

balance

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Digital communications in the workplace

Before the widespread use of computers, the invention of the Internet and the creation of smartphones, written communication in the workplace was slower, more civilized and less frequent. People either spoke directly to one another or sent letters.

Today, digital is the favoured form of communication in the workplace, and employees are receiving and sending written messages at a rapid pace. So the question is – how do you ensure the increased quantity of digital communications doesn't sacrifice quality?

How to optimize your office email

- 1) Sending an email? Slow down!** Brevity and speed have become synonymous with digital communications, especially with the advent of text messaging and Twitter's famous 140-character limit. But what may be acceptable via text or social media may not be appropriate in the office. Instead of truncating words, omitting punctuation and using acronyms, take a moment to carefully craft your message with proper sentence structure and ensure you hit all the key points. Remember, just because you can send an email in less than a minute doesn't mean you should.
- 2) Review and edit.** Incorrect spelling, bad grammar, incomplete information and an edgy tone are not uncommon in the world of corporate emails. However, by taking the time to review and edit your emails, you'll come across as thorough, thoughtful and professional, which ultimately builds credibility. Conversely, sloppy, curt, unprofessional emails can hinder effective communication and tarnish your professional reputation, especially if this is your typical email style.
- 3) Write like you speak.** In the interest of time, people often neglect to filter their email correspondence the same way they edit their speech. The result can be curt, tonal, bossy, rude or confrontational, often when that's not the intent. So before you hit send, ask yourself: *Would I say this to the recipient's face, and would I be comfortable if my manager read it?* If the answer is no, rewrite your message.
- 4) Question the mode of communication.** Okay, it's true – email is one of the easiest and most convenient ways to deliver a message, but is it always the most effective? Before drafting an email, consider if there is a more effective way to deliver the message. Perhaps a phone call or face-to-face meeting will achieve what you need and help to build relationships in a more meaningful way.
- 5) Relax!** At some point in time, *everyone* will receive an email that gets them fired up and on edge. Usually the tone of the message is to blame, even though this was not the intent of the sender. Instead of letting it get the better of you, take a deep breath and remember that there was probably no malicious intent behind the email; it was likely just caused by speed and brevity. Why not pick up the phone or drop by your colleague's desk to clear things up? Chances are it will quickly diffuse your negative feelings and, again, help to build inter-office relations.

Email fun facts

- Approximately 294 billion emails are sent every day globally
- In 2012, the typical email user wrote 41,368 words – the length of a novel!
- In 2012, the average email user received 5,579 emails
- The busiest time to receive emails is 11 a.m. on a Tuesday

Effective communication in a culturally diverse workplace

At its core, cultural diversity is about accepting and respecting people's differences and understanding that everyone is unique. The same can be said for communication. To do it well, you need to understand your audience and craft your message in a way that will make the most sense to them.

When that audience is culturally diverse, the challenge is to understand their differences and be sensitive to how your message will be received.

Four ways to communicate better in today's diverse workplace

- 1) **Use clear language.** When you are communicating with a culturally diverse audience, keep your language clear, concise and straightforward. Avoid jargon, slang terms, euphemisms and colloquial expressions. For example, you could say: *That sales report was fantastic!* Instead of: *That sales report was a slam dunk!*
- 2) **Understand differences in body language.** You may be surprised to learn that different cultures have very different practices when it comes to non-verbal forms of communication. For instance, in most countries, people do not greet each other by shaking hands, and some cultures find it disrespectful to engage in direct eye contact. Additionally, some cultures have different comfort levels when it comes to personal space and touching. When in doubt, leave at least one arm's length between you and your colleagues, and keep your hands to yourself.
- 3) **Practice reflective listening or paraphrasing.** When in conversation, paraphrasing or repeating the message back is a good habit to get into. This will help clarify meaning and eliminate issues that may surface as a result of misunderstanding. The same is true of written communication – paraphrase to clarify any doubts you may have.
- 4) **Be open and inclusive of other cultures.** Although it is natural to gravitate towards others who share our preferences and traditions, getting to know your fellow co-workers from culturally diverse backgrounds can help build relations, and open up your world to new experiences. Bear in mind that they may be new to this country and have challenges of their own, as they try to navigate a different language, customs and way of life.

Communicating effectively in a culturally diverse environment requires tact and sensitivity – valuable life skills to have. Find out more about communicating effectively in a diverse workplace through your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP).

Looking for additional support? Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) can help. You can receive support through a variety of resources. Call your EFAP at 1 800 387-4765 or visit workhealthlife.com.

How culturally diverse is Canada?

- Toronto is one of the most culturally diverse cities in North America, along with New York and Los Angeles
- According to Statistics Canada, 26% of Canada's population will be foreign-born by 2031
- English and French are the most commonly spoken languages in Canada, followed by Chinese, Punjabi, Spanish, Italian and Arabic

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