

Emerging Communication Trends in the Workplace

2021 Global Study



Powered by Elevview Consulting

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We've interviewed hundreds of executives and partners globally to understand which interpersonal skills are most valued by leaders. This insight and the data collected by working with dozens of law firms and companies across six continents is the foundation of this report.

The most consistently valued interpersonal skills by executives:

- ➔ Building strong, trusted **relationships** with colleagues and clients
- ➔ Exhibiting **reliability** and thoroughness
- ➔ Communicating effectively across **email**, video, and in-person interactions
- ➔ Navigating **critical conversations** about feedback, mistakes, and workload imbalances in a professional and productive manner
- ➔ Maximizing your time and **productivity** to reduce burnout

This global study distills the critical trends of interpersonal skills in the workplace and provides recommendations for leaders.

Use this report to:

- ➔ **Harmonize communication and understanding** across all levels of your organization
- ➔ **Evaluate your current training** & development initiatives to ensure you teach these interpersonal skills and clearly convey expectations
- ➔ **Discuss key takeaways with colleagues** and initiate conversations about how to retain and develop your teams



GLOBAL STUDY METHODOLOGY

We've collected 1,200+ data points across a range of industries:



Law



Accounting



Financial
Services



Consumer
Products



Insurance



Logistics



Construction



Real Estate



Non-profit



Higher
Education

The perspectives
in this report come
from professionals
around the world:



IT REALLY IS ABOUT WHO YOU KNOW

Fostering strong professional relationships through networking is critical for companies to build and grow their client rosters and hold onto their talent. However, technology has disrupted how many professionals—especially younger professionals—build relationships. Moreover, younger generations often shy away from networking because they feel uncomfortable in such settings or they feel like they lack networking skills.

The Definition of Networking

Networking is the first stage of building long-term relationships. At Eleview Consulting, we define networking as the act of getting to know someone, over time, for mutual benefit, by focusing on how to add value to the other person.

Over
80%

of our workshop participants view **networking as essential to their success**. So why aren't we all doing more of it?



Why We Don't Network Enough

It feels awkward. Our research has shown that feeling uncomfortable is the #1 reason professionals don't network. The second most common reason is not knowing who to network with or how to network, and the third reason is a perceived lack of time.

Surprisingly, we did not find that “failing to understand the value of networking” is a primary reason for the lack of it. Professionals know that having strong relationships, especially with mentors and advisors, is critical for their success. They report the most significant value is getting crucial advice on career decisions and receiving feedback on improving performance.

How To Make Relationship-Building Skyrocket

- ➔ Provide guidance on who to reach out to
- ➔ Share suggestions on how to connect with colleagues
- ➔ Empower individuals to proactively stay in touch

Fill Your Board of Directors

Eleview's approach is to have professionals construct their own “board of directors” that includes specific people who bring unique perspectives and advice. We then teach professionals concrete skills for building their relationship with each board member.

We've found this method makes networking less awkward and more tangible. Professionals gain clarity on who they need to develop relationships with and grasp why it's worthwhile to do so.

Types of people everyone needs on their personal board of directors:

- ➔ Someone who is advocating for you behind closed doors
- ➔ Peers who have similar roles and can share best practices
- ➔ Colleagues who see your daily work and can provide honest feedback
- ➔ People you can discuss career decisions with

Action Items for Leaders



1

Make introductions to people in your network that your colleagues would benefit from meeting



2

Encourage relationship-building by bringing a younger colleague along to a conference or lunch



3

Allow for shadowing so team members can listen in on conference calls or strategic meetings

Workshop Spotlight: Strategic Networking

Energize your professionals with concrete steps to build meaningful professional relationships in a way that feels comfortable to them. We cover how to identify gaps in your network, templates for reaching out to people, guidance on making a great impression, and simple ways to stay in touch long term.

This workshop gets rave reviews:



Thank you for all the wonderful tips and insight you provided on being an effective communicator and networking! I still find myself referring to the notes I took during your workshops and they've been immensely helpful as a young professional entering the workplace."

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

Hear from one of our global clients, a Director at a large financial institution, about why she felt it was essential to equip the firm's professionals to build strong professional relationships.

Why did you want your investment group to learn networking skills in particular?

Two reasons really – one is that our people spend a lot of time talking to clients and our juniors need to develop good relationships with all of them to grow their reputations as advisors. So, when they are ready to step up, they don't need to start from scratch.

The other is my own, and management's, hope to break down silos and encourage more co-operative work across teams. People who focus on the transportation industry, for example, might find the material being produced by energy teams to be very useful!

Making sure that the group understood the importance of connecting with senior people, clients, and peers was a key driver for bringing in Eleview Consulting.

Describe your experience partnering with Eleview Consulting for this training initiative.

We found Eleview Consulting to be a great working partner with a solid, proven offering and the ability to customize to suit the specific needs of our population. Elise even proactively recorded a short video saying hello to the department that really helped drive registration.

Our departmental sessions were so successful that I was very comfortable suggesting Eleview when our corporate HR asked for help in putting together a training program for summer interns. My trust in her to deliver for my partners was well rewarded—they were thrilled with the outcome in their own program.

THE COST OF UNCLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Two facts best exhibit the clearest sign of disconnect in the intergenerational workforce:

The #1 quality professionals want to be known for is reliability. Yet, one of the most common frustrations executives have is that the professionals on their teams are unresponsive.

The Need for Clear Expectations

Across organizations, there's a clear desire for:



Timely response to emails



Delivering projects on time



Producing consistently high-quality work



Exhibiting dependability

Someone can't be both reliable and unresponsive. So, why does this communication breakdown exist?



Ambiguity and Reliability Are Inversely Related

There's often a lack of defined expectations within teams and organizations and differing perceptions of what it means to be reliable. With a wide range of working styles and communication preferences, it's ineffective to assume team members intuitively know what each leader expects and how they define responsiveness.

Leaders must give professionals explicit direction on what reliability and responsiveness mean to *encourage desired behavior and eliminate ambiguity*.



The Magic Combination of Excellent Work + Likeability



Professionals also want to be known as empathetic, energetic, trustworthy, knowledgeable, and kind.

These adjectives fall into two themes. First, professionals want to be viewed as outstanding at their work. To do this, they realize they must know how to do their job and complete their work in a timely fashion.

The second theme is the desire to be someone others want to work with. Professionals place a high value on being liked by their colleagues. They strive to be pleasant, likable, and to empathize with people from different backgrounds.

The confluence of valuing technical and interpersonal skills is more prevalent in millennials and Gen Z than in other generations.

Action Items for Leaders



Set clear expectations on email response times.



Define professional presence internally and externally by giving guidance on dress code, appropriate topics of conversation, tone of communication, and small talk topics for the range of environments team members will be in.



Initiate conversations about their intangible goals by asking employees what qualities they want to exhibit, and proactively identify opportunities for you to give them opportunities to build those skills.

Workshop Spotlight: Build Your Reputation

Build Your Reputation is our most popular workshop and is the foundation for all of our professional development programming. This session is custom-built to clearly convey the workplace expectations unique to your organization. In our “North Star” exercise, participants reflect on how they want to be perceived by others and develop micro-actions to build their personal brand intentionally.



An average 3-4x increase in the ability to identify and execute on the qualities of high-performing professionals after completing this workshop.

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES OF MODERN COMMUNICATION

In today's dynamic workplace, it's not enough to be a great writer or engaging presenter. Individuals must convey their ideas in a compelling way across a range of communication channels and workplace environments.

The Art of Asking Questions

Knowing when and how to ask questions surpasses other challenges like working with people who have a different communication style, making a mistake, and interpreting the tone of an email. This challenge is exacerbated by the remote work environment, making it harder to ask a colleague a quick question by approaching them in their office or the hallway. The fear of asking questions can also be attributed to the insecurity many professionals feel, and their concern about sounding like they don't know what they're doing.



“

38%

of professionals say their top communication challenge is knowing when and how to ask questions.

Timing is Everything

We find the biggest opportunity area for improvement, regarding asking questions, to be the *timing* of when questions are asked. There's no such thing as a bad question, but there ARE poor times to ask a question. For instance, if someone is new to the job and attending an important client meeting, that would not be the time to ask foundational questions that everyone else in the meeting knows. It's best to write these types of questions down and ask a colleague afterward.

We advise professionals to make a genuine effort to find the answer themselves before asking someone else. It's also respectful to keep a running list of unanswered questions that can be asked in a 15-minute touch base, rather than firing off an instant message as soon as it comes to mind.



Adapt Your Communication Style

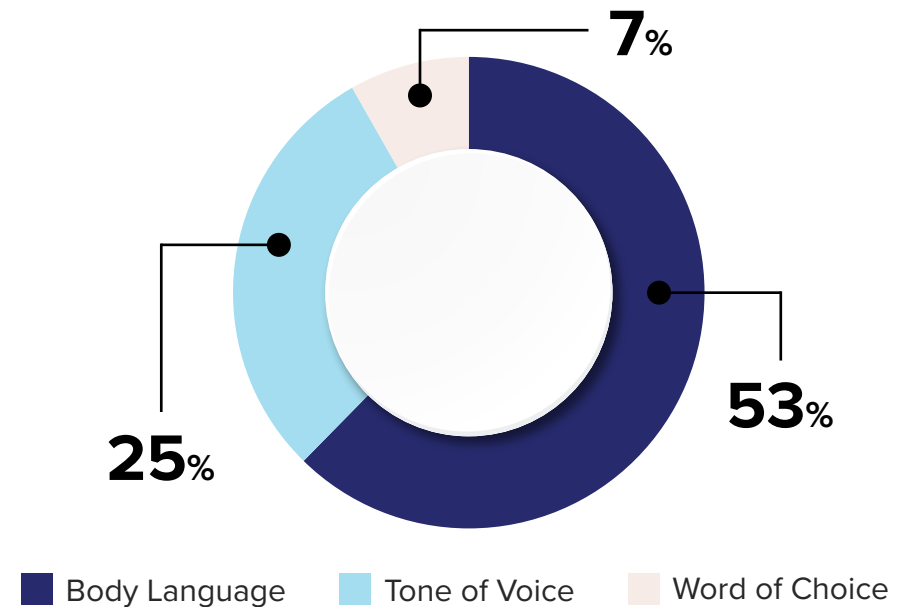
Another element of solid communication skills is the ability to adapt communication based on the audience. To do this, one must be able to read another person's communication style and adjust accordingly. For a typical professional, the most important audiences to understand are their managers and clients. However, we've consistently found that only about **25% of professionals know their manager's communication preferences with confidence.** This reflects an alarming gap in communications, both formal and informal.

Power of Professional Presence

Communication skills and professional presence are deeply intertwined. The ability to speak with credibility, command an audience, and demonstrate confidence allows someone, especially those early in their careers, to stand out in a hugely positive way. Professional presence is multi-faceted because meaning is conveyed via multiple modalities.

93% of the meaning we convey comes from non-verbal cues.

Meaning is conveyed in the following manner:



The greatest enemy of communication is the illusion of it. ”

- William Whyte

Across the 1,200+ professionals we interacted with this year, **the most common self-identified opportunity to boost credibility was to decrease the frequency of their filler words** (i.e., like, um, you know, so, uh). Given that the average usage rate of filler words is five per minute, and the optimal usage rate is one per minute, this is an area where professionals can improve the clarity and effectiveness of their communication. We find having the confidence to pause and collect your thoughts (rather than using filler language) to be a powerful trait that top performers exhibit.

Action Items for Leaders



Even in an internal meeting, encourage every person in the room to have a speaking role.



Schedule a 10-minute touch base a few days after assigning a project to give the employee time to take an initial pass at the task and then ask any outstanding questions.

Workshop Spotlight: Modern Professional Communication

This workshop is consistently one of our top-rated sessions due to the highly interactive content and tangible nature of each activity. There's always a lightbulb moment as we review examples of poorly-written emails compared to well-written emails (spoiler alert: making emails skimmable is key!). We spice up this session by putting participants on the “hot seat” to get immediate feedback from their peers on their public speaking skills.



WHEN THE MOST IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS ARE THE HARDEST TO HAVE



Professionals crave reassurance, advice, and direction. A recent Gallup study discovered that **employees are happiest when they receive some form of recognition every seven days**. The traditional model of bi-annual or annual performance reviews no longer meets the needs of the next generation of talent. They expect frequent and spontaneous recognition regularly. The trouble is that many professionals seem to want positive feedback over constructive feedback. The latter is far more valuable.

Employees are happiest when they receive some form of recognition every seven days.

The Emotional Side of Feedback

In our study, professionals said the critical conversation they most dread at work is receiving difficult feedback. Individuals report feeling sad, hurt, defensive, angry, and confused. Given these high emotions, many struggle to maintain a professional demeanor. The most frequent questions our team hears from workshop participants are around what to do if you disagree with the feedback being given.

Luckily, there are several simple strategies to make giving critical feedback less painful (for both parties involved!).



Tie It Into Their Goals

To turn critical feedback into an encouraging conversation, tie the feedback into why the behavior change will help them achieve their professional goals. Of course, leaders must know the professional goals of the other person to do this effectively.

For example, if a leader knows an individual on their team wants to get access to more client-facing meetings, but the individual doesn't consistently exhibit professionalism, the leader can present the feedback as:



I want to help you get access to more client-facing meetings because you said this is one of your big goals for the year. We pride ourselves as a firm on giving our clients our full attention when we're with them. I've noticed you often glance down at your phone during meetings and, at times, even reply to text messages when we're in the middle of a conversation. I'd like to see you show active listening and engagement in our internal meetings so I know you'll do the same in front of our clients.

Common Critical Conversations at Work Include

1



Asking for feedback

2



Acknowledging a mistake was made

3



Addressing a workload imbalance

4



Giving difficult feedback

Action Items for Leaders



Ask for the other person's key takeaways before ending a difficult conversation so there's an opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings.



Initiate conversations with your team about their professional goals so they feel understood and supported.

Workshop Spotlight: Navigating Critical Conversations

Realistic scenarios are at the heart of this empowering and unique workshop. We create a safe space to discuss the most challenging conversations individuals navigate at work. Participants use our proprietary frameworks to develop personalized feedback action plans so they leave with a clear idea of the specific topics to proactively seek feedback.



THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES OF MODERN COMMUNICATION

When asked, “how’s work going?” most professionals reply with some version of “Things are good! Really busy, though.” Professionals want to be viewed as busy because this is a proxy for importance. If you’re busy, that presumably means a lot of people need your input and knowledge. It signals you’re valued by your employer, colleagues, or clients.

However, there are two key problems with this perceived correlation between never having enough time and therefore being important: we aren’t, in fact, as busy as we think. And, we construct our days to feel busier than need be.

We’re All on Autopilot

First, human beings are terrible at estimating how they spend their time. Research completed by the National Sleep Foundation revealed Americans think, on average, they sleep around 7 hours per night. They actually sleep an average of 8.6 hours.

In a separate study, people who claimed to work 60 – 64 hour work weeks averaged about 44 hours per week.



We simply aren’t as “busy” as we tell ourselves (and others).



It's Hard to Resist Distractions

Second, we sacrifice productivity and concentration when we fall victim to the allure of distraction. Notifications for emails, social media, instant messages, and texts pull our attention away from the work professionals are paid to do: use their brainpower to provide expertise. In the remote and hybrid work environments, we've all become accustomed to, **~40% of surveyed employees said their biggest challenge has been feeling constantly distracted.**

One simple shift in behavior can make a difference.

Americans check their emails 15 times per day on average, or once every 37 minutes. Reducing the frequency of which we check our emails allows for uninterrupted time to produce high-quality work.

Advice for Leaders

- ✔ Seek input from your team about what boundaries can be created so they feel equipped to balance their personal and professional lives.
- ✔ Encourage team discussion about what routines they want to keep from the remote-work period as offices open up.

Workshop Spotlight: Focused Work in a Distracted World

One of our workshop participants at a Fortune 50 company put it best: **“This has been my favorite speaker presentation so far! Thank you for the inspirational and interactive experience.”**

Our Focused Work in a Distracted World workshop is truly an experience.

We take a unique approach of incorporating science-backed research on the power of concentration and allow for open and honest dialogue among colleagues on the minor behavior changes that reduce feelings of burnout. Participants leave feeling empowered and energized to make their job work for them.

CLOSING MESSAGE

We're thrilled to share our research with you through this report. The team at Eleview Consulting is passionate about harmonizing communication and understanding across all levels of an organization. It's our mission to make interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence concrete and actionable.

We train young professionals, leaders, and teams at companies around the world, in-person and virtually.



COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR YOUR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Rapidly equip your intern class, rotational program, and early career talent with the critical communication skills needed to succeed in our modern workplace



INTERGENERATIONAL UNDERSTANDING FOR YOUR LEADERS

Give leaders insight into how to effectively communicate with millennial and Gen Z colleagues using frameworks that inspire action and generate excitement for the next generation of talent



CUSTOM ENGAGEMENTS FOR YOUR TEAMS

Show your employees you're invested in their growth with programming for groups such as ERGs, sales professionals, and mentor programs

CLOSING MESSAGE

We understand your organization is unique. All of our workshops are customized to meet your specific needs and complement your internal programming. Your input and collaboration allow us to lead impactful and engaging workshops.

To schedule a consultation to discuss bringing our custom professional development experiences to your organization, or for media and press inquiries, please contact us at:

☎ (312) 416-6197

✉ info@eleviewconsulting.com

You can see our current programming offerings on our website at www.EleviewConsulting.com. We appreciate your interest in our work building communication skills throughout organizations and we look forward to hearing from you!



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