

If you want to communicate better at work – SHUT UP and think!

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The careers experts at Lawson Williams continue to offer tips, tricks and advice on building your chosen career.

In our previous articles we have talked about the changing world of work, existing in the VUCA world (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous). So many things are changing around us its hard to keep up and know what to do for the sustainability of our future careers.

My suggestion has been that although it is critically important to look forward, some of the best things we can do is control the here and now or be the best we can be right now.

When we consider what employers are looking for in their employees there are many opinions but there are typically 5 competencies or behaviours that reach the top of the list. There are really no surprises, so let's look at how we can be the best we can be right now and get back to some basics.

1: Communication.

Communication starts with you – self awareness at work

Although interpersonal communication requires at least two people, the most important place to begin is with you. Being open with another person starts with being aware of who you are and what you are like. Self-awareness helps you identify the actions required to behave competently in different situations.

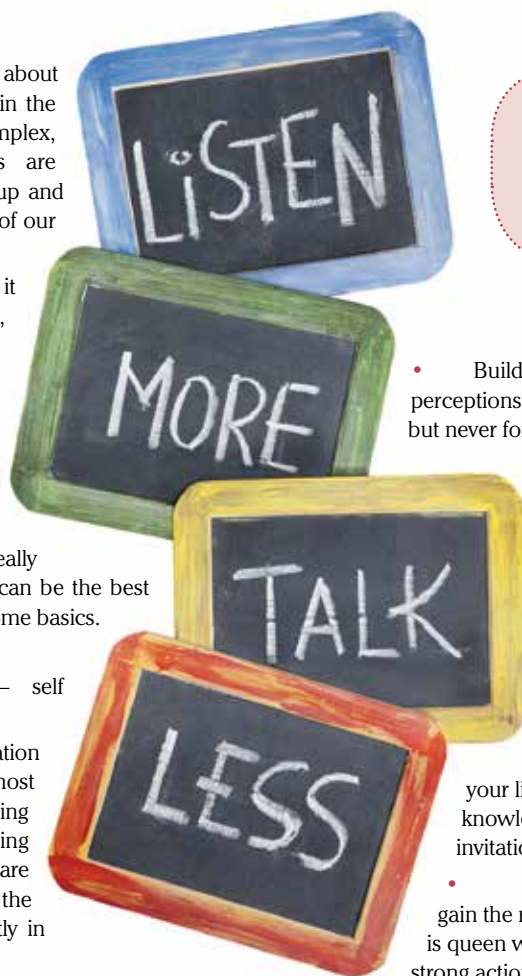
The more self-aware you are, the more able you are to manage your own behaviour and your ability to adapt your behaviour to changing circumstances is greater. The key areas for being self aware are having an understanding of your personality, values, habits and needs. All contribute to your ability to hear and be heard.

2. Think before you speak.

Communication. It's more than the words you use. It's how and when you choose to share information. It's your body language and the tone and quality of your voice.

These are things you should consider as you look to improve your interactions with others:

- Know the outcome. Before you begin planning what you will say in an upcoming meeting, consider what you want the outcome of your communication to be. What actions do you want others to take? How will you move people?



John Lawson will host the Young Technologists Social Evening at Conference (undergraduates and under 30's) and share insight into 'your' personality type in the workplace.

- Build a reputation. In the workplace, other people's perceptions of you don't form based on a single encounter but never forget how valuable a good first impression is! In order to gain respect and be seen as a trusted authority, eager team member or dedicated employee, you will need to build your reputation over time.
 - Avoid flaunting power and intellect. Compelling communicators don't strong-arm people into paying attention or dazzle listeners by showing off how much they know. Leave your ego at the door when speaking to people. Establish an even playing field, and place yourself at the same level with your listeners. While you may be the smartest, most knowledgeable person on a particular topic, wait for the invitation to share your expertise.
 - Be confident. A wimpy response isn't going to gain the recognition or support your desires. Confidence is queen when it comes to effective communication. Use strong action verbs, avoid filler words, such as "like", "um" or "ah," look people in the eye and sit or stand up straight when called on to speak.
- Show awareness of others. Shoving your great ideas or accomplishments down throats of listeners isn't going to work. Building relationships is part of the communication process and is key to your success in conveying your message. When you deeply understand how your audience thinks and feels and what is important to them, you can use that information to craft a message that will resonate with your listeners.
- Consider timing. There is a time and a place for everything. When you are aware of the events or emotional state of those you are communicating with, you can improve the timing of your message. Appropriate timing means you have taken the person and occasion into consideration and know when to share your message.

Five key active listening techniques

1. Pay attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognise that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.

Tips – Look at the speaker directly, put aside distracting thoughts. Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal. "Listen" to the speaker's body language

2. Show that you're listening

Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.

Tips – Nod occasionally. Smile and use other facial expressions. Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting. Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like "yes", and "uh huh".

3. Provide feedback

Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what

is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.

Tips – Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is," and "Sounds like you are saying," are great ways to reflect back.

4. Defer judgment

Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

Tips – Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions. Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

5. Respond appropriately

Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down.

Tips – Be candid, open, and honest in your response. Assert your opinions respectfully. Treat the other person in a way that you think he or she would want to be treated.

3. Time to shut up – master the art of ACTIVE listening.

The most adept communicators are experts at listening and reading between the lines. Mastering the art of listening isn't easy. You will most likely feel tempted to share your own insights, opinions or assumptions while listening to someone. Avoid commentary or interjecting. Instead, ask open-ended follow-up questions. This provides evidence that you are hearing and listening to the person. It shows your respect for the person speaking and for the information they are sharing. Practicing good listening skills will help you gain the respect of those you encounter.

There are five key active listening techniques. They all help you ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they say.

1. Pay attention
2. Show you're listening
3. Provide feedback
4. Defer judgement
5. Respond appropriately

So there it is, Communication. It is always one of the top 5 competencies sought by employers and we are constantly judged by it.

To sustain your career, learn to be an effective communicator now and remember the old saying "it's not what you say it's how you say it".

John Lawson is founder of Lawson Williams Consulting Group. He initially studied Biotechnology at Massey and is a professional member of NZIFST. He now enjoys leading a team of recruitment consultants, helping people like you develop satisfying careers.

