

Instant Communication or Instant Miscommunication?

The fourth, and final, article in this series is about instant communication. How can you make sure your message is read and interpreted correctly?

In the previous articles we've talked about how to increase your success and productivity by increasing your communications skills. But this topic – the world of instant, electronic communication – may just present the biggest challenge of all. Let's take some of the concepts from the first three articles and apply them to increase your success in the electronic world you're immersed in these days.

The magical "Rule of 93." Remember that 93% of communication is nonverbal; it's about your body language and tone of voice. Only 7% is the actual words. So, when you strip out 93% of your communication, it really handicaps electronic messages. A few words now have to do the work of your smile, body language, hand gestures and tone of voice in conveying a message. So, choose your words carefully. Hint: Look for words with emotion, that are descriptive, that will elicit the right reaction.

WII-FM. As human beings we are always listening through the filter of "What's In It For Me?" Make sure you're clear, right up front, what's in it for the person you're sending a message to. Why should they continue to read? One of the best ways to capture attention is with a punchy "subject" line. Hint: zero in on what is important to them right now, today, about this case. Instead of saying "Update on Scribner v Lyons case," say "Change of court date information you requested."

Three Elements of a Successful Conversation. The shorter the message, the more important it is for you to be clear about *exactly* what you want to accomplish in your text or email. If you remember back to October, we looked at three essential parts of content. The first element: what do you want them to **know**? Be clear and concise. Second, what do you want them to **do**? The shorter the better, e.g., get back to me by 3pm, sign and forward to me, etc. By the way, organizational experts say that the best ways to make sure you get what you need is to always tell the other person "by when" the task needs to be completed. It's much better to say "get back to me by 3pm" than to say "get back to me ASAP." Hint: Put an actual number, date or time in every request.

The third element is critical; how do you want them to **feel**? This is tough in the electronic world. But that makes it all the more important. The shorter a message, the easier it is to misinterpret. What sounded pleasant in your head can quickly sound cold and terse in black and white. So, take a few seconds to think about what words will capture your tone of voice? Hint: Good manners, like please and thank you, go a long way to make sure your message is read in the right spirit. Another hint: judiciously use emoticons and descriptives (like "yikes," "tee-hee," "oops," "wow," etc.) to help make a point quickly.

Slow Down to Speed Up Productivity.

In November we focused on slowing down as a way to increase your success and productivity. A hasty email to a client with a typo or dropped word can cause a week's worth of headaches. For example, add an extra space to the word "therapist" and it becomes "the rapist." Oops! Hint: Take 30-seconds to reread important emails or texts. Check the spelling, grammar and punctuation. Most important, check the tone. Does it convey what you would say in person?

Match the Tone to the Relationship.

Every relationship you have is little different. Some are more formal, some less formal. With some colleagues and friends you can use shorthand, others will be offended. Between generations there are cultural differences in what is acceptable in electronic messages. Hint: Make sure you match your communication style with the type of relationship, not the delivery method. For example, if you're forced to text a client, do not use any of the texting shortcuts. Be formal and complete, even if you only have 140 characters.

Thanks.

Since this is the last article, I wanted to tell you that I appreciate the opportunity to have written these articles for The Digest and share what I know with you. I hope it is making you more productive, more successful, and making your demanding jobs a little easier.

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