

16 practical ways leaders can refine their communication skills

Good communication skills are an essential key to success for any professional, but especially so for leaders.

The art of communication is an essential skill for all leaders. They must learn to communicate effectively with various people, whether they're offering feedback to team members, sharing information with stakeholders, or pitching their organization's services to potential clients or the public at large. To get a message across effectively, leaders must be able to adapt as necessary to each situation.

Of course, building this skill comes more easily to some people than it does to others, but it should be actively nurtured by anyone in a leadership position. Fortunately, there are several ways a leader can refine and improve their communication skills. Below, 16 members of [Fast Company Executive Board](#) share their best strategies for doing so.

1. LISTEN WITH INTENT.

To be a leader and effectively communicate, you must listen well and listen with intent. From there, you'll find the true meaning of what you should say and how you should say it. You will be understanding and compassionate while earning the respect of your listeners. This is how you will talk *to* them, not *at* them. – [Alice Hayden, H2 IT Solutions](#)

2. ADAPT TO THE NEEDS OF THE SITUATION.

Don't rely heavily on positional power. Study situational leadership and develop an adaptive leadership communication style. Learning how to flex your communications style to meet the needs of the situation and the people involved is important for all leaders. Practice taking stock of a situation and the variables, and adapt your communications approach to influence others and meet goals. – [Leigh Dow, Identiv](#)

3. LISTEN TO AND LEARN FROM PEOPLE YOU RESPECT.

Listen. I have spent the last several years of my career listening to people whom I respect. Whether they have been colleagues or competitors, mentors or friends, or professors or thought leaders, I have leaned into the notion of really listening and absorbing information. A key component to that is taking the opportunity to be present and accountable. – [Toby Blue, Halla](#)

4. GIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSTRUCTIVE INPUT.

Ask team members, "What am I missing?" or, "If you had to name one thing we need to do to improve our communication, what would it be?" People are very hesitant about communicating negative

feedback upwards, so you have to give them the opportunity to do so in a safe and constructive way. – [Dean Sysman, Axonius](#)

5. GET FEEDBACK AND GUIDANCE FROM TRUSTED TEAM MEMBERS.

I improve by getting honest and helpful feedback from my colleagues. After an important internal meeting, I check in with a team member to make sure everything was communicated clearly and see if there is anything that I need to clarify with a follow-up email. In terms of public communications, I rely on experts in our public relations team to provide key messages that everyone understands. – [Jackie Olson, ams OSRAM](#)

6. ENSURE EVERYONE IS ON THE SAME PAGE.

Ensure every stakeholder is clear on the problem at hand and the strategy that's in place to solve it. Then, everyone can understand how that strategy translates into their priorities. Leadership is not just a megaphone; it's an iterative process that requires being open to trying different approaches and adapting communication styles to what most effectively works for everyone. – [Assaf Resnick, BigPanda](#)

7. CHECK IN WITH PEOPLE AT EACH LAYER.

Don't take the way communication travels for granted. Make sure your message is clearly understood and that it permeates through the different layers. Whether you are in a traditional verticalized reporting setting or a more horizontal one, an easy way to run a quick check is by asking people on the lower or farther lines of report if they got the message. – [Rodolphe Barrere, Potloc](#)

8. SPEAK TO BROAD AND DIVERSE GROUPS.

Expand your audience! Being able to communicate to a wide breadth and diverse set of stakeholders ensures your work resonates with a larger group of people. – [Melissa Barash](#)

9. RECORD AND REVIEW YOURSELF SPEAKING.

Use your phone to record a one-minute video of yourself speaking on a critical topic of interest. First, watch and listen to the video and audio together to review your overall presentation. Then watch the video with no sound, paying attention to your demonstrations, gestures, movements, facial expressions, and so on. Finally, play the audio with no video and listen for stammers, repetitiveness, speed of language, and so on. And one more thing—practice consistently. – [Anthony Flynn, Amazing CEO LLC](#)

10. REFINE YOUR LISTENING SKILLS.

A business leader who wants to be a good communicator must also be a good listener. If you refine your listening skills and pay closer attention to what is being said, your communication skills will improve. The art of listening is the foundation for communication. If you do not hear and understand what someone says, you cannot take appropriate action. – [Evan Nierman, Red Banyan](#)

11. USE A COMMUNICATIONS MATRIX.

It is vital to use a communications matrix. An exemplary communications matrix will include the purpose of the communication, who your target audience is, the tone required (the tone must match the urgency level), your message's objective, who needs to be the "face" of the message, and a feedback mechanism to gauge the message's impact. Also, it would help if you considered the timing of the message. – [Will Conaway, The HCI Group \(A Tech Mahindra Company\)](#)

12. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.

Communication is a skill, and the more you do it—the more you put yourself in uncomfortable situations—the better off you will be in the future. So practice, practice, and practice again. Use every opportunity you have to exercise this muscle, and eventually, you'll get good at it. – [Solomon Timothy, OneIMS](#)

13. ASK MORE QUESTIONS.

With my background in qualitative research, I have found that drawing on inquiry practice and defaulting to questions versus statements is a good way to give others the opportunity to express ideas more productively. Even if you have an opinion on a piece of work, asking a direct report to share more of their thinking will help to create a useful foundation to offer criticism. Ask more questions! – [Amaya Weddle, bande](#)

14. ENGAGE WITH DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES.

How do you know there are 30 days in September? Do you remember the rhyme? Count your knuckles? Close your eyes and see a calendar with "30" on it? Why is this important? Because in every meeting, two-thirds of your audience will not share your preferred learning style. So remember to engage the auditory learners who listen, the kinesthetic learners who learn by doing, and the visual learners who learn by seeing. – [Duncan Wardle, iD8 & innov8](#)

15. GET SOME EXPERT COACHING.

Consider working with a communication coach. Not only can they help you communicate clearly and tailor your message to your target audience, but they will also assist you with improving your body language to drive those messages home. – [Gergo Vari, Lensa](#)

16. BUILD TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS.

Creating trusting relationships is paramount to effective communication skills. When parties feel they are in a trusting relationship, they are more likely to share, connect, and be honest. Constantly working to build the situations and associations that others want to participate in produces environments in which it's easy to express values and create common visions. – [Lonnie Buchanan, Veracity Solutions](#)