

MASTERING THE COMPLEXITIES OF WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION

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TTYL, Call U 2morrow, and TIA — all forms of 21st century communication that aren't appropriate for the workplace!

For those that might be reading this and can't decipher the IM and texting lingo here you go: TTYL — talk to you later; Call U 2morrow — call you tomorrow, and TIA — thanks in advance.

If you ask any professional they will likely tell you that effective communication skills are one of the best assets you have to be successful in your career. Right or wrong, today's technology and avenues for communication are playing a large role in how communication happens in the workplace. We not only have phone, fax and e-mail. Organizations are using text messaging, IM, Skype and social media networks as ways to communicate both internally and externally.

With some of the communication shortcuts discovered and used by those who converse via text or IM, there has been a shift in formality and style of communication in many organizations. However, many companies still take the stand that traditional and formal communication is needed both internally and externally. Whether you are in an internship or your first full-time job, your communications skills and style can be a part of what sets the first impression of you in the workplace.

INITIAL MEETING

Let's take a step back and talk about the first interaction you have with an organization's representative and what you can do to make an impact on that person. Typically for students this interaction takes place at a career fair or campus event.

Good communication includes the nonverbal cues as well. Having a professional appearance and confident attitude is the first step. Shaking hands with the individual (a good one!) and looking them in the

eyes to clearly introduce yourself is next. From there let the conversation flow naturally — likely the recruiter will ask you several questions. Be sure to answer them in a clear and concise manner yet provide meaningful content that gets to their point. If you begin to talk too long or get off subject, it is okay to say, "I'm sorry, I got a bit off track there, did I get your question answered?" Then

company, what they do, and anything interesting that might be happening at their organization. You can locate this type of information on the company's web page, local news media and by simply googling the organization's name.

Be sure to wrap up your conversation with an understanding of next steps and appropriate action. Will you be calling them or will they



Effective workplace communication can be during the interview process, in a team meeting, talking on the phone or e-mailing a colleague. In all of these situations and others that you may encounter, put your best foot forward and make a positive impression.

stop and let them pick up the conversation or question asking.

If the recruiter does not offer up much for conversation, provide a quick review of yourself and accomplishments and why you'd enjoy working with the organization or even better yet, ask the recruiter some questions about the company and their role, such as, "What is it that you like most about (your company)?" or "How long have you been with the organization and why did you decide you'd like to work for them?"

Another aspect that can be impressive not only in this first meeting but throughout the recruitment process is a knowledge of the

company, what they do, and anything interesting that might be happening at their organization. You can locate this type of information on the company's web page, local news media and by simply googling the organization's name.

DURING THE OFFER

Hopefully all has gone well through the interview, which is a whole other topic on communication, and you are at the point of a job offer. Sometimes communicating through job offers can be a little tricky, especially if you are weighing multiple opportunities, need to negotiate terms or aren't quite sure if the job is the right fit.

If you are happy with the offer and the compensation package and you are ready to accept the position,

be sure that you communicate your excitement and enthusiasm about accepting the offer. This will set a good tone as you approach your starting date and your first couple of weeks on the job.

Ask your main contact, upon acceptance, what the next steps are. How often will they be communicating with you from now until your first day? Who do you call if you have questions between now and then? And, is there anything that you can do to better prepare for your first day/week?

Keep in mind that because career fairs typically happen in the fall, there is often a large gap in time between when you accept an offer and when you start your job. You'll want to be sure that you can still keep connected with the company through that time, but yet not be overly aggressive. If you set parameters for when and who is going to do the communicating throughout that time, you will both feel better about the process.

If there are multiple offers being considered or you are exploring additional career opportunities that you may or may not have even interviewed with yet, that can get more difficult. If you have multiple offers, be sure you clearly understand when each company would like to have your response.

From there you need to weigh out the different opportunities and narrow down your decision. If you develop additional questions while doing this, it is okay to contact the person you've been communicating with to let them know that you have multiple offers. Tell them you are continuing to find out more about each opportunity to help you make a better decision and then ask your few questions.

In the situation that you are anticipating an interview or job offer from another organization that you might be a little more excited about, but you are nervous to pass up the offer you have, there are a few things that you can do.

It is completely appropriate to contact the company that you are more interested in, especially if you've already interviewed, to see how they are coming along with their decision process. Let your

contact at that company know you have another offer that has a tight timeline for response, but that you are highly interested in what they have to offer and potentially working for them.

Sometimes this can speed along a company's decision making process, but not always. You can also communicate with the company that has the offer on the table and tell them that while you are interested in this

first impression as possible, communicate both in written and verbal forms, as you were educated.

The trend of using text messaging and IM language in the workplace has been noticed more often in other written communication, such as e-mail.

Don't write like you talk or how you text, spell out words and use correct punctuation. And definitely, use spell check — it is there for a reason.



Take note of company policy on accepting personal phone calls in the office. If it is acceptable, it is always best to excuse yourself to take the call, keep the conversation short or ask to call the person back. If you are provided with a company cell phone, be sure you know the policies for personal use and don't overdo it.

position, you also have another opportunity that you are considering but they have yet to make an offer and then see if they'd be willing to extend their timeline for responding to let you consider all of your options.

If they do extend the timeline and you still take their offer, they'll feel a sense of pride in providing you with a better option. Now, some companies will tell you no! Just like you have options, they do too! There are a number of very talented students available. You may have to take a gamble — it is OK to pass on an offer if it isn't right for you.

IN THE WORKPLACE

There are all sorts of forms of communication tools available in the workplace and many young people use them from a personal standpoint as well. The advice here is simple — drop the new and revert to the old. It is better to err on the side of caution and to ensure that you make the best

After you have been with an organization a while you will become aware of its communication norms. Maybe IMing is an effective method for a company that has multiple locations or the casual connection between co-workers allows you to be more liberal with your e-mail style. This might be acceptable internally, but it is best practice to keep your professional style with external contacts at all times.

COMMUNICATION SITUATIONS UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Say that your boss or a co-worker comes to you needing assistance on a project and they list out the details of the project. A — what they are asking you to do, you don't feel you'll be able to accomplish or B — the timeframe they have given seems to tight.

A word of caution, be careful not to be too quick to say you are unable

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to do the project. If you haven't even tried and say you can't do something, it will leave a poor impression.

Rather, ask your boss for advice on how they would go about accomplishing the project. Throughout that discussion offer your ideas on how you might suggest getting to the finished product. If the timeline is too tight, share with your boss or co-worker that you have other projects you need to complete, but you are happy to help and tell them when you think you might be able to have the project complete.

You can also follow that comment with, "If that does not work for you, are there others that could help me with the project, or could we take a look at my current list of projects and reprioritize so I can get to this project sooner?" Typically if you are upfront and show your willingness to help, most will accept that response.

PROBLEMS WITH A CO-WORKER

There is nothing that says you will or have to be best friends with everyone in the office. Like life, there will probably be people in your workplace that you just won't get along with.

How you handle interactions with those people can make a difference on how you are viewed by your peers and also how you feel about yourself. The Golden Rule applies — Treat others as you'd like to be treated. Problem situations with co-workers usually revolve around poor communication and not understanding the point of view of the other person.

When there is a conflict in the workplace your key weapon in not letting the problem escalate is to listen. Seek to understand what the other person is trying to communicate to you. Ask questions! In return, ask that your peer hears you out and explain why you feel the way that you do. Stay calm! Remember there is usually more than one way to do something or resolve a problem.

As you've experienced in school, you will probably be asked to work in teams. By nature, different people have different personalities and that really becomes apparent when working in teams. Some prefer to be the leader, some the doer, and others

can go back and forth. When you begin working in a team try to define who will act in which roles. If you have more than one person who fits the leader role, determine if they can work together in that role. If not, maybe assign each a component of the project to lead. No matter what role you play, be sure to let your thoughts and opinions be heard. Good teams seek input from all of their members.

DISSATISFIED WITH YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

While it may be difficult, the best thing you can do if you don't like your work environment is to communicate to your superior about it. If you do not have the resources you need to do your job or are unhappy with the physical space you've been provided, nothing will change unless you say something about it. Approach your boss in a non-threatening manner and share your thoughts and why they are affecting you.

A manager will realize that your concerns are affecting your productivity and will hopefully work to resolve the issues. However, know that sometimes managers can't do much about certain things, like if you have an office without a door. Rather, work with your manager to understand what the root of the issue is. If not having an enclosed office is prohibiting your ability to concentrate, maybe in your cubicle you could wear headphones to drown out some of the background noise when working on a project that requires you to really concentrate.

If your boss is the reason you are dissatisfied with your work environment, speak with a human resource professional at the organization and explain your reasoning and ask for advice. Remember, you don't want to appear whiny and you need to have legitimate reasons for coming to them.



Listening is a key component to effective communication. Be sure to allow those around you to share their thoughts and opinions and truly listen to what is being said. There is usually more than one way to resolve an issue and by listening to alternate solutions you may be able to work together better to come to a resolution.

WORKING WITH SOMEONE OF A DIFFERENT BACKGROUND

This could be someone from a different generation, different culture or simply the opposite gender. There has been a lot of research done on communication between different generations as well as different genders. For example, Millennials like to receive a lot of feedback and communication, while Traditionalists, would rather you not over-communicate with them. While this topic could be a whole other article, one piece of advice if this becomes an issue for you, would be to ask for some formal or informal training on this topic.

Many organizations are investing in educating staff around generational differences and might have an easy resource for you to look into, or they might pair you with a mentor of a different generation, race or gender. That personal interaction with someone who is open to you asking questions about understanding them can be extremely helpful.

Many forget that effective communication is a two-way street, the person talking and the person listening. Listening really is just as important and can help you handle many workplace communication situations. Be an active listener and ask questions. Good listening with effective verbal and written communication skills will help you become the best employee you can be!