

25 Top Tips to Better Communication

(From BT Talk Works – How to get more out of life through better conversations)

1. Devote the time

Conversations need room to grow if they are to reach their full potential. Research shows that we spend a lot less time talking to people close to us than we imagine. Yet when a conversation is really working well, the time seems to fly by.

2. Share the airtime

Make conversations like dancing: a two-way partnership, with neither side dominating.

3. Stay in touch

The 'stitch in time' rule applies to communication as well. Studies show that many of our more 'difficult' conversations (the ones that turn into battles) could be avoided by staying in more regular contact.

4. Value difference

Every conversation is a potential learning experience. We can all make our lives richer by understanding the experiences of others. Having a conversation with someone is like exploring the pages of an encyclopedia full of valuable knowledge.

5. Know your reputation

How other people see you greatly influences how they approach you in conversations. If there are negative sides to your reputation as a communicator work hard to change them.

6. Own your thoughts and feelings

Try to avoid the Blame Game. Use "I" statements rather than "you" statements when talking about your thoughts and feelings.

7. Recognise and respect feelings

Unless you're able to recognise your own feelings, you won't be able to express them clearly and be open with other people. If you are not able to recognise other people's feelings, you'll only ever understand part of their picture.

8. Don't assume

Many misunderstandings arise from faulty assumptions about all kinds of facts and feelings. So when in doubt, say what you mean and encourage the other person to do the same. Hinting is not good enough.

9. Accept responsibility

Blaming the other person for not understanding you – or for not understanding them – is pointless. While you can't be responsible for the other person's efforts, you can for your own.

10. Choose the right moment

Don't bring up important issues when there isn't time to deal with them properly or if the circumstances are wrong.

11. Set the stage

Use the opening part of a conversation to be up front about why you'd would like to talk and what your main point is. You'll engage the interest of the other person and help them to understand what follows.

12. Be concrete and specific

Talk in a way that's about real things, real experiences and real feelings. Aim to be the central character of your stories.

13. Say what's on your mind

Once the conversation has finished, it's too late to say the things you left out.

14. Summaries

Regularly summing up what you've said can transform the quality and accuracy of your conversations – and instantly eliminate many of the knock-on problems caused by misunderstandings.

15. Listen on all channels

Don't just listen to the words, listen to the 'music' as well, including body language and voice quality. Also, look for clues in what is not being said.

16. Keep an open mind

Listen with as little prejudice and as few presumptions as possible. Avoid snap judgements. Let your understanding develop like the image on a Polaroid film as the information comes in. Try to avoid responses that are criticisms in disguise. They are likely to sabotage the conversation.

17. Show you understand

Empathy is about demonstrating that you understand. You can best do this through words that reflect the other person's meaning. So take care to feed in plenty of Highlights as you go along.

18. Say when you don't understand

Be willing to recognise when you don't understand or need to know more. The other person will respect you for your efforts.

19. Work hard at clarity

If you're not clear, try, try and try again. It may not be your 'fault' that you're feeling fuzzy. It could be that the other person's thoughts are unclear. Encourage them to be concrete and specific about all the ingredients of their story.

20. Check your understanding

From time to time, feed back a summary of your understanding to confirm that you've got it right.

21. Spare the advice

The best decisions are those people that reach for themselves. So be lean on the advice but generous with the help and support.

22. Deal with negative feelings separately

If a conversation is failing to work because of negative feelings on either side deal with this issue separately.

23. Respect small talk

It's an important way to establish and demonstrate our closeness to people.

24. Base your feedback on facts

Offer helpful feedback based on a straightforward description of the behaviour and its impact. Before you offer advice or guidance, always make sure you have enough information.

25. Be yourself

Being genuine is at the heart of all worthwhile communication.