9 interpersonal skills you need when working remotely

Working remotely has been gaining popularity in recent years. According to Global Workplace Analytics, it has grown 91% over the last 10 years, and we can expect those numbers to continue in the future.

The recent COVID-19 outbreak has led to a massive influx of business owners working from home in a way we've never seen before. This shift can potentially change the future of how we view remote work as a country.

One common challenge to remote work is maintaining strong interpersonal skills. This can be difficult when interacting with coworkers in person, so, understandably, difficulties would be present when doing so from afar.

We must make improving interpersonal skills a priority. Here are 9 of the interpersonal communication skills you should focus on as a remote employee.

Clear communication

When communicating while working remotely, it's crucial that you do so with clarity. While you might consider this a no brainer, keep in mind that when you're not in person, your nonverbal cues aren't as strong. So, communication via phone, video chats, emails, collaborative apps, etc. has to be even better.

When communicating, three ideas you want to keep in mind are to:

- State your message without using unnecessary words, which can complicate what you're saying.
- Don't be too brief or vague in your communication, which can lead to others having to interpret what you mean.
- Have difficult or emotional conversations via phone or video call.
- Sometimes being more assertive in your communication style will lead to more clarity and understanding.

Develop a strong voice

When working remotely, an interpersonal skill you want to hone in on is the strength of your voice. While you want to communicate clearly, you also want to speak with some power.

You will be on team phone calls and video chats and other forms of communication where your voice is the only way you're showing up. Show up with clarity and confidence with every interaction.

Assume good intentions

It's easy to have miscommunication when having conversations remotely. Your best bet in most situations is to assume those around you mean good intentions.

Otherwise, you can make a situation worse by reacting negatively, when that might not have been the intention, to begin with.

If you feel uncomfortable about something that was done or said and feel the need to address it, ask about it instead of making an assumption. Also, you want to handle these conversations during a phone call or video call instead of any written communication. Remember, if there is an issue that needs to be addressed, it's best to do so verbally.

Build rapport

Just as you build rapport with your coworkers in person, you want to do the same when working remotely. This can take some getting used to, and while it might not feel quite as natural, it is possible.

Consider doing simple things such as

- Checking in at the beginning of the workday as you would if you were working in person
- Asking how others are doing or how their weekend was before diving into work-related tasks
- If you're signing off early, letting them know and wishing them a good evening

Remember that although you're connecting to manage work tasks, it's essential that you maintain a cordial relationship and share some interest in connecting through small talk.

Timely response

Another important interpersonal skill is to respond promptly to emails, phone calls, and other communication efforts.

This is not only professional in general, but it also keeps everyone on the same page related to the task at hand. Unlike working in person, no one can stop by your office or desk if they don't get a response from you.

So, the only way to get the information they need is when you respond to them.

You also want to make sure that you provide relevant updates as needed without others having to ask you for the information.

Not only is this an excellent interpersonal skill, but it also helps to build trust and reliability between all of those involved, which is critical when working remotely.

Learn communication preferences

You'll find that not everyone you work with has the same communication preferences, and not all situations require the same form of communication.

Some people will prefer to handle situations via a video call while others will prefer an email or phone call.

Some matters that need to be handled will be best addressed by a 5-minute phone call vs. 30 minutes of emailing back and forth.

With this understanding in mind, you want to think about the communication preferences of those involved, along with the matter that needs to be addressed to determine the best way to handle it.

Verbal conversations

With so many ways to communicate these days, it's become more common to have conversations through writing, whether that's email, text, or some team software.

While these are all great ways to have conversations, if you work remotely, it's also important to touch base verbally, at least from time to time, for no reason at all or to handle important issues.

These verbal conversations can be held through a Zoom call or a traditional phone call, but touching base in this way can be very beneficial and keep the lines of communication open.

Utilize team software

There are various software options available to improve communication when working remotely. Your team might use Zoom, Teamwork, Slack, or something similar to communicate about projects, deadlines, responsibilities, team needs, and more.

Be sure to utilize these software options as expected by your company. Again, when everyone is on the same page related to communication, it helps operations to run smoothly.

If you have questions about how to use the software best, you can ask for training or take to Google or Youtube to get the support you need. There are usually tons of resources available on how to use these programs.

Working remotely gives you time to shine light on your interpersonal skills

There are many benefits and perks to working remotely, just as there are to working in the office. But one great thing about not seeing your coworkers daily is that it requires you to improve your interpersonal skills and soft skills in your day to day work.

If you make a concerted effort to improve the interpersonal skills listed above, along with any others you think might benefit you, you'll find yourself with a skill set that can suit you in all areas of your life.