

Top 8 Rules for Nonverbal Communication in the Workplace

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The most successful individuals in business have learned how to maintain relationships with the people they work with, and relationships are built and maintained through clear communication. Following are the top 8 rules for nonverbal communication in the workplace.

1. Learn to Actively Listen

Learning to listen well may be the best thing employees can do to ensure their success.

- Listen more than you speak.
- Don't just listen, but process and synthesize the information received.
- Take time to think about your response before you speak.
- Listen attentively; this shows others that you value their time and the information they are sharing with you.

2. Maintain an Organized Workspace

A tidy, organized desk and a well-planned work area give an immediate impression of an employee.

- Eliminate unnecessary paperwork; do not let things pile up your desk.
- Keep personal effects tasteful and to a minimum.
- Streamline and minimize office supplies and equipment on your desk; store as much out of sight as possible to allow for a less cluttered, more organized space.

3. Dress for Success

How a person dresses for work is a direct, nonverbal communication to their superiors of what they think about their job. An employee's appearance is a direct reflection on the business or company they represent, and an employee must be willing to accept a business' standard of dress when they accept an offer of employment.

- If you have to wonder about it, don't wear it. If you question the appropriateness of an outfit, it is probably best to choose something slightly more conservative.
- For conservative offices, keep prints to a minimum, and focus on solid colors. For women, blazers, and well-fitting trousers or skirts are generally acceptable; for men, button-down shirts and slacks are the standard. In some more formal professions, such as the legal or financial fields, suits are required.
- Keep jewelry tasteful and professional.

4. Pay Attention to Your Voice

Tone, pitch and inflection should complement verbal communication, rather than confuse it. Learning how to leverage the elements of the "paralanguage" can be a huge asset for employees.

- Avoid sarcasm. The key indicator of sarcasm is the tone and inflection of the stated words. When using sarcasm, a person usually says one thing but means the exact opposite. This can communicate a lack of respect or caring to those you interact with.

- Maintain a confident and professional tone and pitch. A voice too highly-pitched can be associated with weakness or lack of confidence, while conversely, a voice too low-pitched can be perceived as overly confident or even bored. Keeping a mid-timbre range of tone is important to ensure that listeners can focus on what you are saying, rather than being distracted by how you are saying it.
- Maintain consistent speed. Learning to speak in measured tones that effectively convey your point in a timely manner but allow for a professional, conversational style can help you present yourself as a competent individual.

5. Have Body Confidence

Body language directly communicates to both listeners and observers who you are and how you interact with your surroundings.

- Take up space confidently and considerately.
- Maintain direct eye contact, but look away casually to decrease intensity.
- Shake hands firmly and confidently.
- Keep facial expressions neutral and open. Avoid “zoning out” or frowning out of habit.
- Work to recognize and minimize nervous habits or ticks.

6. Respect and Be Aware of Personal Space

Norms of professional and personal space should be a consideration in the workplace. Lack of attention to this can result in uncomfortable or awkward interactions, and less than effective working relationships.

- Maintain at least two to four feet of space between yourself and others in one-on-one conversations or in group settings, whenever possible.
- Avoid threatening posture or “looming over” someone sitting while you stand.

7. Keep Touch Professional at All Times

Touch in the professional office is almost never necessary with the exception of handshakes.

- Avoid hugging or brushing against employees, managers, or coworkers of either sex. While some workplaces maintain a more casual and friendly or family-like atmosphere, the professional office is not the place for physical expression of friendship.
- Avoid being in compromising situations or taking actions that could be perceived as inappropriate.

8. Be On Time

Being on time indicates that an employee cares about their position, and respects the time of others.

- Get into a morning routine; plan for and eliminate morning time-wasting habits
- Leave more time than you actually need to get to work
- Make it a point to arrive on time for meetings and consultations; this communicates to coworkers, clients and employers alike that you respect and value their time, not just your own