The Best Communication Skills for Workplace Success

Honing your communication skills can influence your career — and your daily success at work.

March 4, 2019 5 min read

This story originally appeared on Glassdoor

You might be a put-your-head-down-and-get-things-done kind of employee, but no matter your work style, you can't avoid communicating at the office — on a screen or in person.

"In 2019, we Slack, ping, text, Zoom, email, call and meet face-to-face," said Jill Jacinto, a millennial career expert. But, she added, "no matter which method you use, you'll need to need to develop an appropriate method to interact with your [co-workers or] employees."

But beyond having to communicate in the office, honing your communication skills can influence your career — and your daily success at work. According to career coach Hallie Crawford, "How well you communicate impacts efficiency, effectiveness, trust between employees, your brand and how you come across as a professional, and much more."

Here are seven essential communication skills every employee and boss needs to hone.

1. Showing respect

"Being respectful of other people's space and time is

important – especially if you need to talk about a touchy subject," Crawford said. And while we may not think of showing respect as a communication skill, it is, because respect comes down to how we talk and listen to people. "Avoid talking down to someone, this does not foment a positive environment at work. Respect the other person's feelings and strengths and perspective," Crawford said.

2. Active listening

"Active listening is an essential part of any job," Jacinto said. Being a bad listener – such as someone who interrupts or doesn't make eye contact when another person speaks to you – can compromise your position at work. If you don't listen well, "You might not understand the full objective for a project or the tool you were just trained on," she said.

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3. Displaying positive body language

You may not realize it, but "your body language communicates more than words," Crawford said. So, Crawford encourages you to be aware of the overall energy you emit with actions and movements. Ask, "are your arms crossed, or do you avoid eye contact?" Crawford said. If you do, try to correct these behaviors by uncrossing your arms and making eye contact.

4. Be willing to ask questions

When you're a new employee at a company – or if you're a recent college graduate – you might be afraid of asking questions of co-workers or your managers. But the ability and willingness to ask questions is a crucial communication skill. Asking questions "helps to clarify things at work, whether you

are talking about a project or a problem with a co-worker," Crawford said. "If you're a leader at work, this applies to you too: "Instead of giving direction, try asking questions to guide someone to a correct conclusion," she said.

In 2019, most of the communication we do is via email or another online platform. "There's always that one person who is too detailed and sends a novel back to you," said Jacinto, who added, "don't be this person. Know how to break up an email, add bullet points, and be concise." Jacinto recommended asking yourself, "does the receiver need all this information," before hitting send, or even, "would this be better as a phone chat instead?" Jacinto said.

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6. Remaining open-minded

Staying open-minded is a very important communication skill – especially for entry-level employees, Crawford said. "If an employee is an entry-level or new to their position, it's important for them to be able to connect with his or her coworkers and understand the corporate culture of the organization," Crawford explained. How do you do that? "Be open to new ways of doing things and don't shut down if your new team members have a different process or methodology for completing a task than you are used to," Crawford instructed.

7. A willingness to give feedback

This communication skill "is important for senior-level employees to help their employees and business to grow," Crawford said. "This doesn't always mean correcting mistakes – it could be commending someone for a job well done." But what about when you do need to call out someone's mistake? "If you do need to correct mistakes, make sure to

commend an employee first," Crawford said. "This makes it easier to accept any negative feedback."

(By Jillian Kramer)

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