

## English for Workplace Communication

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### Abstract

Even as English is a necessity for businesses, trades, diplomacy, etc. around the world, one notices continuing growth of miscommunication through English. Various factors are responsible for this: individual traits, business demands, inadequate preparation, etc. Various factors govern work place communication which includes mastery of soft skills.

**Key words:** Miscommunication through English, variety of soft skills, conversational etiquette, tone and brevity of usage

### Miscommunication through English

The use of English is as varied as ever in the present scenario. With the expansion of businesses, trades, international transactions and diplomacy, English is used extensively for everyday interactions. In the corporate world, English is an integral part of the communication system.

It is true that English occupies a coveted position among all languages. But the fact remains that very few know how to use it appropriately. Miscommunication is something which most employees have to deal with often. Sometimes the given information is misconstrued and consequently misinterpreted leading to a lot of chaos and confusion. This article focuses on soft skills, conversational etiquettes, tone and brevity as important factors which could reduce miscommunication through English in Indian and international contexts.

### Factors Governing Work Place Communication

Workplace communication does involve English but there are many factors which govern its usage. First of all, a man's style of communication is determined by his nature. A soft spoken man eases the most trying circumstances with his reassuring tone and gentle words. A temperamental person, on the other hand, terrorises the entire organisation. Sometimes, the terrorising trait is not inherent in a person. But as soon as he assumes an important office, he dons an intimidating garb, threatening the co-workers, subordinates, et al.

With such intimidating people around, communication either comes to a standstill or is deplorably warped! Such predicament has necessitated a paradigm shift in the communication style itself. This is also the reasons why soft skills or people skills emerge as a full-fledged discipline. People have to be trained to use the right word in the right tone at the right time.

This paper makes an attempt to examine the factors and recommend some corrective measures. The following are the factors which need attention:

a) Soft Skills, b) Conversation Etiquette, c) Tone and d) Brevity

### **Soft Skills**

Effective communication includes active listening as well as good language skills, leadership traits and team spirit. Sometimes people with extraordinary technical skills are just a rung below a person with mediocre skills. The reason is often attributed to their lack of soft skills. They have failed to relate to the people around them. Their inflexible approach and uncanny attitude, an uncompromising outlook distances them so much from people that they miss out on their promotion even!

### **Conversation Etiquette**

It is often said that in communication we have to use positive words, which will encourage people. Even unpalatable things could be phrased in a motivating manner. An apology which goes like this: “I am really sorry that I have to drop this on you” may not go well on the hearer; neither will a statement like, “Whether you like it or not you have to do this by 4 p.m.” sound appealing. Similar examples are given below.

“I know this is difficult, but it really must be done.”  
“How sad! This extra work definitely means overtime.”

A shrewd communicator would have the right tone and the words to get his job done. Examples are given below: “Hey you’re right person who can help me. I need this important job to be done immediately, and I was thinking you’d be the best person to do it accurately and on time.”

### **Words of Praise, Words of Personal Feelings**

It is often the words of praise which keep the wheels of communication going. A personal touch to the language one uses is all that matters. When you are actually praising someone, try to tell them how you feel. “It made me good that I work for the same company as you do when I saw you dealing with that complex customer problem”, means so much more than “Well done, keep it up”

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“I wish I had your comic timing. Your humorous one-liners leave me in awe.” says more than “You can impress me”. Adding personal feelings to words can do wonders to boost a person’s morale.

The following is yet another example which illustrates this point of view.

“I appreciate your offer to call them in order to update them on the progress at the end of the day. That’s a great standard work.”

### **Listen!**

There is a tendency for most heads of organisations, to talk rather than listen, as a result of which they are oblivious of the grievances of their employees. It is not that they are not unaware of their problems. They would like to pretend that the problems are non-existent. They have *panache* for talking hours on end without actually resolving any issue. They fear that if they did give their employees a fair hearing, it would reflect poorly on their administrative skills.

### **Humorous Talk Alone Is Not Enough!**

It is a well-known fact that we all like to listen to good speakers of the English language, especially if they are witty and engaging but even eloquence and wit cannot keep things going in an organization. There should be a humane touch spoken to every word spoken in the English language. People may even forget the hurting words that were said in an organization, but they will never forget how they were made to feel.

### **Dealing with Conflict**

For leaders managing constant change, conflict is built into the very fabric of their organisations. When conflict is not dealt with effectively, it can create strained relationships that tend to sap the time, energy and productivity of even the best teams. Dealt with positively, conflict can also be a catalyst that sets the stage for the needed changes.

Conflict cannot be dealt with perfectly but certainly attempts could be made to deal with the most difficult people. It is often a non-confrontational stand on issues that backfires ultimately. Issues should be dealt with, directly with the person concerned. Dealing with conflict directly may be uncomfortable and may lead to some disappointment but it eliminates resentment in the long run.

### **Focus on Future Problem Solving**

A communication style that focuses on future problem solving rather than proving a conviction for past mistakes should be devised. Winners of arguments never always win,

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because consistent losers never forget the resulting repercussions. These losers who are mostly the disgruntled lot who were not treated fairly in various circumstances, can even trigger a revolt.

### **Avoiding Avoidance!**

Problem solvers avoid avoidance; they learn to deal with conflicts as soon as it even slowly emerges. Problem solvers deal with issues and not with personalities. It is all too easy to abuse the other party instead of dealing with issues. Disagreements should not be personalised. Attempts at threatening, silencing or otherwise avoiding criticism of change will only force resistance and even increase the sabotaging of even necessary changes. Explored resistance helps build clarity focus and action.

### **Tone**

The tone of a person's language can make all the difference in a person's world. Sometimes, people who have the right word but the wrong tone can end up offending the hearer. Tone is also related to the *persona* or the image that writers intend to portray to audiences. Tone can range from sarcastic to humourous, to serious, to questioning, to angry, to persuasive, or to informative. Personal touch is important. People relate to one another better when they can meet in person and read each other's body language, so they can feel the energy the connection creates. If personal contact is not possible, the next best way is to connect is by talking on the phone.

### **Being Courteous**

Being courteous in communication with others lets people know that they are being cared for. The utterance "Thank you" shows that a person's efforts are being appreciated. Saying "Would you please" instead of just "please" would sound less dogmatic.

### **Clarity**

One of the most important components for successful interpersonal communication is clarity. People need to be able to understand each other. This may seem obvious, but it is surprising how many people seem to think that long, wordy language use makes them appear more intelligent or important. In conversation, either in person or by phone, making a point quickly is important. Organising one's thoughts beforehand, before attending to a phone call would be a good idea.

### **Brevity**

This means to be precise and clear and articulate ---- not general. How many times has someone said "Good job" or "This will do" or "We'll talk sometime later." How about comments like, "You can do better than this" "Your work has potential" or "Is this rough draft

or final copy?” These comments are vague and difficult to interpret - even if they are honest.

In workplace environment, it is always a good idea to keep conversations short and concise. Most organisations suffer from the ordeal of having to attend seemingly endless meetings. With inconclusive meetings and subsequent meetings on the rise, communication has increased rapidly at the cost of important work. Mostly, the work is shelved or postponed and an important deadline is not met. Meetings do play a major role in sorting out issues but certain limits should be set for deliberations.

### **Appropriate English Language Use**

An appropriate use of the English language can increase productivity besides motivating the employees. The right tone, the right diction at the right time is all that matters. A deft and diplomatic handling of the English language can do wonders in a workplace environment!

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