



Communication in the digital age

Technology has irrevocably changed the world of communication, both in the workplace and at home. While it used to be that you would only be available for work calls, and even work emails when you were at your desk, smartphones have changed all that - we are now available anywhere and anytime. Both your professional and your personal contacts can get in touch at all hours of the day or night, and likely expect an almost immediate response. Here are some useful tips to keep you using digital technologies to your advantage.

Know your audience. Texts and emails often have us writing in shorthand, using abbreviations and slang without even realizing it. Keep your audience in mind when you send a message, as this type of internet-speak isn't appropriate for all your contacts. People from your own generation may be used to short, instant message-like emails, while people who are used to letters may be more comfortable with emails that resemble traditional letters. Keep who you are writing to in mind when you send a message.

Keep in mind cultural differences. In today's global marketplace, we are often sending emails across continents. In the span of an hour, you might be in touch with contacts in Canada, Europe, and Asia. Because it is so easy to be casual on email, you can slip into being personal or casual without fully registering it. Similarly to the above, be aware that what is an appropriate tone and mode of address may vary across cultures: while it may be appropriate to call a CEO by their first name in your home country, this might be considered an unprofessional approach abroad. To play on the safe side, stick with addressing people more formally, or be aware of whom you are writing to and how well you know them.

Slow down when tempers rise. Whether it's an argument with your partner, a tiff with a sibling or a disagreement with a coworker, conflict doesn't go smoothly when you are using text and email. Most of us know that it is all too easy to write a fiery response and hit send before we have thought it through. Forbid yourself from responding immediately when things get heated, and allow yourself to cool down before you type out something you'll regret.

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Pick up the phone. Do you ever find yourself hashing out details over email, exchanging countless messages back and forth filled with minutiae and clarifications? Sometimes we become so accustomed to text and email that we forget that the phone even exists! And sometimes, it is the fastest, easiest way to get the answers you need.

Schedule face-to-face time for important conversations. For conversations that really matter, nothing beats sitting down with someone face-to-face and discussing it. So much of communication is non-verbal, and this simply does not translate over our devices. If it is absolutely impossible to meet, use video-call software to speak in-person and allow your voice, ears, and body language help you communicate.

Unplug sometimes. Being constantly reachable can become exhausting. Take time away from your smartphone by leaving it at home when you go for a walk, or setting it on airplane mode before you go to bed. It can feel like a huge relief to know that for a few hours you can't be reached - don't worry, the world will still be there when you plug back in.

Whenever you are communicating with anyone, keep your objective in mind, and ask yourself what the best mode of communication is (e.g., face-to-face, email, phone etc.) and what tone you want to use (e.g., formal or informal). Being clear with yourself in advance is a surefire way to ensure that your communication will come across clearly to your audience.

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