

Navigating Communication Obstacles in a Remote or Hybrid Workplace

“Hello? Hello? Can you hear me *now*?”

Who *hasn't* uttered these sentences? They start so many calls, chats, and Zoom presentations. Communication in a remote or hybrid work environment can be challenging, but it doesn't have to be! We've got some tips designed to help you navigate some common communication obstacles.

Obstacle 1: When should I respond?

Solution: **Establish Communication Guidelines**

One of the greatest perks of remote work is the ability for employees to build their own schedules (depending on your company policy). It is important to align teammates on expectations for both internal and external response times. Establish acceptable response times for emails and messages. Adjust these times for different groups, such as colleagues, volunteer leaders, members, press, policymakers, public, etc. This new protocol will likely require a change in the expectations of others outside the team. Set clear policies and be consistent in their use and when managers and employees are expected to respond. While there may be those who may not be comfortable with it at first, at least *you* can start being consistent and setting the example for others.

Obstacle 2: How do I know if my teammate is available to talk?

Solution: **Set and Use Work Status and Availability**

Sharing your availability throughout the day with colleagues is important to do in a remote or hybrid work environment. Most communication tools such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, Outlook calendar, Google calendar, etc., allow users to share their status and availability with others. Set policies and be consistent in using these tools to help reduce the “back and forth” questioning others' availability to meet. Put quiet hours on your calendar so you can focus on [deep work](#) and encourage your teammates to do the same. Aim to strike a balance between respecting others' work times and getting the information you need during your team's “On” hours.

Obstacle 3: How do I handle someone who constantly wants to meet and discuss every detail?

Solution: **Embrace and Encourage Asynchronous Communication and Collaboration**

Real-time communication strengthens relationships, especially when working remotely, but it can be counterproductive too. A key principle of [workplace etiquette](#) is respect for the time of others. It's not fair to expect an instant reply from colleagues who are just as busy as you are.

Make asynchronous communication the norm. It allows people to deal with fewer distractions, preserve their focus, and increase their productivity. Instead of calling a meeting or responding to every Slack message, they can check it every few hours.

Obstacle 4: When should I send a message via chat or Slack vs. calling a “face-to-face” video meeting?

Solution: **Use Video for Difficult Conversations and Needed Face-to-Face**

Do not lose the personal element of crucial and sometimes difficult conversations. When having a sensitive conversation such as constructive feedback, negotiations around raises, or removal from a project or position, video is a critical element to the conversation. Use the same techniques and tones as you would in an in-person conversation. Do not take the “easy” way out by making a phone call or emailing because it might feel less awkward for you.

Additionally, use video at least once a week to connect with your teammates and those you manage. While it should not be required to use video for every call (you don’t want to give the impression of micromanaging), it is an important way to maintain a regular connection with and between your employees.

Obstacle 5: How do I know who is accountable for specific tasks and get status updates if I don’t call continuous team meetings?

Solution: **Use Communication and Collaboration Tools**

Let technology do some of the work for you. Project management tools like Asana, Smartsheet, Confluence, and Trello eliminate the need for project status check-ins, meetings, and follow-up emails. These tools make tasks and projects transparent to everyone involved, and they increase accountability, too.

If you have the urgent need to explain something “in person,” shoot a video and send it over instead. The recipient can watch it at their convenience without you interrupting their work. Collaborate in an online document instead of wordsmithing a report by sending emails or messages back and forth.

Let each piece of technology find its purpose in collaboration, not competition, so you can work on achieving your organization’s purpose without additional complexity and stress.

Summary

Overcoming issues related to miscommunication, lack of communication, too much communication, and when to communicate is not easy. But if you embrace technology, get in the habit of communicating asynchronously, create and use communication response protocols, and establish consistent policies and procedures, you and your team will become master communicators!