

Communication The Key

Here are 10 common communication problems and mistakes:

1. Not Truly Listening

When we are communicating with someone, we often are not committing our full attention. We might be looking at our phones, or even daydreaming about something else. When we don't actively listen to the person we are speaking to, not only do we run the risk of making the person feel invalidated, but we also miss important nonverbal cues and may not fully understand the person's message. To avoid communication mishaps, it is best to give the speaker 100% of our attention. Effective listening skills include making eye contact, asking clarifying questions, and remaining engaged.

2. Assuming You Know the Message Before the Person Finishes

We've all done it. We're listening to a friend speak, and we already assume we know what is going to be said before they finish their sentence. When we assume we know what the person will say, we miss what is actually being said. Honor the speaker by remaining openly curious and listening intently for the message rather than predicting what will be said.

3. Interrupting the Speaker

We've probably all interrupted another person midsentence once or twice. It can happen accidentally, or we may get so excited about what we want to say and fear we will forget our response if we don't just go ahead and say it. Others may interrupt during arguments as a power move. Whatever the intention, interrupting can make a person feel invalidated, as if what they have to say is unimportant. Have respect for the other person, and allow them to finish the message entirely before you respond.

4. Using "You" Statements Instead of "I" Statements

When we are discussing our feelings with another person, we need to own those feelings rather than place the responsibility on the other person. It can be easy to say, "You did this" or "You didn't do that." When we use "I" statements, we take ownership of how we feel and are less likely to make the other person feel attacked. Instead of saying, "You didn't call me back..." try saying, "I felt hurt when you didn't return my call."

5. Letting Your Emotions Dictate Your Response

When we react emotionally, we are likely to say things we don't mean. A good communicator allows emotions to sit for a while and then chooses to carefully respond rather than react.

6. Failing to Account for Cultural Differences in Communication

Cross-cultural communication can be difficult. Words can take on different meanings, and cultural norms surrounding nonverbal communication may vary. When communicating with people from other cultural backgrounds, it's important to account for cultural differences in communication styles. If we don't, we may accidentally offend or miscommunicate with someone.

7. Misinterpreting the Message

We may misinterpret others more often than we think. To avoid this, it is best to give the person our full attention and paraphrase the message back to the speaker to ensure we have understood correctly. In today's society, we are more susceptible to misinterpretation, as we rely heavily on technological communication. Without tone of voice and nonverbal cues, it can be easy to misunderstand each other. When using text or email communication, be sure to use appropriate punctuation and ask clarifying questions to ensure you understand the other person.

8. Being Indirect

Being subtle and/or indirect in communication is usually ineffective. We can't expect other people to read our minds. If you want someone to understand you, try being direct and try not to "beat around the bush" in conversation.

9. Attacking Character Rather than Behavior

When we are upset with someone, it is easy to say things such as, "You're a jerk" or "You're an idiot." Rather than attack someone's character, an effective communicator should address the actual behavioral issue and leave it at that.

10. Avoiding Difficult Conversations

When faced with the possibility of a difficult conversation, many people choose to avoid or prolong the conversation as long as possible. People usually perceive a conversation as difficult when they are faced with telling someone something that person doesn't want to hear. It might be delivering bad news or bringing up a conflict of interest.

An effective communicator remains open and honest to address issues as soon as they arise rather than avoiding or prolonging important discussions.