

Communication can be misinterpreted using new technology

Ping, Facebook chat, IM, message, text, DM, Whatsapp, BBM, e-mail, SMS and Skype are examples of just some of the ways in which technology has enabled us to communicate for business and in our personal lives.



Clinical psychologist and leading corporate trainer at The Human Edge, Helene Vermaak says that these methods don't adequately portray the full richness of human communication, particularly non-verbal signals and tonal and emotional nuances. "It's commonplace in our culture for e-mail messages to be misinterpreted because the medium simply lacks an effective way to convey emotions.

"The ability to communicate on so many virtual levels is reducing person-to-person interaction in our daily lives, introducing a device as an intermediary," says Vermaak. Due to the proliferation of technology, Vermaak says we have stopped talking to each other. People are also far braver, more confrontational and outspoken on many of the mediums including the likes of e-mail and Twitter, as they now have a platform on which to voice their opinions, without the face-to-face repercussions of crucial conversations or open dialogue around a high-stake or stressful topic.

Amplifying the problem

When it comes to resolving broken promises, violated expectations or bad behaviour, resorting to methods like e-mail, IM or text messages can amplify the problem - especially when confronting a peer, manager or subordinate at work. "For example, a subordinate might send a cryptic excuse by text after missing a key deadline, or a colleague e-mails your error-filled report to your boss instead of confronting you directly," says Vermaak.

In a recent research study, undertaken by The Human Edge into challenges facing South African business women, it was found that four out of ten South African women leave a crucial work related conversation feeling disengaged. Vermaak says that by being able to engage in a crucial conversation, people are able to work together on the decision and come up with far more mutually satisfying outcomes. The study found that this is not happening nearly enough in the South African environment, with 10% of women feeling compelled to leave their jobs after unsuccessful attempts to dialogue around important issues.

Be aware of pitfalls

In today's connected world, messaging applications, mobile applications and online mediums for communication have enhanced our ability to keep in contact with family overseas, long-lost school friends and even those friends and family we see more often. "There are many benefits from the advancements we've made in communication, but one must be aware of the pitfalls of hiding behind technology and not interacting on a personal level with our colleagues, friends, family and partners."

Vermaak believes that high speed voice technology will become a primary element of a high performance cultural operating system in the future. Personal interaction and in person connections, not over e-mail, Skype or using other technological tools will become crucial to successful relationships in the workplace. She concludes that crucial interpersonal conversations and the value thereof in our homes and at work cannot be underestimated or replaced.

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