

*A Timesaving Guide*



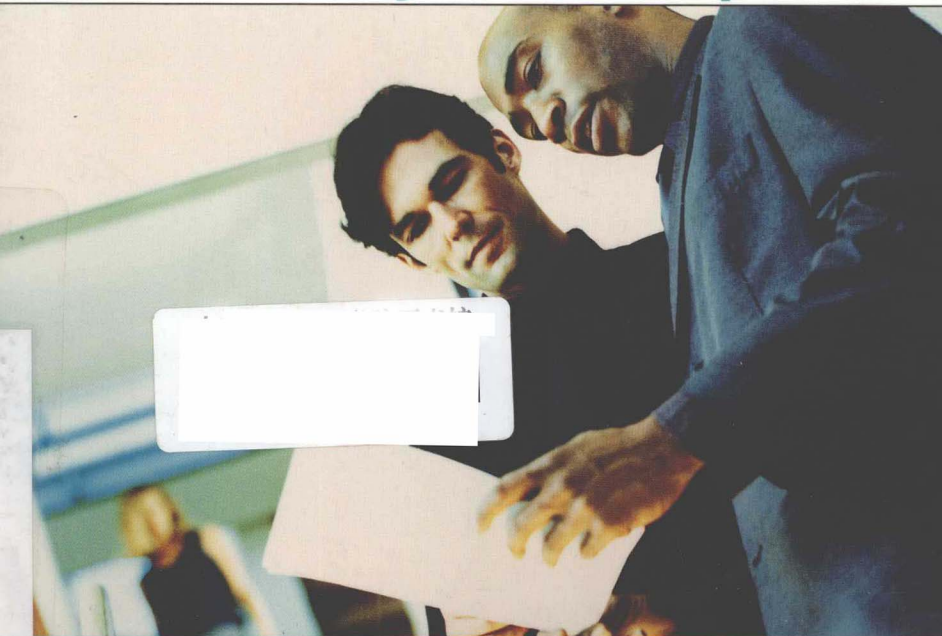
**THE RESULTS-DRIVEN MANAGER**

**RDM**

- ◆ INFLUENCE LISTENERS
- ◆ CONVEY CONFIDENCE WITH BODY LANGUAGE
- ◆ AVOID MISUNDERSTANDINGS

# FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATIONS

for Clarity and Impact



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*A Timesaving Guide*



**THE RESULTS-DRIVEN MANAGER**

**RDM**

# Face-to-Face Communications

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Face-to-Face  
Communications  
for Clarity  
and Impact

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# Introduction



With today's dizzying proliferation of communication technologies—ranging from e-mail and instant messaging to paging and teleconferencing—it's easy to imagine a time when we won't have to meet “in person” to conduct business. Yet face-to-face communication has taken on more importance than ever.

If you have doubts about this, consider the disasters that can erupt when you're communicating with someone else using a less personal vehicle—such as e-mail. A joke or casual remark that might have scored a hit in a face-to-face conversation falls flat in the e-mail or, worse, offends the recipient. A long, dense block of text leaves readers confused or impatient. Nuances in meaning never make the transition from sender to receiver. Perhaps it's not surprising that e-mail users have developed “emoticons,” little pictographs comprising combinations of letters and punctuation marks—such as “:-)” to express a



smile or “:O” to express alarm or surprise. Emoticons provide a personal touch to an otherwise impersonal mode of communication—revealing our deep reliance on emotion in our exchanges with one another.

But even when we do communicate face to face with others, plenty can still go wrong. Consider a performance evaluation with an employee that turns disastrous, or a workplace relationship increasingly racked by tension even though we don’t know why. Or what about a troubling misunderstanding over who had agreed to do what on a big project—even though people seemed so clear about their responsibilities during the meeting?

Business mishaps owing to faulty face-to-face communications are legion—from a team whose members drag their feet in carrying out an assignment, to an inability to get the support you need from a colleague, to the discovery that someone you thought of as trustworthy actually isn’t.

Given the gravity of these scenarios, it’s clear that any manager’s career hinges on his or her ability to master the art of face-to-face communication. And this form of encounter grows more crucial every day. Why? In today’s “flattened” organizations, managers must resort to means other than command-and-control to win support for their ideas. That means influencing people over whom they have no formal authority. To cultivate interpersonal influence, we have to get to know other managers—something that requires lots of face-to-face communication. This “old-fashioned” form of communication thus

provides a crucial source of power in a manager's arsenal of influence.

Moreover, in the age of global-business, many companies' workforces, customers, and partnering organizations are increasingly diverse. With diversity come more opportunities for misunderstandings between managers. Again, face-to-face encounters can help conversation participants better understand one another's perspectives.

Finally, face-to-face communication continues to serve a central role in business interactions for the simple reason that we're animals: We make decisions based just as much on emotion as on reason. For example, when we meet someone new, we work to determine how trustworthy or powerful that person is, whether we share common interests and friends, whether we like him or her. Communicating face to face conveys rich information about these emotional aspects of human interaction.

Skilled face-to-face communicators achieve astonishing outcomes that benefit themselves and their companies. Here are just a few examples of what you can accomplish by communicating effectively with colleagues, employees, customers, business partners—indeed, anyone with whom you interact during a typical workday:

- You persuade a key decision maker to accept and support your new idea.

## Introduction

- You inspire your team to follow your lead in launching a change initiative.
- You gain information with which to assess what's going on with a difficult project.
- You diagnose problems in the way your unit is operating.
- You help generate creative, out-of-the-box thinking among employees working on a complex program.
- You convince people of the merits of embracing a challenging new vision or mission.
- You deliver constructive criticism to a direct report or business partner without triggering defensiveness.
- You soothe an irate customer, preventing the tension from escalating to damaging levels.
- You detect dishonesty in a supplier's rep who is attempting to sell you a new contract.

So it's clear that mastery of face-to-face communication counts among the most vital of managerial talents. But what is face-to-face communication, exactly? What does it consist of, and how do we know when we're engaging in it?

## The Nature of Face-to-Face Communication

Any face-to-face exchange between people <sup>involves</sup> entails a bewildering array of behaviors and information—everything from the spoken word to nonverbal signals. Examples of communication through the spoken word might include questioning, making statements, and modulating voice tone and volume. Nonverbal signals may entail facial expressions, gestures, and body posture: The wideness of a listener's eyes, whether a speaker is staring at the audience or looking away, smiling versus not smiling—all of these constitute additional examples of nonverbal communication that impart vital information about participants' emotions and thoughts.

There's no doubt about it: Face-to-face communication is complex. Moreover, the rules governing this kind of interpersonal exchange can prove contradictory. Plenty of experts have offered suggestions for deciphering others' agendas and states of mind during a face-to-face encounter—only to see their advice shot down by colleagues who have a totally different view on the subject.

For instance, as Nick Morgan asks in the article “The Truth Behind the Smile and Other Myths,” should we “steeple” our fingers—or not—to show we're intelligent during a meeting? Views on the meaning of this behavior have changed over the years. And should we conclude that a person who can't seem to look us in the eye while

we're talking is lying? Or might he or she be experiencing some other emotion that has nothing to do with honesty? Again, the truth about this behavior seems more complex than we originally believed.

Yet despite these complexities, we can learn to become more effective at face-to-face communication. And we should—if we hope to get the results we desire in a rapidly changing business environment.

So what's the best way to hone your communication talent? This volume helps you by breaking the task into four major themes:

- Discover how to use the spoken word effectively.
- Use nonverbal communication thoughtfully.
- Learn how to “read” others’ signals during a face-to-face exchange.
- Master the challenge of communicating effectively under pressure—when opportunities for misunderstandings become especially pronounced.

Let's take a closer look at each of these below.

### Using the Spoken Word Effectively

The articles in the first part of this volume focus on ways to use the spoken word skillfully during face-to-face

encounters with others in the workplace. As Betty A. Marton explains in “Mastering the Art of Persuasion,” communicators increase their effectiveness most when they strive for “social power”—influence that enables them to enhance a group’s success by emphasizing shared objectives.

In the same article, Marton describes five suggestions offered by management expert Jay Conger for cultivating your social power:

1. Connect emotionally with others by demonstrating your own commitment to your position, and adjust the tone and approach of your argument to your audience’s emotional state.
2. Find the common ground shared by you and your audience by listening carefully to their concerns and adapting your message accordingly.
3. Use vivid language (stories, anecdotes) and *compelling evidence* (authoritative sources) in delivering your message—because listeners absorb information in direct proportion to its vividness.
4. Establish your credibility by making—and then fulfilling—commitments and cultivating trusting relationships both within and beyond your organization.
5. Become an effective team builder by taking workshops in group processing and from running

small groups—which involves both giving meaningful content and getting feedback.

In “How to Bring About Change by Paying Attention to What You and Others Say,” Loren Gary shares insights from several books about language and power. For example, Sarah Myers McGinty, in *Power Talk: Using Language to Build Authority and Influence*, encourages managers to select from two different communication modes, depending on the situation. To lead people through stressful times, McGinty advises, use “language from the center”—making authoritative statements, challenging others’ claims, and controlling the conversation flow. To gather information and encourage exploration and collaboration, use “language from the edge”—asking questions, getting other speakers involved, keeping communication channels open.

Gary also presents suggestions that Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey offer in their book *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation*. These authors recommend using “the language of public agreement” to break down organizational “immune systems” that conspire to maintain the status quo. For example, managers can encourage their team members to forge a simple agreement that “We will all speak directly to one another when problems arise.” Though this agreement won’t eradicate the problem of people talking behind each other’s backs, its mere existence, the authors explain, “creates the possibility of a

violation, so that when someone breaks the agreement, there is now the opportunity to examine what caused it.”

In “How to Make Your Case in 30 Seconds or Less,” Nick Wreden shifts gears from spoken communication techniques that require longer-term cultivation to tactics that you use when you have just seconds or minutes to convey a message orally. Wreden cites the all-important “elevator pitch,” which “gets its name from the 30-second opportunity to tell—and sell—your story during a three- or four-story elevator ride.” A well-crafted elevator pitch can help you communicate effectively in a wide range of circumstances, such as “job interviews, networking events, public relations opportunities, presentations to executives, and sales. . . .” Key tips for formulating your pitch include knowing your goal (to get permission to phone the other person? to be able to send additional information?), knowing your subject, understanding your audience’s needs, and organizing your pitch so that it closes with a request to take the next step in the relationship.

John Baldoni explores a different component of the spoken word in “Are You Asking the Right Questions?” In this article, he maintains that posing the right questions at the right time “can be a powerful tool to help managers explore, discover, and illuminate—and help their employees achieve new levels of productivity.” By presenting questions in a nonthreatening way, you facilitate employees’ learning by stimulating self-reflection. Your payoff? Better performance in the future.



How do you know what types of questions to ask, and when? That depends on the stage of a project or initiative. For example, early in an effort, find out what's going on "in the trenches" by asking what's uppermost in employees' minds. Later, inspire people to reach for greater performance by asking them what they're capable of—and what stretch goals they may want to embrace.

The final article in this section—"Is One-Dimensional Communication Limiting Your Leadership?" by Theodore Kinni—explores the idea that verbal communication takes place through three channels: factual, emotional, and symbolic. The best face-to-face communicators, Kinni writes, don't rely on facts alone to convey their message. Instead, they interpret data—explaining what it means to them and why the information is important to listeners. They also use emotion to amplify their communications—sharing their own feelings with their audience and telling stories and anecdotes that enable them to connect with listeners on an emotional level. Skilled communicators also leverage the power of symbols—which can take the form of ceremonies; awards; logos; and songs, poems, or quotes that have profound meaning for listeners.

## Using Nonverbal Communication

In face-to-face communication, nonverbal signals are just as powerful as—if not more powerful than—the spo-