

## WHY IS MINDFUL COMMUNICATION SO IMPORTANT?

Mindfulness to increase self-awareness and communication skills can help manage workplace conflict, which affects almost everyone.

- 89% of employees have experienced a work conflict that escalated
- U.S. employees spend 2.8 hours each week dealing with workplace conflict
- 25% say conflict lead to sickness or absence
- 18% people left their jobs due to conflict
- 9% reported project failure.<sup>1</sup>

Workplace conflict has a direct, negative impact on productivity and outcomes, increases stress and decreases employee satisfaction. Skillful communication can help build trust and contribute to better culture, collaboration, relationships and productivity.

## BRAIN BITS: SOME NEUROSCIENCE OF COMMUNICATION

“Mirror neurons” are brain cells that respond equally when we perform an action and we witness someone else performing the same action. It’s the brain’s way of instinctively and immediately understanding what other people are experiencing, and may be fundamental in social interaction, including self-awareness, empathy and language.<sup>2</sup> So you can imagine that in an uncomfortable or conflictive situation, we may be “wired” to respond with discomfort or conflict. The ongoing practice of pausing and noticing without judgment can move the brain from reactivity to thoughtful response. Practicing mindfulness can enable you to break unskillful patterns and build different neural pathways.

## DATA BITS: SOME NUMBERS ABOUT MINDFULNESS AND COMMUNICATION

Employers rank communication among the top three most valuable skills. Employees believe the single most critical activity for effective conflict management is conversation (42%)<sup>1</sup> and it applies to all working relationships, including our boss, peers, subordinates, clients, vendors, etc. Mindful communication practices can improve all aspects of conversation, from listening and speaking, to facial expressions, gestures, tone, eye contact and body movement. Being fully present, aware of your body and noticing your triggers and thoughts, allows you to regulate your response and align verbal and nonverbal communication.

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<sup>1</sup> [CPP Global Human Capital Report](#)

<sup>2</sup> Acharya, S and Shukla, S; [Mirror neurons: Enigma of the metaphysical modular brain](#), Journal of Natural Science, Biology and Medicine.

## MINDFUL COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

### Thought and body checks

- Cultivate self-awareness when someone is speaking: *Are you itching to interject? Do you want to fix the situation? Are you judging? Do you feel any tension in your body?* Recognize your triggers and consider how that affects your response.
- Practice non-judgment of self, other and/or the situation. Dig deeper before you react. Ask, “How? Could you tell me more?”
- Pause before you speak and review if your words pass the “**THINK** test:”  
Is what I’m about to say **T**True? Is it **H**elpful? Am **I** the best one to say it, or is it **I**nspiring? Is it **N**ecessary to say it **N**ow? Is it **K**ind to this person and others?

### Digital communication checks

- Don’t let notifications and messages drive the communication channel. Ask yourself if there is another form of communication that would be a more effective medium.
- Activate the STOP practice and decide if you need to respond and how you can most thoughtfully respond. It’s challenging to resist shooting off a quick reply, particularly in our culture of constant connection. But in many cases, an immediate response isn’t necessary.
  - If you feel comfortable, consider sending a separate communication to inform your colleagues (and family and friends) that you are making an effort to be less reactive, and a response might take longer than it used to.
- Limit communications while multi-tasking. Often we are juggling electronic communications and other activities, when we would be better off giving each our undivided attention.

## MEDITATION AND COMMUNICATION

The ability to pause and notice without judgment is a skill that requires practice. The brain is like the body. If you want to build physical strength, you have to exercise the body. If you want to change the way you think, feel or act, you have to exercise the brain. Meditation is a proven way to reshape your brain and increase attention, memory, resilience and compassion-- skills that will make you a more effective communicator and enhance your overall well-being too. Just three 10-minute sessions of breath counting has proven to make a difference in attention skills. Plus, the benefits of meditation are cumulative and increase over time and practice.<sup>3</sup> So give it a try. Make a commitment to meditate each day, for whatever amount of time that seems doable, even if it’s just a minute or two to start. See your *Introduction to Mindfulness* and *Stress Less* resource guides for specific tools for meditation practice.

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<sup>3</sup> Goleman, D and Davidson, R, [Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body](#).