Communication tips in the digital age

Clear and effective communication is a skill that comes with different demands and requirements depending on the medium that is being employed. In today's digital age, there are more factors than ever before to take into account when engaging in communication as expectations, tones, and styles vary across different technologies. Speaking with someone face-to-face different than sending an email and a phone call is different than a text message. Different mediums are used at home and at work, bringing even more nuances into play. Here are some factors to consider when you are using and moving quickly between multiple forms of communication.

Choose your form wisely. When is the right time to send an email and when would making a phone call be more efficient or effective? If you need an instant answer, you might be better off making a phone call. If what you need to communicate contains lots of details such as dates, times, places an email is going to be your best choice. It can also maximize the effectiveness of your communication to "double up", by sending an email and following up with a phone call or vice versa.

Shift your tone for work and home. Now that we have messages to our colleagues interspersed with texts to friends and family, it is important to be attentive to tone. Texts and emails often have us writing in shorthand, using abbreviations and slang without even realizing it. Keep your audience in mind when you send a message as this type of digital-speak isn't appropriate for all your contacts. This also shifts generationally with younger people using and understanding digital slang - always keep your audience in mind when sending a message.

Don't hit 'send' when emotions run high. Whether it's an argument with your partner or a friend, or tension with a coworker, conflict rarely goes smoothly when you are using text and email. Most of us know that it is all too easy to write a fiery response and hit send before we have thought it through. Forbid yourself from responding immediately when things get heated, and allow yourself to cool down before you type out something you'll regret.

When it truly counts, talk in person. For conversations that really matter, nothing beats sitting down with someone face-to-face and discussing it. So much of communication is non-verbal, and this simply does not translate over our devices. If it is absolutely impossible to meet, use video-call software to speak in-person and allow your voice, ears, and body language help you communicate.

Engage with those around you. You know that feeling when you are at the dinner table and the person across from you is scrolling through whatever is on their phone? We are all familiar with it and most of us have done it but it can have a negative impact on empathy and attention span. Unless you are expecting an emergency phone call or are in the midst of a crisis, put your phone away when you are spending face-to-face time with someone.

Unplug from time to time. Being constantly reachable can become exhausting. Take time away from your smartphone by leaving it at home when you go for a walk, or setting it on airplane mode before you go to bed. It can feel like a huge relief to know that for a few hours you can't be reached - don't worry, the world will still be there when you plug back in.

The main difference between older forms of communication and the digital communication of today is speed. Because information does travel so rapidly now, don't be afraid to slow down and think about what you want to say and what technology you want to use to say it.