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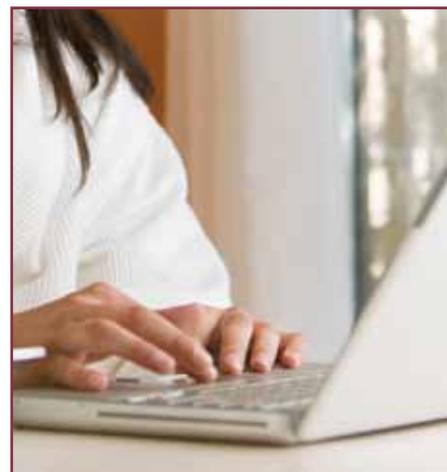


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Take That! Click!

The lost art of face-to-face communication



Communicating meaningfully is becoming more difficult than ever before. While technology has created an ever-increasing number of ways to communicate rapidly over great distances, many people are now so well insulated and protected by these devices we use that we are losing the skills and abilities to communicating in the most influential way – face to face.

Stacey Hanke, a Chicago-based management consultant and author of the book “Yes You Can” has serious concerns about the ever-increasing use of technology in business and organizations.

“There’s a real danger to the maintenance and perpetuation of meaningful communications and personal and professional relationships,” says Hanke. “If you become overly dependent on e-mail or text messages, you focus on the object, but not the person.”

Hanke explains that Tweets, text messages, e-mail and Facebook posts all transmit words over distances so that they can be received without the presence of the sender. The human element and context is absent.

“It’s a one-sided blast. Take that! Click!” she says. “You cannot communicate meaningfully with 140 spaces! All you can say is ‘Wassup!’”

These messages are typically short, sequential, controlled and directed. There’s no instantaneous interaction or connection that allows the other person to understand the tone, inflection or emotion that is carried with the words. The sender cannot express or effectively project the elements of trust, confidence, credibility, warmth, empathy and concern that is crucial to developing and building a personal relationship. The recipient cannot perceive these elements either.

That failure to convey the feelings that accompany the words so that people build trust, credibility, and understanding can have a phenomenal impact on business and success.

Meaningful communications that carry these powerful and important characteristics can only be achieved in face-to-face interactions.

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Communicating with impact and achieving influence with people is not only about what you say; it’s also how you say it. You have influence on others because you see their face, observe and experience their emotion, and actively listen and engage their interest and support and build relationships.

You know it’s probably time for a face-to-face when:

- You no longer really understand what is important to your listener.
- You think they have become bored or are losing interest in you or your message.
- You feel they are no longer listening and do not understand you.

There are also certain topics of conversation where face-to-face communication will absolutely be the best way to achieve the clarity and understanding needed for mutual success and beneficial action, including:

- Negotiating salaries, vacations, and termination;
- Resolving a dispute, a challenge or a conflict between two or more people or organizations;
- Seeking clarification after written communications have failed.

Face-to-face communication is a very crucial skill. It requires you to focus. You have to be able to be comfortable in the presence of other people for more than a few minutes.

Communicating with impact and influence face to face also requires discipline, determination and self-control.

Here are some of Hanke’s best recommendations.

Make your moments together count. Everyone has the right to speak. Listen before you speak. Earn the right to be heard. Think about what you want to say before you say it. Make ev-

ery communication moment worth your and your listener's time. Every word counts. Think before you speak. Tailor what you say to meet your listener's needs.

Pay attention by listening for the unspoken emotions. Concentrate on the speaker closely. Focus intently on his or her face. Do not let your eyes dart away and drift off, since that signals you are no longer paying attention. Do not interrupt. Wait to speak only when the person has finished what they want to say. Hear their words and read their face so that you gain maximum understanding of the why behind their words.

Honor the other person's space and time. Prepare ahead of time. Match the message to the opportunity. Get to the point quickly. Don't frustrate your listener by taking too long to get the key message across. Don't ramble and clutter your message with unnecessary points. Ask for the right action. Be clear and be specific. Watch the time. Don't take 20 minutes when you only asked for ten. Show you know how to respect the other person.

Prepare for your face-to-face meeting ahead of time. K.N.O.W. your listener.

- K – What does your listener know about your topic?
- N – What does your listener need to know to take the action you want them to take in the time frame you have for this conversation?
- O – What is your listener's opinion about your topic?
- W – Who is your listener? What additional information do you know about your listener to help you customize your message for them?

Tailor your agenda and message to achieve the understanding you need and to influence your listener to act on what you have to say.

Watch your body language. Avoid non-verbal abuse. Every movement you make counts. Control your facial expressions. Don't smile, snicker, whistle, roll your eyes, or grimace, look sideways, wink, or send the evil eye. Your behavior and non-verbal cues are as important as the words you say. Don't fidget, act nervous, express fear, or allow your posture to convey uncertainty, insincerity, lack of caring, arrogance, overconfidence, dismay or criticism.

Be sincere and authentic. Speak in your authentic voice. Be sincere, be genuine and allow others to see the real you.

Maintain the power of the floor. Be interesting. You are no longer the center of attention if:

- Your listener begins working on his or her Blackberry, iPad, iPhone, etc.
- Your listener starts nodding off.
- Your listener begins to have side conversations.
- Your listener interrupts you.

If any of these are the case. Stop. Break the flow. Earn their attention. Get back on track.



Ask for Feedback. Face-to-face communications is a two-way street. Balanced feedback allows people to be relaxed and comfortable. However, when people start feeling comfortable they also may become lazy and lose their professionalism. Don't forget who you are and what you are doing. Maintain your self-control. Ask for specific feedback about the points you raised, the manner in which you presented your information and the way you responded. Ask for balanced feedback about how to improve and immediately begin applying this feedback.

According to Hanke, your technology-driven communication will improve if you first focus on improving the most important method of communication – face-to-face communication.

"We're not talking tailoring a perfect e-mail or internalizing the shorthand texting alphabet," she says. "Eliminate the static that plagues your one-on-one, person-to-person communication and everything else you do will dramatically improve as well." ⓘ

Stacey Hanke is owner of 1st Impression Consulting, Inc. She is a sought-after speaker, on the topic of communication skills. She is the co-author of "Yes You Can! Everything You Need From A-Z To Influence Others To Take Action" and featured author of the book, "Conversations On Success," on which she partnered with "Chicken Soup for the Soul's" Jack Canfield and "Fish Philosophy" author John Christensen. Stacey has delivered more than 500 presentations for business leaders from the financial industry to the healthcare industry to government and everyone in between. Her vast client list includes companies like Coca-Cola, Kohl's, TransUnion, Novartis Animal Health US, Inc., the United States Army and Navy, Leo Burnett and the FDA. She is a frequent and experienced media guest and has inspired thousands as a featured guest on numerous radio interviews nationwide. Her articles regularly appear in national media like The Balancing Act on Lifetime Network, WGN-Chicago Smart Money, Chief Learning Officer, Business Week, Investor's Business Daily and many more. She is also the 2009 Recipient of the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire Alumni Award, member of the National Speakers Association. Hanke was one of six speakers selected to present at the 2008 NSA Convention in the category "Top Six Under Forty." 1st Impression Consulting, Inc. is located at 333 W. Hubbard Street, Suite 506 Chicago, Ill. 60654. For more information, visit www.1stimpressionconsulting.com.

