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Published on May 18, 2021 We have two ears and one mouth for a reason—effective communication is dependent on using them in proportion, and this involves having good listening skills.The workplace of the 21st century may not look the same as it did before COVID-19 spread throughout the world like wildfire, but that doesn’t mean you can relax your standards at work. If anything, Zoom meetings, conference calls, and the continuous time spent behind a screen have created a higher level of expectations for meeting etiquette and communication. And this goes further than simply muting your microphone during a meeting.Effective workplace communication has been a topic of discussion for decades, yet, it is rarely addressed or implemented due to a lack of awareness and personal ownership by all parties.Effective communication isn’t just about speaking clearly or finding the appropriate choice of words. It starts with intentional listening and being present. Here’s how to improve your listening skills for effective workplace communication.Listen to Understand, Not to Speak There are stark differences between listening and hearing. Listening involves intention, focused effort, and concentration, whereas hearing simply involves low-level awareness that someone else is speaking. Listening is a voluntary activity that allows one to be present and in the moment while hearing is passive and effortless.Which one would you prefer your colleagues to implement during your company-wide presentation? It’s a no-brainer. Listening can be one of the most powerful tools in your communication arsenal because one must listen to understand the message being told to them. As a result of this deeper understanding, communication can be streamlined because there is a higher level of comprehension that will facilitate practical follow-up questions, conversations, and problem-solving. And just because you heard something doesn’t mean you actually understood it.We take this for granted daily, but that doesn’t mean we can use that as an excuse.Your brain is constantly scanning your environment for threats, opportunities, and situations to advance your ability to promote your survival. And yet, while we are long past the days of worrying about being eaten by wildlife, the neurocircuitry responsible for these mechanisms is still hard-wired into our psychology and neural processing.A classic example of this is the formation of memories. Case in point: where were you on June 3rd, 2014? For most of you reading this article, your mind will go completely blank, which isn’t necessarily bad.The brain is far too efficient to retain every detail about every event that happens in your life, mainly because many events that occur aren’t always that important. The brain doesn’t—and shouldn’t—care what you ate for lunch three weeks ago or what color shirt you wore golfing last month. But for those of you who remember where you were on June 3rd, 2014, this date probably holds some sort of significance to you. Maybe it was a birthday or an anniversary. Perhaps it was the day your child was born. It could have even been a day where you lost someone special in your life.Regardless of the circumstance, the brain is highly stimulated through emotion and engagement, which is why memories are usually stored in these situations. When the brain’s emotional centers become activated, the brain is far more likely to remember an event. And this is also true when intention and focus are applied to listening to a conversation. Utilizing these hard-wired primitive pathways of survival to optimize your communication in the workplace is a no-brainer—literally and figuratively.Intentional focus and concentrated efforts will pay off in the long run because you will retain more information and have an easier time recalling it down the road, making you look like a superstar in front of your colleagues and co-workers. Time to kiss those note-taking days away! Effective Communication Isn’t Always Through Words While we typically associate communication with words and verbal affirmations, communication can come in all shapes and forms. In the Zoom meeting era we live in, it has become far more challenging to utilize and understand these other forms of language. And this is because they are typically easier to see when we are sitting face to face with the person we speak to.Body language can play a significant role in how our words and communication are interpreted, especially when there is a disconnection involved. When someone tells you one thing, yet their body language screams something completely different, it’s challenging to let that go. Our brain immediately starts to search for more information and inevitably prompts us to follow up with questions that will provide greater clarity to the situation at hand. And in all reality, not saying something might be just as important as actually saying something.These commonly overlooked non-verbal communication choices can provide a plethora of information about the intentions, emotions, and motivations. We do this unconsciously, and it happens with every confrontation, conversation, and interaction we engage in. The magic lies in the utilization and active interpretation of these signals to improve your listening skills and your communication skills.Our brains were designed for interpreting our world, which is why we are so good at recognizing subtle nuances and underlying disconnect within our casual encounters. So, when we begin to notice conflicting messages between verbal and non-verbal communication, our brain takes us down a path of troubleshooting. Which messages are consistent with this theme over time? Which statements aren’t aligning with what they’re really trying to tell me? How should I interpret their words and body language?Suppose we want to break things down even further. In that case, one must understand that body language is usually a subconscious event, meaning that we rarely think about our body language. This happens because our brain’s primary focus is to string together words and phrases for verbal communication, which usually requires a higher level of processing. This doesn’t mean that body language will always tell the truth, but it does provide clues to help us weigh information, which can be pretty beneficial in the long run.Actively interpreting body language can provide you with an edge in your communication skills. It can also be used as a tool to connect with the individual you are speaking to. This process is deeply ingrained into our human fabric and utilizes similar methods babies use while learning new skills from their parents’ traits during the early years of development.Mirroring a person’s posture or stance can create a subtle bond, facilitating a sense of feeling like one another. This process is triggered via the activation of specific brain regions through the stimulation of specialized neurons called mirror neurons. These particular neurons become activated while watching an individual engage in an activity or task, facilitating learning, queuing, and understanding. They also allow the person watching an action to become more efficient at physically executing the action, creating changes in the brain, and altering the overall structure of the brain to enhance output for that chosen activity.Listening with intention can make you understand your colleague, and when paired together with mirroring body language, you can make your colleague feel like you two are alike. This simple trick can facilitate a greater bond of understanding and communication within all aspects of the conversation. Eliminate All Distractions, Once and for All As Jim Rohn says, “What is easy to do is also easy not to do.” And this is an underlying principle that will carry through in all aspects of communication. Distractions are a surefire way to ensure a lack of understanding or interpretation of a conversation, which in turn, will create inefficiencies and a poor foundation for communication. This should come as no surprise, especially in this day in age where people are constantly distracted by social media, text messaging, and endlessly checking their emails. We’re stuck in a cultural norm that has hijacked our love for the addictive dopamine rush and altered our ability to truly focus our efforts on the task at hand. And these distractions aren’t just distractions for the time they’re being used. They use up coveted brainpower and central processes that secondarily delay our ability to get back on track.Gloria Mark, a researcher at UC Irvine, discovered that it takes an average of 23 minutes and 15 seconds for our brains to reach their peak state of focus after an interruption. Yes, you read that correctly—distractions are costly, error-prone, and yield little to no benefit outside of a bump to the ego when receiving a new like on your social media profile.Meetings should implement a no-phone policy, video conference calls should be set on their own browser with no other tabs open, and all updates, notifications, and email prompt should be immediately turned off, if possible, to eliminate all distractions during a meeting.These are just a few examples of how we can optimize our environment to facilitate the highest levels of communication within the workplace. Actions Speak Louder Than Words Effective communication in the workplace doesn’t have to be challenging, but it does have to be intentional. Knowledge can only take us so far, but once again, knowing something is very different than putting it into action.Just like riding a bike, the more often you do it, the easier it becomes. Master communicators are phenomenal listeners, which allows them to be effective communicators in the workplace and in life. If you genuinely want to own your communication, you must implement this information today and learn how to improve your listening skills. Choose your words carefully, listen intently, and most of all, be present in the moment—because that’s what master communicators do, and you can do it, too! More Tips Improving Listening SkillsFeatured photo credit: Mailchimp via unsplash.com If you had to guess how many English words you know, about how many do you think it would be? A thousand? A few thousand? It probably differs quite a bit from the number you yourself use on a daily basis; your brain might just hold a mini-arsenal of less common words that you’ve encountered in books, movies, and even middle-school vocab quizzes. And how does the number you know compare to the full number of words in the English language?How many words are there in the English language?Well, how many words are there in the English language? If you’ve ever marveled (or laughed!) at a list of new words added to the dictionary in the past year, you know that that number is constantly changing. But Dr. Adam Crowley, an associate professor of English at Husson University’s College of Science and Humanities, provides an approximate answer—and it’s surprisingly nice and even! “How many words are there in the English language? The short answer is about a million,” he told RD.com.Doubt you know anything even close to a million words? Don’t sweat it. “That number includes any number of legal, medical, scientific, and mechanical terms that most people will never encounter in their day-to-day lives,” Dr. Crowley says. While words like these are very obscure, many of them not even appearing in general dictionaries, they still, of course, count.The “million” number also, according to Dr. Crowley, includes the many, many words that have fallen out of usage throughout the time people have been speaking modern English. Though they have been removed from the dictionary, Dr. Crowley still counts them as English words. “Consider the word ‘diddle,’ a slang term from the 1700s that means ‘gin,’” he says. “Many English speakers would recognize ‘gin,’ but far fewer would recognize ‘diddle.” Likewise, see if you recognize these uncommon, but fun, English words we sadly no longer use.How many words does the average English speaker know?So, if a million words is the absolute upper echelon, how does that compare with the approximate vocabulary of most English speakers? More than you might think! “Most English-speaking adults know between 20,000 and 30,000 words,” Dr. Crowley says. Is that more than you thought? Well, the news gets even better—in addition to those many thousands of words, you’re probably able to comprehend a good 20,000 more just from context clues.How many words are there in the dictionary?No, you won’t find a single dictionary that includes anywhere close to the total million words that can be considered part of English. One of the reasons for this is the fact that general-usage dictionaries exclude lots of technical terms—both because of how uncommon they are and, in some cases, because of length. “The longest word in the English language is a term from chemistry that is used to identify a certain kind of protein. Spelled out, it is 180,000 letters long,” Dr. Crowley says. So you certainly won’t see it in the dictionary, but it still counts as an English word—indeed, it earns an English-language superlative!Most dictionaries also tend to exclude words after they fall out of common usage, consolidating only the most common words. That still amounts to a whole lot, though! “Today, the Oxford English Dictionary offers readers over 170,000 words,” Dr. Crowley says. And while the OED does consolidate the most “common” words, he adds, “many of these words are unfamiliar even to...people who have been speaking English for many, many years.” So there’s always more to learn and an opportunity to dive into the enigmatic English language. For instance, you’ll definitely be surprised to learn what the most complicated word in English is.Associated Newspapers/ShutterstockAlexander Image/ShutterstockStephen Orsillo/Shutterstock RD.COM Knowledge Grammar & SpellingThanks to cultural changes, incorrect translations, and a host of other reasons, word meanings often shift over time. Here, ten words that have done a 180. Olena Yakobchuk/ShutterstockCurrent meaning: Someone who mocks or harms those who are weakerOriginal meaning: A good fellow or a darling. Linguists believe it evolved from the Dutch word “boel,” meaning “lover.” LStockStudio/ShutterstockCurrent meaning: A conference or meeting to discuss a particular subjectOriginal meaning: A drinking party. The word comes from the Greek word “symposion,” which the ancient Greeks used to describe their lively, boozy banquets. Here are 10 words that mean very different thing in England and America. Monkey Business Images/ShutterstockCurrent meaning: A matter of no importanceOriginal meaning: A hypothetical idea created specifically to be talked about. Here are 10 common words that everyone gets wrong.. wowsly/ShutterstockCurrent meaning: IndignationOriginal meaning: Gratitude Originally Published: March 04, 2019

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