



REFLECTIONS

Communication Key to an Effective Remote Workforce

George Bernard Shaw offered some deep insight into communication when he said, “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

Boom!

Drop the mic (as the young folk like to say).

Communication is a vital life skill. Yet so many people seem incapable of mastering it. If we spend a few moments thinking about it, I am confident we can each recall at least one example when an attempt to communicate with another person has failed miserably. You may think you have conveyed the message clearly, but the other person has received something quite different than intended.

Sometimes the misfire results in hilarity. The misunderstanding is identified, everyone has a good laugh, and then you go about the business of trying again. If you are not so lucky, hurt feelings not easily resolved can occur. Maybe the other person does not even tell you they are upset by your words, so you go about life assuming the intended message was received loud and clear. The other person is silently stewing about it, building up resentment. In the workplace, that can lead to an inability to collaborate effectively as a team and lost productivity.



Photo by [Tima Miroshnichenko](#) from [Pexels](#)

Communicating Effectively with a Remote Team

Communication already was difficult enough without adding remote working to the equation. Thanks to a global pandemic, remote work is becoming the norm rather than the exception. More companies are embracing the notion of a permanent shift toward permitting employees to work from home according to data from a [June 2020 PwC report](#).

That is leaving many businesses wondering how to improve communication with a remote workforce if they struggled with it when their employees were all on-site. Here are some suggestions and practical tips for developing effective remote communication.

Tip #1: Pucker up, buttercup

When I was in Journalism school, one of the first rules of writing I learned was the K.I.S.S. method. If you are panicking, relax. It does not require you to literally pucker up. K.I.S.S. is short for a basic piece of communication advice: Keep It Simple Stupid.

Now, this does not imply that people are too dumb to understand complex thoughts. It is a nod to the way most people choose to communicate with one another. Imagine your coworker sends you a message about a joint project that starts out like this: “In this brief missive, I will explore the rationale for pursuing an economizing of our overheads.” You would probably roll your eyes hard enough to give yourself a concussion. And rightly so. A simple,

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“I’m working on ways to reduce our costs” would have worked fine. These are what I like to call \$25 words. You might think they make you sound all fancy and smart, but they open the door for miscommunication. If you want to reduce the chances of a communication failure, speak (or type) simply.

Tip #2: Pick a tool, any tool

The average worker spends [2.6 hours](#) each day reading and responding to email. That does not even account for the phone calls, Zoom conferences, and check-ins on Microsoft Teams. With so many new channels of communication available these days, it is easy to get so caught up with checking in that you get nothing else accomplished. Do not go down the rabbit hole of communication when working remotely. Every team needs clear guidelines on preferred methods for relaying information to their coworkers, clients, and management. Chat channels like Slack work great for teams to keep in touch while collaborating on projects or for daily updates on progress. Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet are great options for weekly staff meetings.

Whatever options you choose, make sure you are not expecting workers to jump from one to the other all day long. Choose specific times – and communication tools – for touching base and reserve the rest of your working hours for attending to work-related tasks.

Tip #3: Tone it down

With written communication methods – email, chat, text – it is important to follow formatting rules. One of the biggest challenges with this kind of communication is the difficulty in denoting another person’s tone. You may think

your words are pleasant and polite, but the person on the other end may interpret them quite differently. There are some things you can do to help lessen confusion.

- Typing in all caps is a major no-no. It generally is understood to mean the person is shouting or being aggressive. This is never acceptable when communicating as part of a remote team.
- Avoid sounding terse. It is tempting to engage in a series of quick messages back and forth when you are busy. Resist the urge. When this happens, it is easy for the person on the other end to misconstrue your short bursts of information as being dismissive or rude. Sure, using emojis can help, but it is not always professional to do so. It is better to either use properly formatted sentences or ask to continue the conversation on the phone, where it is much easier to denote tone.

Tip #4: Watch it, buddy

Everybody seems all about video conferencing these days. Videoconferencing services reported [upticks in usage](#) since the global pandemic hit earlier this year. Using these platforms to keep in touch with coworkers and clients is an advantage for remote workers. The convenience is not without drawbacks. When we are on video, there is any number of things that can go wrong. From pets and children wandering into the background to embarrassing gaffes when the mic is still live, there is hardly a shortage of examples of videoconferencing gone wrong.

Some of these mishaps are out of our control. Others are not. For example, body language. It speaks volumes about how we are feeling whether we mean to convey those feelings or not. Sitting up straight, holding eye contact, and minimizing hand gestures is a great way to keep your body from betraying your

private thoughts and feelings. Yes, meetings can be boring. You probably have 20 other things to do. Your job at that moment is to be invested in the conversation.

Tip #5: Break down (on the communication highway)

Do not wait until there is a complete breakdown of communication to address any issues. Remote work is challenging, especially for those who are used to an office dynamic. If you find colleagues are not responding in a timely fashion and it is impacting your workflow, take steps to address the breakdown before a complete communication failure occurs. When emails and texts are ignored, pick up the phone and call. Electronic communication is not foolproof. Emails end up in spam and texts sometimes do not get delivered. It can be tempting to rely on the convenience of all these handy new electronic tools, but sometimes, a good old-fashioned phone call is best. As a last resort, reach out to management to help resolve communication failures.

The Bottom Line on Remote Communication

Communicating remotely is a challenge, but it should never be an excuse for failure. We live in an era of amazing possibilities, with technological advancements and tools designed to facilitate better communication readily at our disposal. It may take some trial and error to find the right fit but committing to a remote communication plan is worth the effort.

Need help improving your remote workforce’s communication plan? [Reach out](#) to The Write Reflection to schedule your no-obligation consultation with one of our team members today.

“Hey, Hey! What’d You Say?” Puts New Spin on Dealing with the Mean Kid

Hampton native Lisa Mack-Finn always knew she wanted to write a children’s book. She had a way of putting together words to teach a lesson without it feeling like a lesson – an important technique when your target audience is children.

A former substitute teacher who currently works as the business coordinator for the Pine-Richland Youth Center, Ms. Mack-Finn understands how children think. She knows if you want children to listen, you must speak in a way that makes them feel valued and respected.

She had a great idea for a story, which sat in bits and pieces on her computer for a while. It was when she was strolling down the beach in Florida that she proclaimed she would finally finish and publish her book.

“Tom, my fiancé, had no idea it was even in the works,” she said. “He loved the idea and from there I began the process of gathering all of those fragments, bits, and pieces to put together.” Those bits and pieces formed the recently released “Hey, Hey! What’d You Say?” a thoughtful book about coping with the mean kid.

The book’s characters – a bear, a family of bunnies, and a turtle with glasses – come together to try and figure out why the snake is so mean to everyone. They decide to treat the snake with kindness to get to the bottom of his behavior. It is a different approach than some kids may take with bullies or mean kids, but it is one Ms. Mack-Finn said should be explored more often.

“As parents, when we are at home and we hear our child say that there is a mean kid at school, I think our first instinct is to say, ‘Stay away from them! Just walk the other way! Tell a teacher!’ I think we need to try to change that rhetoric a bit.”



Although it may be difficult, teaching children to instead show kindness toward a mean kid may make all the difference for that child. “We need to say things like, ‘Have you asked them if they are OK? Have you tried to offer them a place at the table? Could you try once to see if they are tired or having a bad day?’”

Ms. Mack-Finn said she realizes that not all kids are going to be friends with each other. “But we should teach them to rule a few things out before just walking away. There is so much healing in words no matter the age.”

The hardest part about publishing the story was the layout and design. Using Amazon’s Kindle Direct Publishing platform was confusing and frustrating. “It would be so much easier with a publisher,” she said. “Who knows? Maybe someday a publisher will find me and scoop me up.”

She credits her illustrator, Alicia Georgie, who came up with an amazing cover and illustrations to perfectly match her words. Her editors, Janet Leo and Annie Kirby were crucial in preserving her

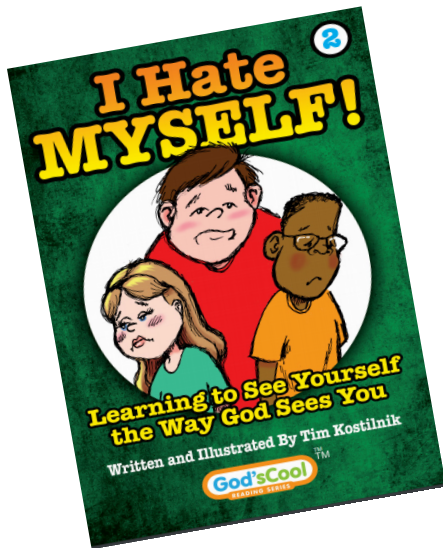
creativity. Annie is a pro at punctuation and Janet will tell me when something is just off. I wouldn’t have been able to do it without them.”

“Hey, Hey! What’d You Say?” is not Ms. Mack-Finn’s first book. She is the author of “Unknown,” a memoir recounting her recovery from an accidental blow to the head that left her with a severe concussion. It was written to inspire anyone going through a tough time, especially those suffering from brain injuries. “They are life-changing,” she said. “I like to be real in my writing, so you will really see who I am in that book. It’s unedited because I wanted to leave it in the state in which my thoughts streamed.”

For her next book, she plans to publish an unfinished fiction novel. “But I have had many ask me to continue writing for children,” she said. “Honestly, I kind of go where the wind takes me and something really needs to strike me creatively to present it for everyone to see.”

“Hey, Hey! What’d You Say?” is now available on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).

Christian Author Breaks the Cycle



T.J. likes to daydream. A lot. He gets into trouble for drifting off into his thoughts in the middle of class and frustrates his family with his inability to stay in the moment. For T.J. daydreaming is a coping mechanism. It is how he controls his angry outbursts and feelings of inadequacy, which seem to happen a lot if he spends too much time in the real world.

Author Tim Kostilnik can relate to the main character of his Christian children's books in The God'sCool Reading Series. The first book, titled "I'm So Angry," introduces readers to T.J. as a child battling a

lot of different feelings he has no idea how to handle. T.J. learns God's way of dealing with his feelings from his wise Grandpa Sol.

Not only did Tim daydream a lot as a child, but he has also struggled with the urge to give in to angry outbursts. "Anger is something I've dealt with my entire life, so it was kind of cathartic for me to write this character who is struggling with his anger," said Kostilnik. "There is a difference between Godly anger and selfish anger. No one told me that when I was a kid. I want to break the cycle by giving kids a story they can relate to with a character who learns this valuable lesson."

"I Hate Myself" is the second book in the God'sCool series. T.J. and his friends all have things that they hate about themselves but never share with anyone. The story describes how they learn to love and accept themselves and see themselves the way that God sees them. The series is geared toward readers in the 9 to 11 age range and includes helpful discussion questions and additional resources for parents.

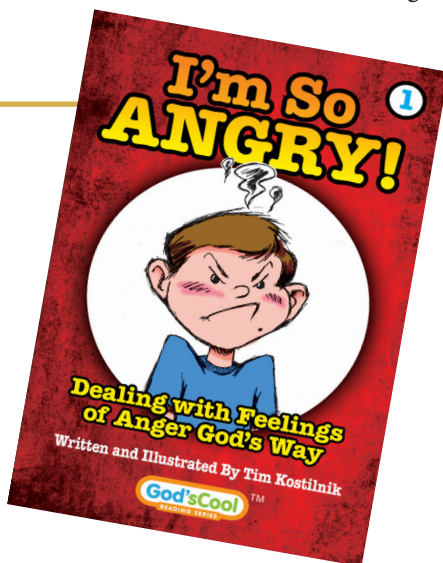
"I wanted families to be able to tackle these problems in a Godly way," said Kostilnik.

"I'm a firm believer that the Bible is a resource. God's word is the way to handle any positive or negative experience. I hope to end the cycle of toxic family traditions concerning child-rearing by providing parents with an alternative resource."

Kostilnik pulls double-duty as the book's author and illustrator, leaning on his graphic design skills to help bring his stories to life.

A total of 12 books are planned for the series, each featuring the same characters introduced in books one and two, with new friends joining in along the way. "I plan to include diverse characters in my books so more children and families can relate to them." Every book in the series focuses on a specific lesson. The third book, which Kostilnik currently is writing, explores how to handle death from a Godly perspective. He is still fleshing out the details of the story but plans to introduce a soldier as one of the main characters. The goal is to have the third installment in the series available in early 2021.

"[I Hate Myself](#)" and "[I'm So Angry](#)" are available on Amazon.





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