Express yourself clearly

Consider the culture, age, gender, personality and communication style of your listeners to get your message across.

Much has been written on the importance of effective communication for success in our jobs and our personal relationships. Communication touches every aspect of what we do in a given day. Every day, we communicate verbally, in written format and non-verbally through our body language. If we do so much of it, how is it that we make so many mistakes?

The problem starts with our approach. We are so focused on delivering a message that we do not always think of the personality, gender or culture of the receiver of the message when we compose our thoughts and transmit them.

We approach others and choose words based on our personal life experience and communication style, and expect the receiver to understand exactly what we are “trying” to say, leaving us extremely frustrated when “they don’t get it.”

Secondly, we filter and “listen” to communication, adding our own ideas to the message being passed as we are too tuned in to the internal dialogue in our own heads — “I don’t agree with him, he’s wrong.”

We are left wondering why a person is being so difficult and perceive that they are deliberately not listening to us. All too often we are making perfect sense and are clarity in our words and delivery, but the message somehow becomes distorted and is not perceived as intended. All of this makes communication a challenge.

Today’s organisation expects us to be able to communicate well regardless of gender, age or culture. If half of that wasn’t complex enough, add to that the challenge of communicating in a world now in a globalised connected world, be it online or face to face, the complexity of the world we now live in.

With globalisation and the ease of communication channels for us to speak to one another, many of us have an even greater communication challenge.

The whole point of communication is to express ideas in a clear, concise and easily understood manner to a variety of audiences. If half of our problem is our approach, let us look at some solutions to improve our communication capabilities.

Become self-aware

Be open to feedback. Are you getting your message across or only being understood by people like yourself? What is your tone? How do you think you are being perceived?

What is your body language saying? Get feedback from your friends and peers and learn about their perception of your abilities. Be open to criticism. Are you using too many words? Words with multiple meanings? Is your language familiar?

Gauge the natural style of the person you are speaking with and tailor your conversation accordingly.

Natural style

Men use more “report talk” and are more direct in their style. Women often adopt the approach in business to be able to be understood but naturally are more inclined to use communication to build relationships and familiarity. Before you speak, look at the person you are speaking with to gauge their natural style.

Non-verbal hints

Watch their body language — do they look interested? Are their arms crossed or do they seem to be pointing away from you? Look, listen, learn about their body language and alter the tone and content of your message so that they start “hearing” you.

Cultural cues

Remember, the language you are communicating in may not be their mother tongue or yours.

Are you using too many words? Words with multiple meanings? Is your tone appropriate?