

Nuances in meeting face-to-face can make tech talk work better

By Jan Howard | Posted: Friday, February 8, 2013 6:00 am

Having an opportunity to connect words with body language, eye contact, tone and inflexion and a myriad of clues to show the context of the message saves the potential for miscommunication. Emails, posts and tweets can be great time savers, but making and maintaining in-person connections, helps long-term professional and personal communications success. Whether it's networking within your organization or cultivating new clients and connections in the community, face-to-face communications is a skill to practice and sustain.

Networking experts know dozens of tips, strategies and techniques that can help people connect and build relationships in virtually any setting. Business people need to connect on a professional level and seamlessly build in information about their businesses and services.

Start with the end in mind. If you are going to an event, ask yourself beforehand, who it is you want to meet and how you are going to strike up a conversation. If you are going to run a meeting, plan out what decisions need to be made and how you can identify a common vision for the outcome. If you are going to have a one-on-one conversation, think about what key messages you wish to convey.

Just like the training for a presentation or media interview, never just "wing it" regardless of how comfortable you feel in the setting. Crystallize the topic knowledge you have that will be of interest to who you'll be talking to. Knowledge, insight and expertise are what you exchange with others. The more you determine what you know and what you are passionate about, the more likely you are to truly connect with others. You will make a positive impact and make effective use of others' time.

One of the hardest face-to-face scenarios is to attend a meeting, function or event when you don't know many of the people you'll be meeting. How do you introduce yourself, then strike up a conversation and make a positive impression before moving on so you can meet others.

Instead of leading with your job title, stay away from jargon and use the opportunity to explain what you do. Give a short recent example of a project you helped with. Those personal stories can provide excellent opportunities to connect with people. Fun stories are well received, especially when humor is involved.

What can often be more important — and a great skill I learned as a reporter — is to find ways to engage others to talk about their work and what they are passionate about. In media, the best way to get the facts is to ask questions. It's variations on the: who, what, where, when, how and why. Look for conversation starters that require more than a simple yes or no answer.

The best part of engaging in face-to-face communications is to learn from listening. While you have

goals of what you hope to convey about yourself, focus first on others. When you ask a few questions up front to learn more, they'll begin to ask questions back. Then you'll have an opportunity to describe yourself and why you're here.

Little things can make a difference and sometimes the smallest detail can make the wrong impression — an impression you did not want to make. When you talk, make good eye contact, smile warmly, give a firm handshake and repeat the person's name. Again, it's the combination of words, tone and body language people notice and make you someone they want to stay connected with.

These skills work in any setting and can be especially effective if you think you might be entering a potentially volatile environment. When you show you are genuinely interested in hearing what others have to say, you create an opportunity to identify what mutual interests and goals you share and how to achieve them.

Remember your “ears and mouth” — you have two ears and one mouth because you should be spending most of your time listening. Face-to-face communications is about establishing a meaningful and mutually beneficial relationship. And, by knowing the person you are communicating with — from their sense of humor to their serious side — it enables more effective non face-to face interactions. That's true whether it's by email, LinkedIn or Google+.

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