

# How to Add Polish to Your Interpersonal Communication

by Carol Dunitz, Ph.D.

E-mail, IM, Skype, phone, snail mail --- there are more vehicles for communication than ever before. But when it comes to truly effective communication, there is nothing as good as face-to-face meetings. That's because more than 90 percent of the communication we do is nonverbal. How can you possibly accomplish your communications objectives if the person you are communicating with receives only 10 percent of your message?

**Add Strength to Your Words.** When I was growing up I was repeatedly told, "It's not what you say, it's how you say it." That's what nonverbal communication speaks to. When you meet with someone, you have the opportunity to send your entire message and they have the ability to truly embrace it. You can share the tone and volume with your voice and place emphasis on certain words. Your facial expressions, gestures, and body language convey additional meaning that is totally lost with computer-based communications. There is little room for misunderstanding.

**Power Up Your Nonverbal Communication.** When you get together with someone, they have the chance to experience the real you. If you want to make a good impression you'll dress properly, and make sure your hair and nails are clean. You'll lead with a firm handshake that demonstrates self-confidence and follow up with good eye contact and a winning smile.

**Tune In to feedback.** Meeting with someone is more personal than using high tech lines of communication. It gives you the opportunity to build a bond and establish trust. When you're talking, you get immediate feedback from the person you are with. If the response is not what you expected or hoped for, you are in a position to modify it on the spot.

**Ramp Up Your Listening Skills.** A face-to-face meeting give you the opportunity to listen. And listening is the most important communication skill we have. After all, you don't learn anything when you are talking. You already know all about what you have to say. It is when we listen to others that we have the chance to learn about them and what they are sharing.

Being an effective listener means asking open-ended questions and listening carefully to the answers. Avoid the tendency to interrupt or advise. Cultivate the ability to make the person you are listening to feel like they are the center of your world while they are speaking. Let them see how interested you are in what they have to say -- even if you really aren't. Actively listen. That means listening intently and processing the information so you are in a position to respond in a thoughtful manner. Be sure to read between the lines. And be cognizant of their nonverbal behaviors.

**Show That You Care.** Face-to-face communication is an opportunity to establish a common bond. Make an effort to find an interest that you share. Be sincere. Be interested. Be giving. Supplementing your newly polished communication skills with the knowledge you care can work miracles with your interpersonal communication.

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