



Mentoring – Successful Communication

A successful mentor-protégé relationship depends on good communication from each person. But what does that mean?

Communication is both verbal and non-verbal. You might want to video-record yourself talking and replay that to see if you are communicating clearly.

Verbal communication is your voice, of course, and it is also what you say.

- Do you speak fast or slow? Loud/aggressive or soft/tolerant?
- Do you tend to tell your listener everything you are thinking or do you pause to consider what is most appropriate to say at one time?
- Do you tend to give your listener instructions or directions (“here is what you should do”) or do you give your listener ideas and see what the response might be (“have you tried this?” “what has worked for you in the past?”)?
- Do you speak at the listener’s level or do you use concepts that the listener has difficulty understanding? Think of the difference between talking with an adolescent versus talking with a graduate student.

Non-verbal communication is as important as verbal communication. The decrease or lack of ‘the non-verbals’ is what makes telephone and videoconferencing communication more challenging. You might think, after a phone call, “what did he/she really mean?”

- What is your face ‘saying’ while you are speaking? What are your eyes looking at – the ceiling, the floor, others in the room, or your listener?
- Do you tend to touch people when talking with them? Can you judge how the listener reacts to your touch? How do you react to others touching you during conversation?
- Do you fold your arms in front of you when speaking or hold your arms at your side?
- Do you pause during conversations to give the listener time to respond or do you fill the blank spaces with umm’s and ahh’s?

As a mentor or protégé, you want to be comfortable in your ability to communicate well. Give some thought to how you communicate now and what you might need to work on to improve the quality and productivity of the mentor-protégé relationship.

Claudia C. Bartz 20 July 2017

cbartz@uwm.edu