doubt. That thought process shapes and frames our response. Respectful disagreements keep us connected and teach us the importance of other perspectives and opinions.

Is Listening a Communication Skill?

Definition of listening "is to give attention to a sound or action. When listening, one is hearing what others are saying, and trying to understand what it means". Yes, indeed, listening is a form of communication!

It's no secret we tune out those who we spend the most time with. A study by Queen's University found we can tune out a familiar voice and are less likely to do so with someone we don't speak with as often.

How can you demonstrate listening techniques?

- Summarize what has been said, or paraphrase, in your own words
- Use acknowledging statements such as "I see", "Oh really", "I'd like to hear more", "I hear you saying..."
- Non-verbal communication, including any indication of judgement
- Ask open-ended clarifying questions to ensure a full understanding of what is being said
- Never dictate, even if asked, a response but rather guide or offer potential solutions

Most importantly, discipline yourself not to drift off and think of:

- What you will say next or
- Changing the topic, in your mind, because you are distracted by something

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

-George Bernard Shaw

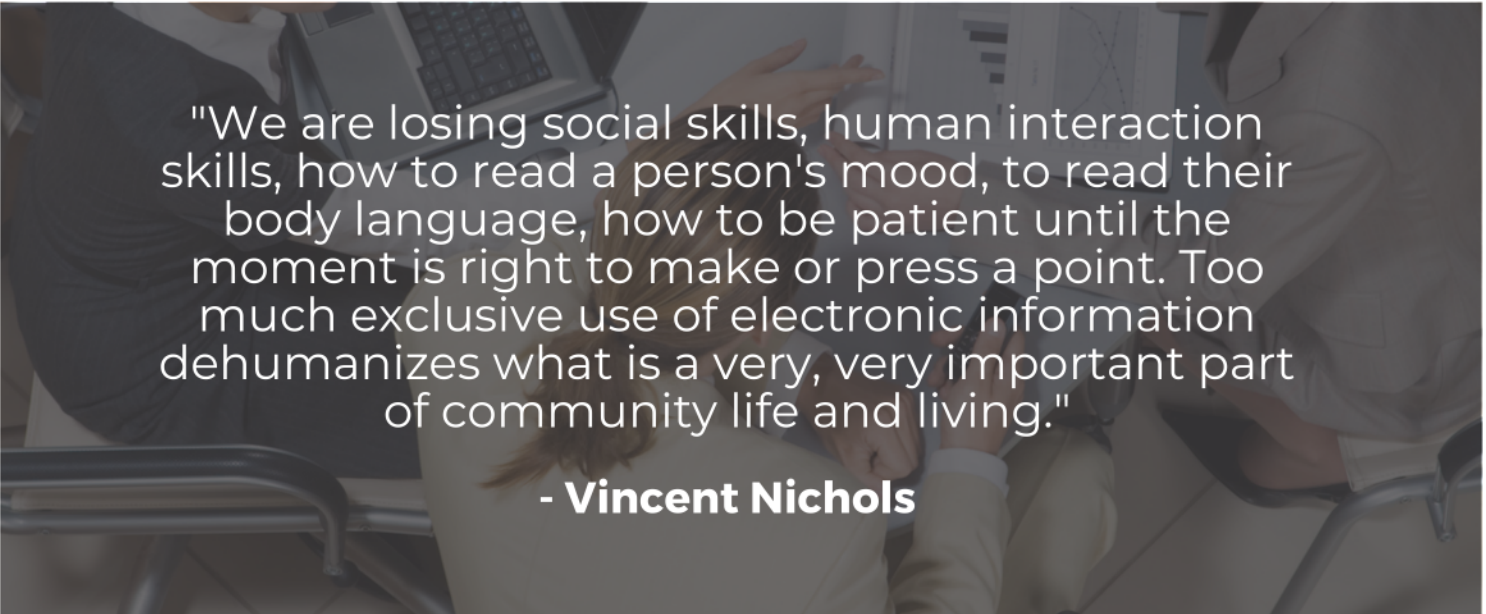


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Regardless of the reason to communicate, doing so effectively is an asset for our relationships, our experiences, our sense of well-being and accomplishment, and a plethora of other reasons. Understand your own style, including strengths and opportunity areas, and you have made a good stride forward in effectiveness.

Whether personally or professionally, set regular goals to improve your effectiveness at home or at work. Find a coach or a mentor that can offer you feedback, and direction, and help you achieve your goals. We are all “hard-wired” a certain way, although that does not mean we cannot learn effective techniques and acquire new skills to work on opportunity areas.

In closing, an incredibly effective technique to develop ourselves, show interest in others, and ultimately learn more and be noticed, is to continually practice the art of asking questions. Asking questions effectively is the ultimate mastery of communication!



"We are losing social skills, human interaction skills, how to read a person's mood, to read their body language, how to be patient until the moment is right to make or press a point. Too much exclusive use of electronic information dehumanizes what is a very, very important part of community life and living."

- Vincent Nichols

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

1 Can one over-communicate?

If communication goes off-topic or is repetitive, it can be considered negative. In most cases, however, over-communicating ensures a message is received. In today's busy workplace, with email being a common platform for communication, a message can easily get lost. The ideal scenario of over-communicating is to repeat the same message via multiple channels (and never neglect face-to-face). There should also be a closed-loop standard for each department lead to initiate within their teams. Nothing should be assumed or taken for granted.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

2 What are the advantages to the organization that has a Communication Strategy?

A Communication Strategy creates a standard for the entire organization to follow. That avoids a lack of information from being an issue and holds everyone accountable to the same protocol. The Communication Strategy should be part of the Onboarding training process, so employees are set for communication success from the beginning. The Training allows employees to learn more about their communication preferences, and those of others. It is this learning that creates a culture of respect and understanding.

[Click here to learn more](#)

3 Is communication important to the average employee?

Surveys have shown employees appreciate communication that informs them about organizational direction and strategy, including regular updates. It is much more likely that employees will take an interest if they understand what direction the company is moving toward, and why. They are not likely to ask, nor are they typically given the opportunity to ask or get involved. Communication, at all levels within the organization, can be an effective Succession Planning strategy, when it involves effective training that encourages employees to understand their own Workplace Personalities and those of their coworkers.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

4 How can effective meetings have an impact on organizational communication?

An effective meeting serves to inform, debate, discuss, and ultimately achieve a decision-making commitment. Meetings that are focused, time-sensitive with an agenda, can accomplish more than a slew of email threads that do not often get full participation. The meeting, however, must welcome productive conflict and uncomfortable conversations because that is how ideas are shared, and opinions communicated. Quiet meetings that are directional, versus participative, are seldom effective.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

5 What costs might be associated with poor communication in an organization

It would be difficult to put an exact number on this, yet BCCampus.ca recently reported the cost of poor communication cost U.S. companies \$4 Billion annually. The losses are in areas such as reduced productivity, inefficiency, and lost business due to wasted time, poor work, and lack of staff, or poorly training staff. In extreme cases, losses can be measured in property damage, injuries, and even deaths. Although it appears extreme, each of these areas represent a cost centre and if these are not structured and organized, which includes communication, the potential failures are obvious.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

6 How can communication be optimized with hybrid or remote teams?

Regardless of where a workforce is physically situated, the communication protocols need to be the same. Of course, how they are delivered may vary, depending on each situation. Workplaces vary, and the ideal is with hybrid work the same attendance days apply to everyone. For fully remote employees, they need to be part of the same communication stream, including one-on-one, as everyone else. Breakdowns can occur when employees come and go, and ironically, go to the office just to meet virtually. Every organization is unique, although consideration needs to be given to each employee to ensure they remain an informed member of the organization.

[Click here to learn more](#)

“Over-communicating is the glue that holds a high-performing team together and keeps them focused in the same direction. And, it circles back to clarity. Without good, consistent communication, you don’t have clarity.”

– Lee Ellis, leadership consultant, author, presenter, retired colonel USAF

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