

## Ten Ways to Improve Your Communication Skills

Ten Ways to Improve Your Communication Skills      We all have people with whom we have to work to get things done. Our ability to communicate with clients, customers, subordinates, peers, and superiors can enhance our effectiveness or sabotage us. Many times, our verbal skills make the difference. Here are 10 ways to increase your verbal efficacy at work:

- Develop your voice ? A high whiney voice is not perceived to be one of authority. In fact, a high soft voice can make you sound like prey to an aggressive co-worker who is out to make his/her career at the expense of anyone else. Begin doing exercises to lower the pitch of your voice. Here is one to start: Sing ? but do it an octave lower on all your favorite songs. Practice this and, after a period of time, your voice will begin to lower.
- Slow down ? People will perceive you as nervous and unsure of yourself if you talk fast. However, be careful not to slow down to the point where people begin to finish your sentences just to help you finish.
- Animate your voice ? Avoid a monotone. Use dynamics. Your pitch should raise and lower. Your volume should be soft and loud. Listen to your local TV news anchor; take notes.
- Enunciate your words ? Speak clearly. Don't mumble. If people are always saying, "huh," to you, you are mumbling.
- Use appropriate volume ? Use a volume that is appropriate for the setting. Speak more softly when you are alone and close. Speak louder when you are speaking to larger groups or across larger spaces.
- Pronounce your words correctly ? People will judge your competency through your vocabulary. If you aren't sure how to say a word, don't use it.
- Use the right words ? If you're not sure of the meaning of a word, don't use it. Start a program of learning a new word a day. Use it sometime in your conversations during the day.
- Make eye contact ? I know a person who is very competent in her job. However, when she speaks to individuals or groups, she does so with her eyes shut. When she opens them periodically, she stares off in a direction away from the listener. She is perceived as incompetent by those with whom she consults. One technique to help with this is to consciously look into one of the listener's eyes and then move to the other. Going back and forth between the two (and I hope they only have two) makes your eyes appear to sparkle. Another trick is to imagine a letter "T" on the listener's face with the cross bar being an imaginary line across the eye brows and the vertical line coming down the center of the nose. Keep your eyes scanning that "T" zone.
- Use gestures ? Make your whole body talk. Use smaller gestures for individuals and small groups. The gestures should get larger as the group that one is addressing increases in size.
- Don't send mixed messages ? Make your words, gestures, facial expressions, tone, and message match. Disciplining an employee while smiling sends a mixed message and, therefore, is ineffective. If you have to deliver a negative message, make your words, facial expressions, and tone match the message.

Improving your communication skills will improve your productivity.

### About the Author

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