

Communication Tips for Managers

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Communicating with Stressed Employees

Stress produces the hormone *cortisol*, which causes many negative effects within an individual's brain and hinders communication. Essentially, cortisol

- Shuts down neurons in the brain
- Reduces the ability to store new information
- Causes concentration trouble
- Triggers defensiveness
- Increases short-term forgetfulness

Stressed employees will understand you more clearly if you:

- Keep messages concise (focused on key words)
- Write down important information
- Follow up conversations with email messages
- Be an active, empathic listener



Remain patient: Your employees and coworkers may need you to repeat information periodically as they work through the effects of cortisol.

Writing Effective Email Messages

An effective email message contains:

- A specific, informative subject line
- A clear purpose stated at the beginning
- Only details the reader needs
- A clear action step at the end
- Your full contact information

Email advice:

- Focus on one topic per message
- Follow professional writing rules
- Rarely send your reply to "all"
- Don't send email if the topic is sensitive
- Know that email is legally binding
- Read the message out loud for tone
- Use spell check before sending

Giving Constructive Feedback

- Speak with the individual in private.
- Begin with genuine and specific praise about a different action.
- Transition into discussing the action you need corrected by asking the employee about it.
- Explain the specific actions the employee should take.
- Emphasize the benefits the corrected action will have for the employees, and offer to help the employee throughout the process.
- Send a follow-up email to the employee that restates the specifics of your discussion. Make sure the tone of the message is motivating.

A positive, professional tone is preferable in most situations, even when conveying negative news:

Softening a Negative Message

- State what you can do instead of what you cannot do. Try to avoid "not" in your message.
- Replace words that carry strong negative associations, such as *problems* and *wrong*.
- Depersonalize negative statements by shifting the point of view from *you* to *we*.
- Use the passive voice occasionally to avoid accusatory *you* statements. Change "You must complete the report by Monday" to "The report is due by Monday."
- Read your writing aloud in varying tones of voice to make sure it cannot be misinterpreted. When in doubt, clarify with additional details.

Communicating Through Body Language

Avoid these negative and unprofessional gestures:

- Hands in pockets
- Arms crossed over chest
- Fidgeting
- Frowning and head down
- Shaking head "no"
- Pointing at people
- Hands near head and face

Do make eye contact and smile!