3 communication skills you should never forget

For better or worse, we’re communicating creatures. Every day we rely on this innate skill to let the world know what it is we want, let the world tell us what it wants from us, and—just occasionally—let the world know exactly what we think! If anyone will listen.

Which is the first communication skill we should never forget—but usually do: LISTEN.

Of course, effective listening engages more than just the ears. It’s a visual thing as well. The second communication skill we should never forget—but often overlook—is to LOOK.

We talk about “body language”, and so often say, “I see” when someone explains something to us. Verbal cues—raised eyebrows, furrowed brows, fidgeting, looking away, slouching, punching the air—communicate more than our words do. That’s why telephone conversations can be so much harder than face-to-face ones. A colleague recently shared his experience of participating in a meeting with six other people around a table and him on the telephone. He said it was exhausting, because he couldn’t see what was happening—all he had were the words and he knew there was much more going on.

So, “watch” your communication—observe what’s happening in the interchange. And remember: other people aren’t just listening to you, they’re watching too.

Of course, sometimes when we’re listening—or trying to—we get distracted by other things and end up watching them while we attempt to listen. The classic example is the attempted conversation between two people on a couch with the television on in front of them. Guess what? Listening isn’t taking priority. Because of the distraction of the visual element.

So, the third thing to never forget about communication is that it’s crucial to LIMIT the distractions. Limit the alternatives to the sounds and sights of your message. Help yourself and other people to LOOK and LISTEN.

If you’re doing the listening and looking, help yourself by limiting the distractions. Turn off the TV, the radio, the CD, even the phone! Get focused. Give yourself a chance to really communicate, not another chance to be distracted. LIMIT the environment as much as possible to those things that are essential so that as little as possible can distract.

LISTEN. LOOK. And LIMIT the distractions.

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