

# For Effective Communication Tone (Surprise!) Matters Most: 5 Strategies For Effectiveness

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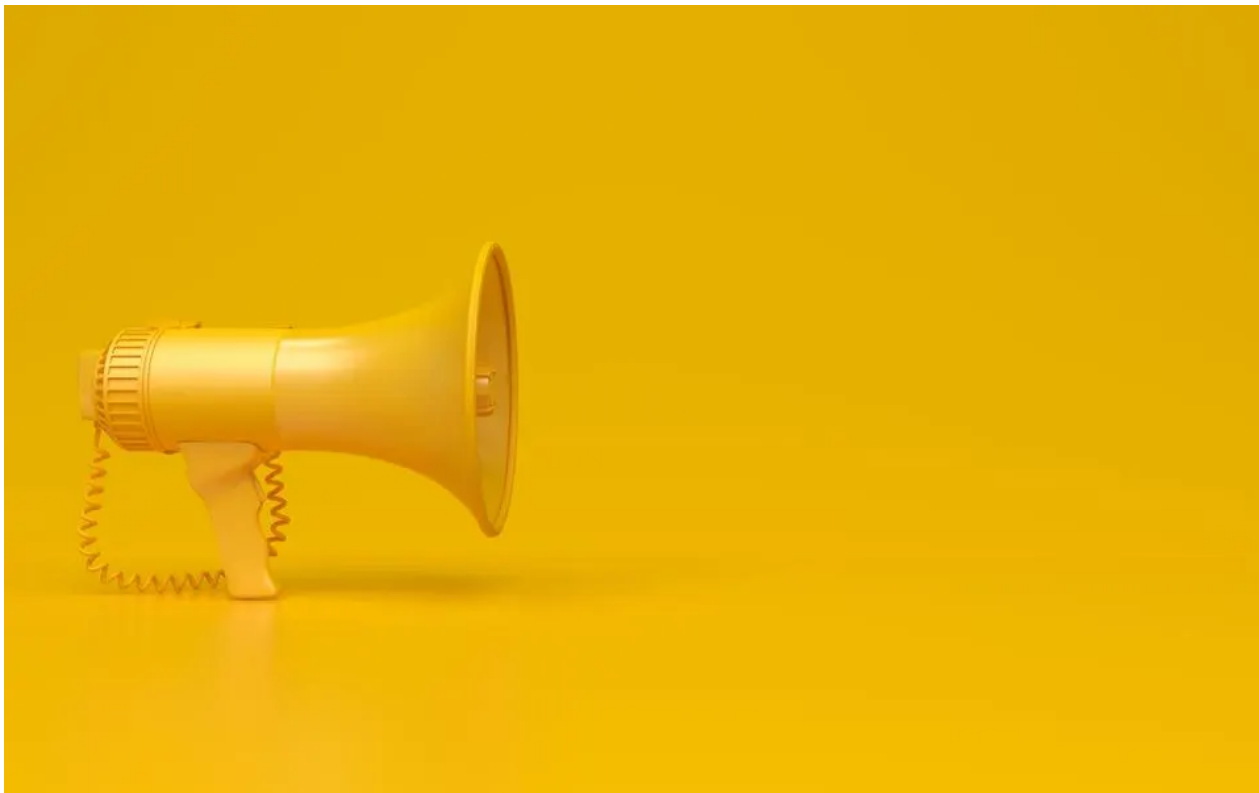
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Feb 26, 2023, 06:03pm EST

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The tone of your communication affects credibility and effectiveness. GETTY

You know communication is critical to your credibility and effectiveness, but like so many things in the last few years, its importance has been elevated and its nature has shifted. With hybrid and remote work, distance creates the need to communicate in new ways and with a greater emphasis on writing and asynchronous approaches.

Interestingly, communication [contributes to mental health](#), inclusiveness, confidence, retention and culture. And one element of communication stands out: tone. How your message is framed and how it is perceived by the recipients can make all the difference in your success and theirs.

## Communication Reduces Distance

New opportunities to [work away from the office](#), from remote locations and from a distance have highlighted the impacts of communication. According to new data from [Grammarly and the Harris Poll](#), 82% of knowledge workers say working remotely increases the need to be a better communicator.

In addition, people are struggling to stay connected with colleagues and 45% of employees say their personal connections have suffered based on hybrid working. This experience varies by generation, with 59% of Gen Z, 48% of Millennials, 45% of Gen X and 28% of Baby Boomers saying the same.

Fully 62% of workers say better communication skills are necessary to nurture diversity and inclusion. This is especially true for 75% of workers who identify as neurodivergent—who report ineffective communication is a barrier to inclusion while only 64% of neurotypical respondents agree. And 77% of those for whom English is a second language (ESL) report ineffective communication is a barrier compared to 68% of those for whom English is their primary language.

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But great communication also creates a positive work experience with 52% of workers saying asynchronous communication makes their job more flexible, 42% reporting they are more productive and 34% saying they feel a greater sense of inclusion. In addition, effective communication is viewed as the reason for increased satisfaction with work for 56% of respondents and improved relationships with colleagues for 54%.

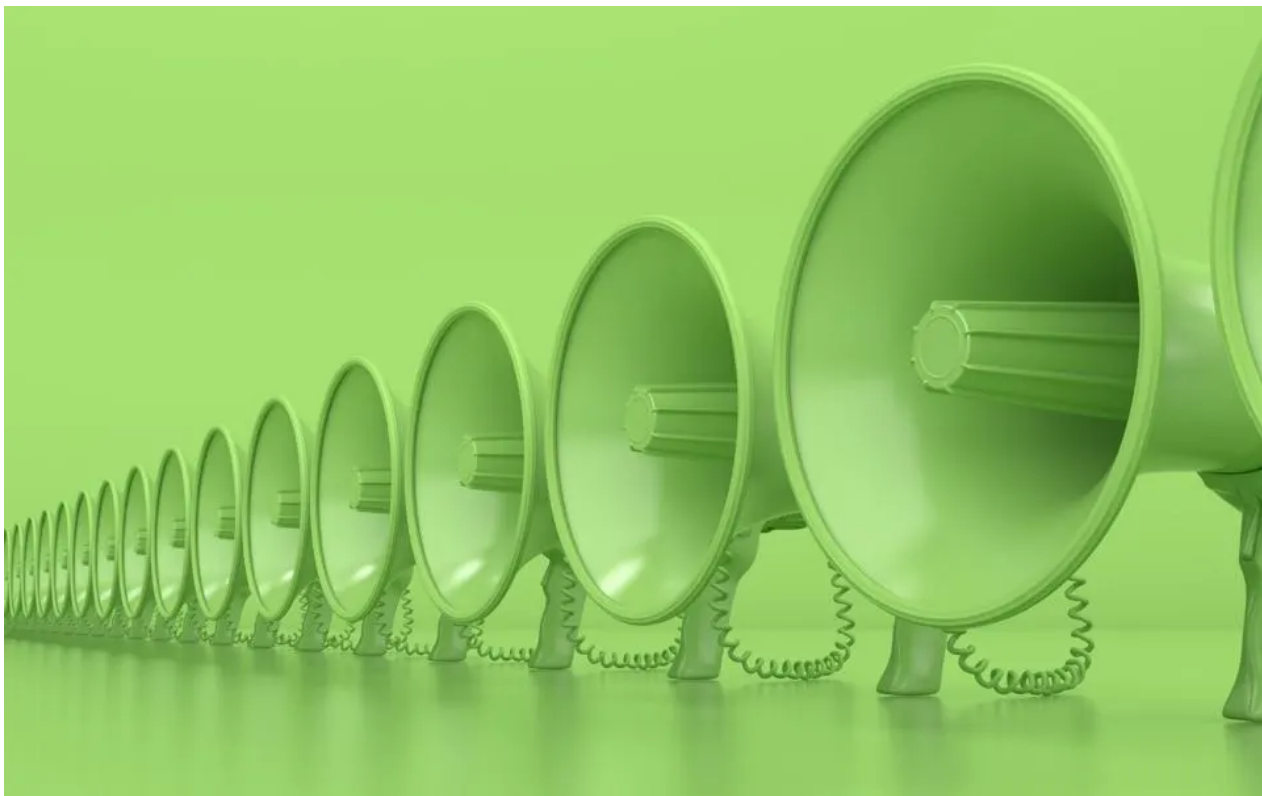
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Creating the right tone is about balance and context. GETTY

## Tone and Confidence

There are many factors in effective communication—from content and tone to empathy, mode and platform—but tone seems to be especially critical. In fact, 53% of knowledge workers say tone is more important than the content of the communication. But 71% have difficulty with choosing the right words to avoid offending others and 56% feel unsure about finding the correct tone for their communication.

Tone has a significant bearing on how well people work together. If communication has a positive tone,

- 62% respond more quickly
- 57% are more responsive to future requests
- 48% address the concern or do the work at a higher quality

- And 59% perceive the sender more positively

For those who are in different offices within the U.S., or in different offices outside the U.S. or who are fully remote, each of these percentages increases between 3% and 11%.

## Creating the Right Tone

Finding the right tone is a delicate process and a fine mix of various elements of communication. Here's how to get the balance right.

### #1 – Be Business-Like but Friendly

One of the first ways to find the right tone is to be business-like, but also friendly. You'll need to hone this approach for your culture and your role, but in general, people appreciate a salutation rather than diving right into your content. And a comment such as "I hope you are well" or a [brief acknowledgement of weather or season](#) can provide a positive runway for a business exchange.

You'll want to be brief, and especially use these tactics in a first message opening a subject. But then you'll want to be focused on the business at hand without being too formal. Compare your best communication to a business casual wardrobe in which you're not showing up in your sweatpants, but neither are you in a three-piece suit. You're focused on the outcomes you need to achieve but with a positive voice.

### #2 – Be Confident but Not Arrogant

In your communication, you'll be most effective when you balance confidence with humility. Be clear and have a point of view, but also ask for input when it's appropriate. With your tone, let the sender know that you have your own perspectives, but also value theirs, knowing you don't

have all the answers.



In your communication, be authentic, but attend to your audience. GETTY

### **#3 – Be Concise but Not Curt**

You'll want to get to the point in your business communication, but avoid being short or brusque. Provide context and don't assume people know the background of your communication—unless you're sure they do. Edit your communication before you send so you provide enough detail without overwhelming the reader.

Also be clear about what you're asking for. Consider getting to the point early in your communique and then providing more detail or background in the latter portion of the message.

Sometimes what you don't include is as important as what you do—so be selective about what you say and include the most critical elements of content. In addition, don't overuse the written word. If a written missive will take more than five minutes to read, include more than five points or require more than five volleys, it's probably better as a quick call or verbal

exchange.

#### **#4 – Be Compelling but Not Emotional**

When you feel passionately about a subject or if you're angry or frustrated, be especially careful about your response. You'll want to be compelling in making a case for something when the situation is right, but **avoid being defensive, emotional or angry** in your tone. If you're feeling especially charged, you might consider waiting a few hours before hitting send or even sleeping on it before you launch your note.

#### **#5 – Be Authentic but Not Inattentive**

Most of all, you'll want to be yourself in your communication—at the same time you're attentive to what will be most impactful to the recipient(s) of your communication. For someone very data-driven, you'll want to present the evidence, or for someone more sensitive you may spend an extra sentence on a warm-up line. But don't go overboard, and do **ensure you're being authentic**. Consider how your communication will be received and how the recipient most likes to hear and best understands information.

## **It's a Miracle**

Great communication **can build relationships** and enhance your credibility, but you face plenty of barriers. You use a word that someone else interprets negatively. You intend a tone which the recipient misreads. You delay your response, and your colleague makes incorrect assumptions about why you've done that. And with written communication, you lack all the clues and cues which are non-verbal. It's a bit of a miracle that we're able to communicate at all when you ponder the barriers.

But intentionality helps. When you take your time to communicate well,

consider your audience and also re-read and edit, you will reap the benefits.

In addition, when you're the recipient of communication, you can give the sender the benefit of the doubt as well—knowing the barriers, you can look beyond the literal words and listen for positive intentions.

## Intent Is Not The Same As Impact

You've heard that intent does not equal impact and that is especially true with written communication, asynchronous communication and distance communication. But it's worth it to make the effort so you can build relationships, develop your credibility and succeed brilliantly in your work.

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