



Minnesota Women of Today

Leadership Toolbox – Positive Communication Skills

The speed at which, and the ways we communicate is continually changing. As we spend more time online and less time face to face, we tend to forget basic communication skills. From the most experienced member to the guest walking in the door for the first time, we can all benefit from practicing positive communication skills. Positive Communication is more than the way we talk to others. It is being aware of a person's facial expressions, tone of voice and body language. It is Conveying respect through written text by taking time to edit your message before sending it. If you send a sloppily written, confusing email the recipient will think you do not respect them enough to think through your communication. It takes time and regular practice to build communication skills. Practicing positive communication will have a great impact on your abilities as a leader.



The 3 C's of Verbal Communication

- Confidence. Confidence shows others that you believe in what you're saying and will follow through. Make eye contact and use a friendly, but firm tone. Be careful not to sound arrogant or aggressive by always listening to and empathizing with the others.
- Clarity. Prepare what you are going to say ahead of time. Don't talk too much or too little. Say what you want clearly and directly. Stay on point. If you ramble on, you run the risk of confusing your audience.
- Curiosity. Show an interest in what others are saying. Asking questions helps you understand what has been said and gives the other person a chance to explain if their meaning was different. Be attentive and do not interrupt. Let the speaker finish what they want to say.

Issues that arise communicating with volunteers

- Intense Feelings.
- Jumping to Conclusions.
- Not Feeling Heard.

Help others by helping yourself. Read over the included positive communication tips and tricks and put them to work for you. If you find yourself needing help, please contact the MNWT Chapter Management Vice President (CMVP) cmvp@mnwt.org.

What is Positive Communication

Positive Communication is not about avoiding conflict by saying nice things. It is about communicating appropriately for the situation and shifting the focus from critical and complaining to supportive and achievable. By describing what you want instead of what you don't want you will decrease defensiveness and encourage enthusiasm.

- Give and receive feedback appropriately. Constructive feedback does not attack a person or idea. It involves sharing concerns, finding points that could be improved upon, and giving praise as well. Saying "good job" or "thanks for helping me" can greatly increase motivation. In return, you should be able to accept and even encourage, feedback from others. Ask clarifying questions if you are unsure of the issue, and make efforts to implement the feedback.
- Know what form of communication to use. Some conversations are best done in person; others can be done over the phone or by email. You should think about the person you are going to be speaking with. How do they prefer to receive communications? When you consider the different communication style preferences of others, they will be more likely to respond positively to you.
- Encourage engagement by personalizing your communications. It is important to be kind and polite in all of our communications. Use a friendly tone. Smile. Ask a personal question. It is as simple as saying "I hope you all had a good weekend" at the start of a conversation.
- Be Brief and Specific. Most people say more than necessary when they haven't planned it in advance, especially when nervous or passionate about the topic. Prepare what you want to say ahead of time, reread and rehearse your script ahead of time, and edit as needed. Refer to specifics instead of thoughts or feelings. Remember, too many words can drown out your core message and vague requests are easy to ignore or misunderstand.
- Respect Others. Pause and listen to what the other person is saying before reacting or responding. It is important for you to try to understand and respect their point of view. It is okay to agree to disagree. Saying "I understand where you are coming from" demonstrates that you have been listening to the other person and respect their opinions.

Listening with Respect

Positive communication should begin with a flexible, open mind. Be open to listening to and understanding the other person's point of view, rather than simply getting your message across. Others will be more open to communicating with you if you convey respect for them and their ideas. Simple changes like using a person's name, making eye contact, and actively listening when someone speaks will make them feel appreciated. Active listening involves paying close attention to what the other person is saying, asking clarifying questions, and rephrasing what the person says to ensure understanding. Avoid distractions and stay focused on the conversation. By using active listening skills, you can better understand what the other person is trying to say and can respond appropriately.