

Edition #1: Communication



# NAVIGATING THE NEW NORMAL

FROM AG CONSULTING



**We are living in an unprecedented time.**

**Our lives have changed beyond comprehension in no time at all. Virtual working, home-schooling and ever changing priorities, both at home and work, are the new normal and each comes with new challenges which many are still trying to navigate.**

**We've created '5 in 5' to help with just that. In each edition, we'll explore a prominent theme arising from the in-house community and provide you with tips and suggestions on each, backed by research and input from the profession. Time is precious, so we've made sure that each edition can be read in less than five minutes.**



# **FIVE IDEAS IN FIVE MINUTES – SIMPLE.**



# COMMUNICATION



Communication is one of the most important skills which a lawyer can master, but how can you ensure that your communication remains effective whilst done over the phone or via VC? Many of the suggestions we offer here may seem obvious, but it's important to remember that sometimes, it's the basics which can have the biggest impact.

1



## SHOW YOU'RE THERE

Creating open lines of communication is imperative in any team situation, but even more so when working remotely. Ensure that you are communicating with your team frequently. Even something small like acknowledging receipt of emails or voicemails is incredibly important. Silence can lead to people second guessing, more so than in the office where you can be seen. Strategies such as ensuring you're connecting with your direct reports once a day (without an agenda) or holding 'office' hours are showing early indications of reducing manager and employee stress, increasing productivity and contributing to the maintenance of healthy communication channels.

Source: N. Sabina (April 2020) How Managers Can Support Remote Employees; Harvard Business Review

2



## LISTENING IS JUST AS IMPORTANT

Many people assume that communication is about what they are putting into the world, but what we receive in is just as important. It can be all too easy to switch off, particularly in a virtual setting but 'active listening' is key to good communication. Active listening is often mistakenly thought to centre around outwards mannerisms (eye contact, nodding etc.) but Carl Rogers, who coined the term, suggests it is more about being in a receptive mode. Attentive listening can allow for better understanding and discourse, good not just for business but also for building empathy. It was Henry David Thoreau who wrote: "The greatest compliment that was ever paid to me was when one asked me what I thought and attended to my answer".

Source: K. Murphy (2020) You're Not Listening; Penguin Random House UK



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## BE BALANCED



Ensure an even level of communication throughout your team. This may seem obvious, but a 2017 poll found that 52 per cent of respondents who sometimes worked from home, agreed that when they do they can oftentimes feel “left out”. Ask yourself – are you inadvertently sharing updates with only a few people who you're close to? Are you only arranging video calls with a select group of people? Involve everyone (where appropriate) to stop people from feeling disconnected. Julia Wench, an executive coach recommends creating a list of team members (and their photos). She says: “[K]eep it in front of you while you're working each day. This will help you make conscious decisions about allocating information and tasks. You can ask yourself, “Did I reach out to Susan today?” Make sure to have touch points with everyone on your team regularly”.

Sources: J. Grenny; D. Maxwell (November 2017) A Study of 1,100 Employees Found That Remote Workers Feel Shunned and Left Out  
<https://www.businessinsider.com/ways-businesses-new-to-remote-working-adapt-quickly-be-productive-2020-3?r=US&IR=T#4-take-a-virtual-tour-of-your-home-office-4>

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## PRACTICE EMPATHY



Keep in mind that everyone will be going through a different experience. It is therefore important to ensure that the team is connecting on a personal level, and that communications are altered accordingly (whether physically, e.g. when a call is put in the diary, or emotionally, e.g. changing your tone to mirror emotions). Try not to brush concerns away – acknowledging how someone is feeling can be a powerful way to connect and will increase the sincerity of your communication.



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## EMOTIONALLY PROOF-READ



Sometimes what you need to communicate may not require a phone call but, as it can't be said in person to your desk-mate, email traffic has undoubtedly increased. Liz Fosslien recommends 'emotionally proofreading' your message to avoid causing unnecessary anxiety (examples given include "let's talk" when really the sender means, "these are good suggestions, let's discuss them"). She also advises against something as simple as using a full stop for very short sentences - "[a]dding a period adds finality to your statement and heightens the negative emotion".

Source: L. Fosslien & M. West Dutty (March 2020) 10 Digital Miscommunications and How to Avoid Them; Harvard Business Review

## DID YOU KNOW?

Being candid in how you communicate leads to greater creativity! Teams who shared an "embarrassing" story at the start of their meeting generated 26 per cent more ideas spanning 15 per cent more use categories than their counterparts!

Source: L. Thompson (October 2017) Research for Better Brainstorming Tell an Embarrassing Story; Harvard Business Review





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