

HOW TO AVOID MISCOMMUNICATIONS

The biggest miscommunication is to assume communication has taken place. How many times have you been disappointed by someone you thought you communicated with, only to find out they were on a different page than you? In the movie, “Cool Hand Luke”, the warden kept saying about Luke, “What we have here is a failure to communicate.” The warden assumed it was Luke’s fault and didn’t take any responsibility himself. This happens tens of thousands of times every day in business and personal relationships.

We can reduce miscommunications, missed expectations, frustration, confusion, disappointment, anger, and many other emotions by keeping the following things in mind when we are attempting to communicate:

1. **Know what your goal is.** What do you want the other person to know, think, or do?
2. **Choose your words carefully.** If possible, practice what you will say and/or write out what you want to say. Use your words and language at the recipient’s level.
3. **Use the proper tone and inflection.** Emphasizing different words in a sentence can dramatically change the way your message is perceived.
4. **Make certain your body language and facial expressions are congruent with your message.** If you tell your team they did a good job and you roll your eyes as you say it, they are going to believe your facial expression rather than your words. They’ll believe what they see every time over what they hear.
5. **Observe the body language and facial expressions of the other person.** If the other person’s body language or facial expression isn’t congruent with the message you are sending, stop and ask a question that will get you both on the same wave length.
6. **Pace yourself to the mental speed of your listener.** You can usually tell how fast a person thinks by how fast he or she talks. If you go too slow or too fast, the other person might get impatient, confused, or frustrated.

7. **Actively ask for feedback.** For example ask an open-end question such as, “So we can be sure we are communicating effectively, would you tell me your understanding of what we just discussed?” If you are on the same page or wave length, move on. If not, clarify and discuss until you are. Avoid questions such as: “Do you understand?” or “Have I made myself clear?” Such closed-end questions can cause your listener to give you a tacit yes and, worse yet, feel that you think he or she is stupid, which can lead to shutting down communication.

8. **Control the environment as much as possible.** If there is a lot of noise, or other distractions, move to a quieter location with fewer distractions.

Ask questions until you get to the heart of the matter or accomplish your goal. Mix statements with your questions. People are good at answering questions. Also, a question can be perceived as threatening and can intimidate. Sometimes you can elicit information better with a statement than you can a question. A statement opens the door to the other person’s reply. A statement does not *require* a reply, whereas a question does. For example, you can make a statement such as, “You are probably wondering about a number of things that are involved with these changes we are discussing”. Even if the other person responds with a simple, “Yes”, resist the temptation to speak. Use silence to give the other person the inclination to tell you what he or she is really thinking. Knowing what the other person is thinking is the first step in avoiding mis-communications.



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