

WHILE WE WAIT...

Please answer the poll questions for this session on the Whova app:

- Share a tip, trick, or hack for better electronic communication
- What is your pet peeve when it comes to electronic communication?



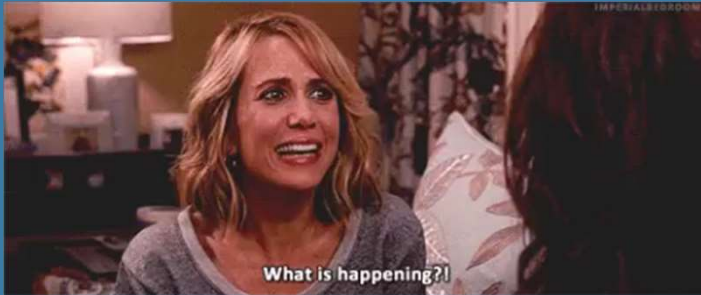
OPENING THE LINES OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

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The Crisis Prevention Institute, or CPI, provides workplaces with skills to recognize and respond to everyday workplace problems and crises, always prioritizing the values of Respect, Service, and Safety at Work.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO TODAY?



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- Consider the effect of various types of communication methods
- Explore ways to avoid problems in workplace communication
- Examine strategies for responding to conflict when communication goes wrong
- Have some fun!

CHALLENGES



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There are so many challenges to communicating electronically!

- Autocorrect!
- Some forms of electronic communication can be one-sided, allowing limited opportunity to clarify information. For example, a voicemail from an angry patron who left no callback number, or an angry blog post with no opportunity to comment.
- Quantity of messages – ever feel like you are drowning in emails?
- Quantity of *ways* we can communicate. Do I chat, email, text, or video call this person?

In choosing a communication method, it is essential to consider the content, the person receiving the information, and the reason the information needs to be shared. There are strengths and challenges to any communication method, including those involving electronic communication.

NONVERBALS



Facial expressions

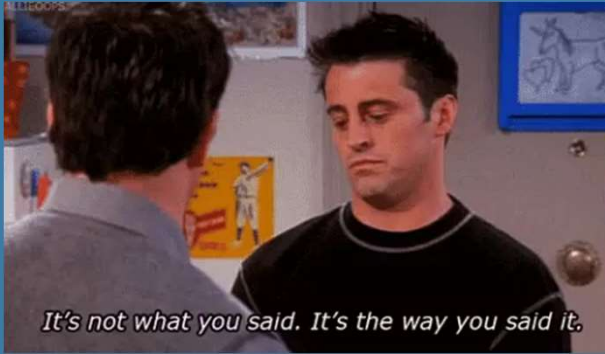
Gestures

Eye contact

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Another challenge is that in many forms of electronic communication, nonverbal communication is absent or less obvious. In fact, less than 10% of any communication involves spoken words. Nonverbal communication is the term for those things we 'say' without using words, including **facial expressions**, **gestures**, and **eye contact**.

PARAVERBALS



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“This book is unbelievable – I was surprised to find it in our library.”

“Can we talk?”

“I’ve got news for you.”

In some forms of electronic communication, **paraverbals** are absent, so a message could be easily misinterpreted.

Paraverbal behavior is *how we say something*. It’s made up of three main components:

1. **Tone:** The manner in which feelings and emotions are conveyed through vocal qualities.
2. **Volume:** The loudness or softness of the voice.
3. **Cadence:** The rate or rhythm of speech.

As we learned on the last slides, only a small percentage of the message we deliver comes from our words. Two sentences containing identical words can convey completely different meanings.

For instance, talking unusually fast might indicate anxiety; tone of voice could indicate defensiveness. The “tone” of written words may be inferred through punctuation, such as excessive exclamation points, all caps on specific words, or even by font style, such as bolding an entire email.

PREVENTION

...of Communication Pitfalls



First, decide: Is electronic communication the way to go, or would this be better in person or over the phone?

When is it better to talk than write?

1. When you need to build trust or strengthen a connection: Samara Hakim of CulturGrit says, “When a situation requires trust-building, free ideas exchange, instant clarification and validating emotions, in-person communication is more effective.” Sometimes you can just tell you aren’t connecting emotionally in a situation where you really need to – that means it’s time to connect in person.
2. When you are kicking off a new relationship – that human touch matters, whether with a new staff member, board member, or community partner
3. Discussion/dialogue: If you need to have more of a discussion than a simple exchange of information, in person can be better
4. If your audience just does better in person, or prefers that method
5. For sensitive subject matter:
 - If you are going to have a highly emotional conversation (helps avoid the message getting misconstrued or misinterpreted)
 - High stakes, critical conversations
 - Potentially volatile topics (personnel issues, for example). It can be difficult to convey warmth or tone in electronic communication

6. If you need to persuade someone: Sometimes, being in-person can give you more influence, according to Wisconsin-based business communication expert Stacey Hanke.

MORE PREVENTION

...of Communication Pitfalls



Find ways to enhance your own electronic communication skills, and if you are able, provide training for yourself and others to do it more effectively. According to Harvard Business Review, many of us do not receive this kind of training: “Only about 30% of companies train employees in virtual work skills, (and) when they do, the training is more likely to focus on software skills and company policies than on social and interpersonal skills.”

We can enhance interactions when communicating electronically by emphasizing CPI’s guiding principles of Respect, Service, and Safety.

1. Communicate **respect**. Any form of communication should be delivered in a respectful manner. **Definition:** Respect involves treating others with **courtesy**, and preserving **dignity**. Etiquette expert Dorothea Johnson says, “Be deliberate with your manners...so that no matter what platform you’re on, people will want to **engage with you** and **listen to your ideas**.”

Examples:

- Greet the person by name
- Address the person by first name only if you know the person well enough to do so

- If applicable, follow your organization’s protocol in the use of others’ titles
- Use proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation in written communication. Ignoring these details may indicate that the message is unimportant. It is sometimes too easy to forget these factors, especially if you are communicating somewhat casually with someone you know well.

2. Communicate commitment to high-quality **service**. High-quality service is apparent when respect is reflected in all forms of communication.

Definition: Service means meeting **commitments** and maintaining **professionalism**.

- Give your undivided attention
- Don’t multitask if you can avoid it. The human brain is not able to attend to more than one thing at a time. It can be very tempting to multitask when communicating through many forms of electronic communication. **Listen** to what the other person is trying to communicate.
- Take the time to understand the person’s concern or question.
- Once you fully understand the question or concern, respond or provide a resource if possible.
- Respond within a reasonable amount of time. For example, some organizations suggest that employees should respond to any kind of message within one business day. Also, make sure you understand your library’s expectations about response time – when is a message sent during off hours urgent, and when is it not? Is a chat message more urgent than an email? Also, what about off hours – if workplaces don’t have clear conversations about expectations, staff can feel pressure to be always “on” or “available.” Using your calendar, status function in chat, or autoreplies can help with this.

3. Communicate concern for physical and emotional safety. There may be unique safety considerations when conflict is rooted in electronic communication.

Definition: Safety means preventing **danger, risk, or injury**.

Examples:

- Employees sometimes tend to disregard safety concerns and assume a false sense of security with a threat to physical or emotional safety communicated electronically.
- Always consider safety issues when communicating with a person who is angry or irrational.

EVEN MORE PREVENTION TIPS

"Hope this email finds you well..."
How the email found me:



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PITFALL-AVOIDANCE CHECKLIST

- Subject line and greeting
- Jargon, abbreviations, and acronyms
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation
- Capitalization
- Empathy
- Assumptions
- Privacy and confidentiality

How else can we avoid trouble in our electronic communication? We can check our messages for these common pitfalls:

- An email lacks a subject line or greeting
- Message contains professional jargon, abbreviations, codes, or acronyms that might be understood by some employees but not by others. For example, "All employees should submit the 7719 form to HR by the deadline," or "Use a #10 envelope when sending a UF9700 to City Hall."
- Message contains misspelled words, poor grammar, or punctuation that is either incorrect or inappropriate.
- Entire message is written in CAPITAL LETTERS (which is often perceived as shouting)
- Try to respond with empathy – consider the recipient's precipitating factors, or other things going on in that person's life that might have affected the way they interacted with you (more in precipitating factors in a few minutes). Write with your recipient's perception, needs, and level of understanding in mind.
- Check if your message includes any assumptions that exclude some recipients. For example: "I know we will all be at church for Christmas," or "Your husbands and wives are welcome to attend the annual company party."
- Message contains information that potentially compromises privacy or confidentiality or that may be in violation of legal, professional, or ethical standards. For example: "As you all know, Pat has cancer and is now in the hospital."

ACTIVITY TIME...THE SEQUEL



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Let's provide feedback on some examples of electronic communication, now that we have looked at some pitfalls of electronic communication.

For each of the following samples, we will pretend that the sender of this information has decided that electronic communication will be the most efficient way to communicate this information. The sender has asked our team to review a draft of the communication and provide constructive feedback and suggestions. We will also advise the sender of the most effective communication method for each sample.

HELP!

HOW COULD THIS MESSAGE BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

TO: Concerned Parties

FROM: Chris

SUBJECT: Rectification of erroneous implementation and/or utilization practices involving Multiorganizational projects and customers.

It has come to our attention that some of you utilize current practices that significantly reduce visibility of data for our data entry personnel specialists who of course say they can never see anything whatsoever most of the time. (of course, our "special" department personnel don't utilize current procedures at all even though they should so the rest of us aren't confused but you know them – they have to do everything "special;" and "different" ALL THE TIME!).

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY, only the process revised on the 11 month of the year two-thousand and nine on the fifth day of that month at 1300 hours shall be used. Effective immediately, our "special" folks need to submit whatever forms those "special" folks in that department use (YOU KNOW THEM!).

Thanks - Chris



The sender of this information has decided that electronic communication will be the most efficient way to communicate this information. The sender has asked our team to review a draft of the communication and provide constructive feedback and suggestions. Advise the sender of the most effective electronic communication method for this communication.

...YIKES

HOW COULD THIS MESSAGE BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

*READ THIS AND
GET BACK TO ME
RIGHT AWAY!
FYI: BTW IMHO THIS IS MEANT FOR
YOU!!!!!!!! C U l8tr! :- - 0*



Again: The sender of this information has decided that electronic communication will be the most efficient way to communicate this information. The sender has asked our team to review a draft of the communication and provide constructive feedback and suggestions. Advise the sender of the most effective electronic communication method for this communication.

ONE MORE

HOW COULD THIS MESSAGE BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

I RECEIVED YOUR MONTHLY REPORT THIS MORNING AND I AM SORRY TO TELL YOU THIS BUT I REALLY DON'T LIKE THE NEW FORMAT YOU ARE USING. WHAT WAS WRONG WITH THE OLD ONE????????? I KNEW JUST WHERE TO FIND EVERYTHING. THE 901 PROCEDURES SAY THAT PROTOCOL SHOULD BE SIMPLE AND CLEAR AND WORDING SHOULD BE RESPECTFUL, SERVICE ORIENTED AND PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY SAFE. OR IT SHOULD INVOLVE THAT OTHER PHILOSOPHICAL JIBBERISH. THIS IS WAY TOO CONFUSING. AND WHAT IS THAT STUFF ON PAGE THREE ABOUT DEVIATIONS FROM THE PRODUCTION SCHEDULE? WHY AM I JUST HEARING ABOUT THIS NOW?????

IMHO WE SHOULD JUST GO BACK TO THE OLD REPORT FORMAT. IT WAS FINE AND IT MADE A LOT

MORE SENSE!!!!!!

LOU



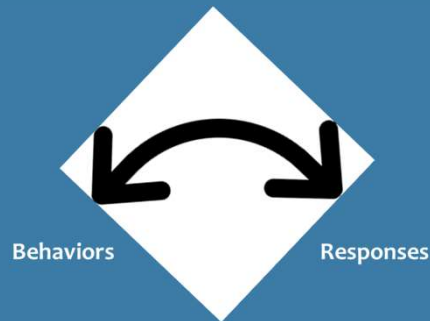
Again: The sender of this information has decided that electronic communication will be the most efficient way to communicate this information. The sender has asked our team to review a draft of the communication and provide constructive feedback and suggestions. Advise the sender of the most effective electronic communication method for this communication.

INTERVENTION

WHEN IT GOES WRONG

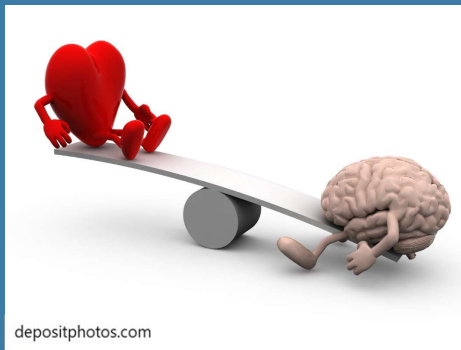
- Delay responding if possible
- Take emotional step back
- Remain calm
- Consider how your attitudes and behaviors will impact those of the other party.

INTEGRATED EXPERIENCE MODEL



- Sometimes, electronic communication goes wrong. What to do then? Let's look at several steps we can take to intervene. The goal of any intervention is to help everyone involved to reach Tension Reduction. Tension reduction involves a decrease in physical and emotional energy that occurs when a person regains control of rationality and behavior. *That* is always our goal. Not to be right, not to win, but to reach tension reduction.
- When electronic communication goes wrong, try these intervention tips:
 - If it is possible and safe to do so, delay your response. Take an emotional step back and remain calm. Try to remember the "Integrated Experience Model."
 - The Integrated Experience Model refers to the way our own attitudes and behaviors impact the attitudes and behaviors of others – and vice versa. If you stay calm and cool, that will likely contribute to a better outcome than if you are angry or defensive.
 - So, keep the Integrated Experience in mind. It is easy to respond to an angry electronic communication with one of your own. Read over your message before you send it. Think before responding.

RATIONAL DETACHMENT



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Control ourselves

Avoid taking hostility personally

Also, if you are in a situation where electronic communication has gone wrong, try to rationally detach.

Rational Detachment is the ability to control our own behavior and not take hostility personally.

- Avoid taking a negative response personally, becoming defensive, or accepting an invitation to a fight.
- Our intent is to be part of the solution, not part of the problem
- We can't control the behavior of another person, but we can control our own
- We can't control a situation without being in control of ourselves

Remember that the person's behavior may not have anything to do with you personally, but may be related to Precipitating Factors that are beyond your control.

PRECIPITATING FACTORS



Precipitating factors are internal or external causes of an acting-out behavior over which we have little or no control. These are those things that are leading this person to be not in their best state of mind to handle things in the best way

Examples:

- Family problems — stresses from home
- Loss of personal power — need to show that one is in control and not powerless to do something
- Need to maintain self-esteem — trying to save face
- Fear—not knowing what is happening; knowing the results of an action will cause an unpleasant response
- Attention seeking — reinforcement of a response; wanting attention from others
- Displaced anger — outside factors that trigger hostile behavior toward others
- Psychological/physiological causes — including drug-induced behavior states, hunger, pain, stress, insomnia

We have little or no control over the Precipitating Factors of another person.

Attention to Precipitating Factors is important because it can help us to:

- Prevent hostile behavior by being proactive
- Depersonalize confrontations by recognizing that we are seldom the cause of the hostile behavior

- Avoid becoming a Precipitating Factor ourselves. If we are not able to **rationaly detach**, we become a part of the problem and may actually precipitate the hostile behavior of others.

MORE INTERVENTION TIPS

...FOR WHEN ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION GOES WRONG

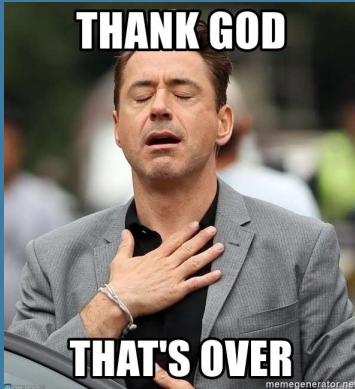
- Choose a method for responding
- Respond to facts, not opinions
- Follow through
- Take threats seriously



1. Decide on an appropriate communication method for responding to the person.
 - If a reasonable number of exchanges using a given method has not resolved the problem, try a different communication method. For example, if email has not resolved a concern after three exchanges, try to reach the person by phone. If voicemail messages become increasingly anxious, defensive, or hostile, wait until you can have a “live” conversation.
 - If you need to convey complex information that might generate questions, consider the most effective communication method for doing so.
 - Be cautious about your communication method when communicating confidential or private information of any kind.
 - Consider the most effective method for communicating anger, criticism, or information which might cause conflict.
2. Respond to facts, not opinions. Keep the focus of the communication on the specific issue at hand. Redirect **challenging questions** and possibly **allow venting**. Set limits if necessary.
3. Follow through. Even if a situation could become difficult, don’t make commitments that cannot be kept in an effort to appease the individual. Be honest about what you can and cannot do, and then meet commitments as agreed.

4. Follow your organization's procedures if someone makes a threat.
 - Take threats seriously
 - Document: Save copies of relevant electronic communication. Angry, disrespectful, highly defensive, and even hostile behavior may be quite upsetting, even when communicated electronically. It is very important to check with involved employees and provide the opportunity for debriefing if at all possible.

DEBRIEFING



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NOT SO FAST!

- Review
- Learn:
 - Contributing factors
 - What went well
 - Opportunities for improvement
 - Changes to consider

Once the unpleasant situation is over, there is an opportunity for growth and change that might help you avoid similar problems in the future. If we debrief well, it can help future prevention efforts.

A well-designed debriefing process not only allows us to deal with the emotions we may experience during and after an incident, it also provides a learning opportunity and helps prevent future occurrences.

- Debriefing involves a structured **review** of the experience, attempting to put the pieces together to form a **factual** account and cohesive picture of the crisis event.
- Debriefing provides an opportunity to learn:
 - What factors may have **contributed** to this crisis?
 - What was done **well**?
 - What could have been done **better**?
 - What **changes** should be considered to help prevent future crisis or improve future response?
- Another important aspect of a successful debriefing is an atmosphere that supports open dialogue in a nonjudgmental setting.

RESOURCES

Crisis Prevention Institute: crisisprevention.com

Forbes Coaches Council. "13 Times In-Person Communication Is Better Than Electronic Exchanges." tinyurl.com/9juhzt44

Johnson, Dorothea and Liv Tyler. "Modern Manners: Tools to Take You to the Top." Random House, 2013.

Larson, Barbara Z. and Erin E. Makarius. "The Virtual Work Skills You Need -- Even If You Never Work Remotely," tinyurl.com/drynz75h

Newport, Cal. "A World Without Email: Reimagining Work in an Age of Communication Overload." Penguin Random House, 2021.

WorkBravely.com. "Written Communication Gone Wrong: The Pitfalls of Email and Instant Messaging in the Workplace, and How to Avoid Them." tinyurl.com/3jhrz5ej



Here are some of the resources I consulted in creating this presentation, which you might find useful, as well.

One of the best resources we have is each other. Let's take a look at our poll results.

Tips:

- If you type the word "attached," stop typing and attach the document.
- Don't enter the recipient's email address until you are done composing, have checked for attachments, and have a helpful subject line.
- If you get a message you don't understand, try to avoid responding with a general, "What?" or just a question mark. Rather, ask for clarification on the specific part you found confusing.

THANK YOU!

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