

# Communication

*'When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.'*  
Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961), American writer

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## STARTING UP

**A** Think of a good communicator you know. Explain why he/she is good at communicating.

**B** What makes a good communicator? Choose the three most important factors from this list.

- fluency in the language
- an extensive vocabulary
- a sense of humour
- grammatical accuracy
- being a good listener
- physical appearance
- an awareness of body language
- not being afraid of making mistakes
- no strong accent

**C** What other factors are important for communication?

**D** Discuss these questions.

- 1 What forms of written and spoken communication do you like using? Why?
- 2 What problems can people have with the different forms of communication?
- 3 How do you think those problems can be solved?

## VOCABULARY

### Good communicators

**A** Which of these words apply to good communicators and which apply to bad communicators? Add two adjectives of your own to the list.

- |            |            |           |            |          |
|------------|------------|-----------|------------|----------|
| articulate | coherent   | eloquent  | extrovert  | fluent   |
| focused    | hesitant   | inhibited | persuasive | rambling |
| reserved   | responsive | sensitive | succinct   | vague    |

## READING

## E-mail: for and against

**A** What irritates you most about these forms of communication?

- e-mail
- mobile phone
- conference calling
- voicemail
- BlackBerry
- web presentation

**B** What are the advantages and disadvantages of using e-mail?**C** Read the article on the opposite page quickly and choose the best title.

- 1 Time to switch your BlackBerry off
- 2 How to deal with your inbox
- 3 A quiet word beats sending e-mail

**D** Read the article again and list the advantages and disadvantages of using e-mail. Does the writer mention any that you listed in Exercise B?**E** Find expressions in the article which mean the following.

- 1 looking at another person (paragraph 2)
- 2 upsetting or embarrassing someone by being rude or tactless (paragraph 2)
- 3 not be caught or punished when you have done something wrong (paragraph 4)
- 4 pretend something is true in order to deceive people (paragraph 4)
- 5 keeping writing or talking to someone, even though you do not see them often (paragraph 8)
- 6 aiming an idea or product at someone (paragraph 8)

**F** Complete this text with the expressions in Exercise E in the correct form.

I don't have a problem with him .....<sup>1</sup> his family whilst he's posted overseas and sending e-mails in office time. That's not the main issue. However, if he thinks he can .....<sup>2</sup> sending such abusive e-mails to colleagues, he is sadly mistaken and he'll have to face the consequences of his actions later. He is clearly .....<sup>3</sup> about his colleagues and spreading nasty rumours. He'd be better off speaking to colleagues .....<sup>4</sup> if he has problems with them. He's slightly better when speaking with customers, but he needs to think about who he's speaking to when he's .....<sup>5</sup> our products to them. And he just doesn't know how to say no to people without .....<sup>6</sup>.

**G** Discuss these questions.

- 1 'Business is best done face to face.' Do you agree?
- 2 How could communication be improved in your organisation?
- 3 How will communication change in the office of the future?
- 4 What do you do when you receive a nasty e-mail?
- 5 Is communication better these days with all the new technology?

.....

by Luke Johnson

E-mail might just be responsible for the productivity increases that economists tell us are the key to rising prosperity. But it could also

5 be sending us all mad.  
The truth is that business is generally best done face to face, and if that is impossible, then speaking via the phone. But too many of us now hide  
10 behind silent, typed communications. The trouble is that the recipient of an e-mail does not hear a tone of voice or see a facial expression; nor can the sender modify their message  
15 halfway through, sensing that it is causing offence. When you read an e-mail, you cannot tell the mood of the e-mailer.

A permanent written form is  
20 deadly if you are feeling impetuous and emotional. Too often I have made the mistake of sending an irritable response, which will have festered and angered the other end  
25 much more than a difficult telephone exchange. Spoken words fade, but e-mail is forever.

It is so much easier to be tough via  
30 e-mail, or to get away with weak excuses, or to make things up, or to say no. Almost invariably, it is more human and serious to have a real discussion rather than a  
35 bizarre online conversation. I know employees who have been fired for sending abusive e-mails, or who have faced severe legal consequences for writing something they should have just said verbally.

40 Everyone in business finds their inbox is almost swamped every day with spam. I notice I spend longer



and longer sorting out the e-mails that matter from all the junk. It has  
45 become, I'm afraid, a dangerously corrupted medium. Large companies suffer chronic overuse of 'reply to all'.

Moreover, e-mail can be a terrible  
50 distraction, especially if you use a BlackBerry. I was recently reprimanded for peeking at mine during a board meeting – a gross  
55 form of hypocrisy on my part, because I once threatened to sling out of the window any PDA-type devices being used in meetings I chaired. I have now vowed to  
60 switch off both BlackBerry and mobile in all meetings – anything less is uncivil.

It must be admitted that e-mail  
is hard to beat as a transmitter of  
65 documents and data. It forces the sender to carefully think through their arguments and express

themselves logically. It allows you to  
reply swiftly to a host of different  
70 questions when time is short. You don't have to worry about journey times or travel costs, unreliable postage or engaged phones or voicemail.

E-mail is a marvellously economical  
75 tool for keeping in touch with far-flung commercial contacts; you can send them a note at your leisure, 24 hours a day. It is also a terrific method of discreetly and directly  
pitching to someone powerful. It certainly beats trying to get a meeting or even reach them on the phone.

80 Like it or not, I could not do my job without e-mail. Meanwhile, I know a senior financier, an ex-chair of a FTSE company, who still has his secretary print out his e-mails for  
85 him to read so he can then dictate replies for her to e-mail back. Now that really is mad.

## LANGUAGE REVIEW

### Idioms

**A** Complete the idioms below with the words from the box.

bush	grapevine	loop	mouth	nutshell	picture
point	purposes	stick	tail	wall	wavelength

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| a) to put it in a .....              | g) can't make head nor ..... of it           |
| b) to get straight to the .....      | h) to talk at cross-.....                    |
| c) to hear it on the .....           | i) to beat about the .....                   |
| d) to put someone in the .....       | j) to get it straight from the horse's ..... |
| e) to get the wrong end of the ..... | k) to be like talking to a brick .....       |
| f) to be on the same .....           | l) to keep someone in the .....              |



**to keep someone in the loop**



**to be on the same wavelength**

**B Match the idioms in Exercise A to these definitions.**

- 1 to fail to understand anything
- 2 to share similar opinions and ideas
- 3 to give the main facts in a short, clear way
- 4 to not understand something
- 5 to delay talking about something
- 6 to give the latest information
- 7 to talk about the most important thing
- 8 to hear about something because the information has been passed from one person to another in conversation
- 9 to be told something by someone who has direct knowledge of it
- 10 to try to communicate with an unresponsive person
- 11 to include someone in group communication
- 12 to not understand someone

**C Complete these sentences with the idioms from Exercise A in the correct form.**

- 1 OK, I'll ..... I'm afraid it's the last time we're going to miss a deadline.
- 2 Paola and I ..... and agree on most things. We seem to be .....
- 3 A lot happened while you were on holiday. Let me .....
- 4 I think we are ..... I mean next week, not this week.
- 5 He never gives you a straight answer. He's always .....
- 6 I ..... that he's been fired. Is it true?
- 7 The new organogram is very complicated, but to ....., we still report to the same manager.
- 8 I'm afraid that isn't right. If you think our biggest problem is communication, then you have .....
- 9 This document from our subsidiary makes no sense at all. I .....
- 10 I've tried to get my supplier to give us a discount several times, but they just won't. It's like .....
- 11 The company is going bankrupt. The CEO told me himself. I heard it .....
- 12 I'll need regular updates about the progress of the project. I'll also need to know what's going on when I'm away. Please .....

**D Ask your partner these questions.**

- 1 What have you heard on the grapevine recently?
- 2 When is it necessary to put someone in the picture?
- 3 In what situations is it good to get straight to the point?
- 4 Is there anything you can't make head nor tail of?
- 5 Who are you on the same wavelength as? Why?
- 6 Have you ever felt you were talking to a brick wall?
- 7 When have you been kept either in or out of the loop? How did you feel?