

Six Communication Techniques for Working Remotely



Working remotely increases the possibility for miscommunication. The following are strategies that create more seamless knowledge transfer, especially in situations where English isn't everyone's first language.

1. Avoid idioms. Idioms are expressions that, by definition, mean something other than their literal translation. Every language has them and they add richness to conversations. Besides, they're fun! Except when they're not. In forums where English isn't everyone's first language, idioms can be "plain old" (an idiom) confusing. A "good rule of thumb" (another idiom) is to interject them when you notice your listener using them as well. As you become mindful of using (and avoiding) idioms, you may be amazed how they're "all over the place".

2. Stay away from the "*whadaya whodaya syndrome*", aka connected speech. "Whadaya" connects the words "what do you", and "whodaya" connects the words "who do you". Try figuring out what the following words mean: Wanna, Gonna, Kenya, Shudja, Doncha, Woncha, Dunno, Useta, Hadja, Didja, Lemme, Howzie, Letcha, Fraydja, Sbin, Becha...and the list goes on. If you learned English as an additional language (no easy feat, by the way), how often do you think "connected speech" showed up in your English grammar book? My point exactly!

3. Never start a sentence with a question word. Why in the world would anyone do that? Quite simply, to be polite. Here's how it works: To show respect, you may find yourself saying things like, "What you need to do is...", or, "How you need to get there is...", or, "When you

need to have this done is by...” This way of speaking softens an explanation or command. Nice. At the same time, it can be horribly confusing. When English isn’t someone’s first language, this way of speaking can put your listener into “I need to give an answer” mode, rather than “I’m being given information” mode. A better method is to drop the question word and use intonation to convey respectfulness.

4. Replace the phrase, “What? What did you say?” with “Excuse Me. I didn’t understand. Can you repeat that for me?” The first phrase can have the inadvertent effect of shutting the speaker down. There are only so many times a person can hear, “What did you say?” without hesitating to jump-in and contribute. The second phrase signifies a shared responsibility for communication, and it keeps the dialogue open and collaborative.

5. Remove Sarcasm. By definition, sarcasm means the *exact opposite* of what’s being said. Even when the intention is to build rapport, sarcasm can be easily misunderstood - especially virtually.

6. Give compliments. Communicating without the benefit of face-to-face interaction diminishes our ability to create and maintain meaningful relationships. During times like these, when social interaction is limited, giving a colleague a sincere compliment goes an extra-long way.

Please feel welcome to share these techniques with others.
Judy

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