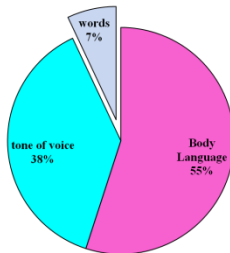


The challenges of Virtual communications

We're probably all familiar with the diagram below suggesting that 93% of the meaning we take from communication is from body language or para-language (tone of voice).



If that's anywhere near true then it means that virtual communication can be so much less effective than face to face communication. On the telephone or in a webinar we don't have the benefit of any body language and that impedes our understanding of the person who's talking. If we're honest it can also damage our interest and engagement with the speaker making it much easier for our attention to wander off. It's a bit better with a video conference

but even then the eye contact is difficult and the ability to see (and hence sub-consciously read) much of the subtleties of body language isn't that good. Added to these challenges are often issues around accent / language / technological hiccups, all contriving to make virtual communication typically much less effective than the technology promises.

Given the extent of the challenges of virtual communication, and the scope of business and projects that now rely on it, it's surprising that organisations typically are not doing much to help employees deal with these challenges. I worked recently with a client that said they had been asking for several years for some training on virtual communication. So here to help are some Top Tips for effective virtual communication: ~

1. Try and get personal

Building rapport with people is a key face to face skill and it is also true of the virtual environment. Try and get to know people you interact with virtually. Use the time before the conference starts formally to "Small talk". Perhaps check them out on Linked In, or get them to send a profile to you (preferably with a photo). When it's impersonal, people have a tendency not to treat each other as courteously as they would if they know the individual.

2. Be clear who's speaking

Always start with "this is Jane" And then make your point. If people aren't sure who's speaking they're often embarrassed to ask and lack of clarity results

3. Get/ keep everyone involved

If you're leading the session, call on people by name to ensure everyone is actively invited to participate and share their views, otherwise you may get no contribution at all from the quieter participants. If you're doing a webinar then ensure you make full use of the voting, hand raising, text chat and questionnaire functions to ensure people stay engaged.

4. Repetition

Advertisers know that until someone has seen an advert at least 8 times they won't remember a brand name. If you need people to be clear on and remember your key message, don't expect to



say it once and have everyone understand and remember it. You need to find ways to repeat your message in several different ways to really ensure people get it in a virtual environment.

5. **Check understanding**

Don't assume people understand - they probably don't! Ask questions to check their understanding.

6. **Repeat / rephrase**

Don't assume you have understood! Paraphrase and repeat back what you think are the key points to people so they have a chance to correct any misunderstanding or deepen your understanding.

7. **Summarise regularly**

Particularly when decisions need to be made, it is vital that people regularly summarise where the discussion/ agreements have got to at regular intervals. Leaving it to the end risks there being a whole series of misunderstandings that are then difficult to unpick