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# M E S S E N G E R

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Employee Assistance Program

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## Supporting a Healthy Organization

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### EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

In any line of work, communication is important. Face-to-face conversations, letters, memos, telephone discussions and electronic mail messages are integral to most businesses and organizations. As an employee, you may interact and exchange ideas with several people each workday, including customers, co-workers, suppliers and supervisors.

Poor communication can cost dearly, creating misunderstandings and barriers to reaching goals. So it's worthwhile to consider the importance of effective communication and the ways to achieve it. Here are some ideas to help you become a better communicator.

**Speak and write clearly.** It seems like a simple concept, but not everyone does it. People often purposely use vague terms and doublespeak to avoid having to defend their own words. If your clients and coworkers do not understand you or miss your point, it will be difficult for them to meet your expectations. You will have greater success if you are easily understood. Use good diction, plain language and get to the point quickly without beating around the bush.

**Present your message graciously.** Getting to the point does not mean you should communicate in a cold, cursory manner. Let your clients and coworkers know you value them as individuals and take their concerns into account. Electronic communication, in particular, is often hasty and impersonal.

It can be difficult to get a true read on someone when all you have is his or her brief voice mail or email to go by, making it easy to misinterpret the sender's intentions.



When you leave voice messages or send email, use friendly greetings and thank people for their input. Read your email messages very carefully before pressing the "send" button.

**Pay attention and understand.** When someone speaks to you, listen actively. Focus not only on the words, but also on the speaker's nonverbal cues, such as body language. Try to grasp what the person is meaning to say or write. As noted above, the emotion behind a brief memo or electronic mail messages can be easily misinterpreted. In conversations, listening means not only hearing what people say, but also comprehending their meaning and letting them know you were paying attention. Nod, smile and ask questions along the way. Affirm what they say by rephrasing it. Use language like, "so,

essentially you need ...," or "if I understand you correctly, you are looking for ..." This ensures not only that you understood what they said, but more importantly what they meant.

**Think it through before you react.** People who can "think on their feet" are certainly worthy of admiration, but speaking quickly before processing the situation often leads to misunderstandings, confusion, and regret. Allow yourself time to think through a situation or issue before responding. Ask questions, look at all the information, and mull it over in your mind.

**Accentuate the positive.** People will be more interested in what you say if

you are using a positive sentence structure and upbeat language. When people are negative, it brings everyone down and can destroy coworkers' desire to assist. By pointing out one or two positives to balance every negative, we can encourage others to reach for their full potentials. Try to pass on a constructive viewpoint whenever you speak or write.

**Make a connection.** True communication requires a connection between the parties to a conversation. Find a common ground or mutual interest to open the way to a good conversation. Share your ideas and use examples and personal experiences to build a bond of trust. When you make people feel at ease, they will be more likely to exchange ideas with you.

## TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE EMAILING

With so many people using email for work correspondence, it is amazing that so many messages lack sound structure and appropriate language. Emails that are too long, vague, or ignore the rules of etiquette result in clumsy communication. By using proper email format and protocol, you will convey a professional image. Here are eight tips to help you create effective email messages.

### 1. Craft your subject line.

A subject line makes the first impression, so make it a good one. First, it has to get your message past the spam filter. Take out anything that may be construed as a sales pitch or obscenity. Second, it must have meaning to the recipient. Customize the subject line so that it matches the content of the message. Use the title of the project or the product you are discussing in your message. This will grab the recipient's attention and assist with message sorting.

### 2. Limit your recipients.

As a general rule, the more people you send an email to, the less likely any single person will respond to it. Fewer recipients actually make for greater accountability. But when you must send to a large group, you may want to consider use of the 'blind carbon copy' (Bcc). This can be an important step when sending to a disparate group whose members may want their addresses to remain private. And please remember to only use "Reply to All" if you really need your message to be seen by everyone who received the original message. Inappropriate use of this response format creates needless spam for all, and can be quite embarrassing if the message was not intended for the entire group.

### 3. Keep it short and strong.

Make your point quickly; use short words and active verbs. This will send a stronger message and add energy to your writing. As examples, replace "utilize" with "use" and instead of "in light of the fact that," simply write "because."

### 4. Quote back.

Even if emails are flying back and forth within hours, be sure to quote back the text that you are answering. Assume that the person you are corresponding with has a dozen email conversations going on at once. If you answer with a simple, "Yes, I agree," the recipient must figure out to what you are agreeing.

### 5. Avoid open-ended questions.

The purpose of email is to save time, not kill time, so do not ask questions that require long responses. Stay away from questions that start with "What do you think about..." or "What is your opinion of..." If you need detailed or lengthy information, ask for a written report or arrange a face-to-face meeting. Don't assume your recipient has time to answer essay questions.

### 6. Watch your tone.

Tone is a difficult thing to explain. It's the way you say something, with your voice and word choice, that lets your feelings come across. It is easy to change your tone when you are speaking, but it is very difficult to correct in your writing. Try to come across as respectful, friendly and approachable rather than curt or demanding. Do not type in all caps, which is interpreted as YELLING in an email. Even if you truly are angry, it's more difficult to read text that is in all caps. Read your message several times before you send it, making sure it sends the right message along with the right words.

### 7. Chill Out.

When someone sends you an angry email, don't let it provoke you into sending an angry response. That would certainly make the situation worse. A good rule of thumb is to wait 24 hours before responding. This will give you time to assess the situation and think through the issues before crafting a reasonable message. Never say in an email what you would not say in person, and always keep your future goals in mind.

### 8. Add a good signature.

Include your name, title, organization, email address, postal mail address, phone number and website. This gives you legitimacy and makes it easier for your recipients to respond to you.

## ▶ ▶ RESOURCES ▶

*Carnegie, Dale. Dale Carnegie's The Quick & Easy Way to Effective Speaking: Modern Techniques for Dynamic Communication. Pocket, 1990.*

▶ *Harvard Business School Publishing Guide to Better Business Writing, 2005. [Harvardbusiness.org](http://Harvardbusiness.org)*

▶ *Flynn, Tom and Flynn, Nancy. Writing Effective E-Mail – Creating Success. Crisp Fifty-Minute Book Series, 2003.*

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## EAP SERVICES

EAP is here to help. For more information about articles in this newsletter, or any other EAP-related topic, please call one of our trained counselors at our toll-free number:

**800-287-2173**

**[www.investeap.org](http://www.investeap.org)**



## Effective Communication Basics

**Be clear.** Speak and write with plain language and get to the point quickly.

**Be Personable.** Use friendly greetings and thank people for their input.

**Listen.** Pay attention to what is said and rephrase it to make sure you understand the meaning.

**Think before speaking.** Process the information and focus on future goals.

**Use Positive Phrasing.** An upbeat attitude is contagious.

**Connect.** Find common ground and build trust.