

## Can You Hear Me Now? Top Tips to Make Sure Your Communication Isn't Breaking Up

**Communicating meaningfully with your people is the real name of the game. It's not just getting attention, but really getting through that truly matters.**

Stacey Hanke, a Chicago-based management consultant and co-author of the new book *Yes You Can: Everything You Need From A to Z to Influence Others to Take Action*, says that achieving success when you communicate requires that you be aware of what others see and hear and how they respond to you — whether it be face-to-face, over the phone, during a presentation, conference call, meeting or via other technology.

“It’s not just what you say but how you say it that matters,” she advises. “If you aren’t making a conscious effort to manage your tone of voice, the way you stand, and the words you use, you risk delivering your message ineffectively and leaving your recipient with the wrong impression. The resulting misunderstanding will not help your cause.”

Stacey says that you can learn how to communicate effectively if you focus on improving the most important method first — face-to-face communication.

“We’re not talking about tailoring a perfect email or internalizing the shorthand texting alphabet. Sim-

ply eliminate the static that plagues your one on one, person to person communication and everything else you do will dramatically improve as well,” Hanke says.

Here are some of her best recommendations, adapted from her new book:

- **Increase your awareness.** We don’t know exactly what others see and hear when we communicate over the phone or face to face. If you don’t know how you and your message are perceived, you will never make improvements. Pay attention to your audience. Watch and listen for their reactions and responses. Learn how what you say affects people.

- **Pause more often!** A mistake most of us make is saying more than our listeners want or need to hear, and saying it too quickly. Slow down. Deliberately introduce more pauses. What perception, pause, do you create, pause, when you hear a speaker speaking so fast, pause, that you can’t really understand, pause, what they are trying to say, pause, or if they clutter their sentences, with nervous non-words words like, um, uhhh, you know, yah, but, and so on. Slow

down, and replace your non-words with a pause. Less is more.

- **Connect or contact.** Look and listen for clues that you are connecting. Without the meaningful connection your recipient will lose interest, question your message, and have doubts about you. Pay attention and practice active listening by providing feedback to the other person’s response.

- **Confident entrance.** Do you walk into a room like you belong there? Within seven seconds others determine if you’re confident or uncertain. Your posture will communicate how you’re feeling without you saying a word. It’s the easiest way to immediately convey confidence yet the quickest way to lose confidence if not done effectively. Stand straight! Look people in the eye. Recognize them individually and smile.

- **Use technology wisely.** Face to face communication should not be a lost art. Ask yourself what communication medium to use to best influence action? Choose the most personal form of communication that allows for the best and most meaningful communication

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for the situation. Don't rely on technology, especially with complex, personal, or important communications.

- **Gesture to create a positive visual impression.** When your gestures and speech convey the same information, they're easier to understand. Confident speakers use their gestures to add emphasis to their words. Avoid fidgeting with your rings, fingers, pen, etc. by expanding your arms from your sides, make the gesture consistent with your message and then bring your arms back to your sides.

- **Speak to be heard.** Your voice is your greatest asset. Do you sound like you mean what you're saying? The sound of your voice shapes the attitude of your listeners even more than the words you speak. If you want to be perceived as confident, use the 1 – 10 scale. When speaking to a group of 15 or more, you must be at a 7 – 8 on the volume scale.

From here, you adjust your volume based on the group and room size.

- **Use fear as your motivator.**

Allow your fear of presenting to propel you forward. Channel your fear into your work. Doubt is good as it raises your awareness so you pay more attention and focus your mind on what is right before you. Anxiety is the greatest motivator you have.

- **Speak less and listen more.**

Talk directly to your audience and look them in the eyes when you do. Don't look at your slides, or notes or your visual aids. You are the message. Instead, communicate directly to your listeners so that you confirm that they understand your message.

- **Make disciplined practice your new habit.** You need to want it bad enough to begin making face to face communication your priority. Practice doesn't only make things perfect — practice makes things per-

manent. Even if all you can do is practice in real time, on the job, on the firing line, ask for constructive feedback on a specific behavior before and after your conversations and presentations.

“Even tiny little changes and improvements in how you communicate can be crucial and extremely beneficial,” says Stacey. “That's because in most cases, the incremental changes people make can result in instantaneous and dramatic improvements in behavior, communications, performance, customer service, relationships, branding, and profits.”

“If it works, do it again. If it doesn't stop and do something better, she says. “That's the essence of continuous improvement.”

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