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SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN ■ TIPS & TACTICS FOR NEW LAWYERS

Hone What You Say and How You Say It

Communication is at the core of almost everything a lawyer does. Being an effective communicator is essential for establishing rapport, trust, credibility, positive relationships and good business outcomes.

In formal legal writing. Be sure your legal documents are clear, concise and user-friendly. Avoid run-on sentences and excessive legal jargon lest you lose your focus *and* your readers lose your point. Even when you're writing for other lawyers who'll appreciate your legal knowledge, direct and less-turgid writing is more effective.

In correspondence. When writing e-mails, letters to clients or internal memos to colleagues, be succinct. Quickly make your point up front. Don't include more information than you need to or than one can assimilate.

During presentations. Whether you are presenting to a judge, other lawyers, prospects or clients, your audience will respond more favorably if you exude confidence and are articulate. But it is equally important to make a connection with your audience. Don't focus on convincing others of your intelligence, expertise and the "right" point of view. Instead, observe those you're addressing to gauge how they're assimilating the information. If need be, shift gears or change your presentation style.

During meetings. Arrive at meetings

on time and prepared. Demonstrate your interest and attentiveness. Do not interrupt, but do participate: Be ready to offer comments or ask a question when someone else is done speaking. Stay focused and don't have side conversations, read materials or allow outside interruptions.

On the telephone. If you're initiating a phone call, write down the key points you want to cover. Have at hand any materials you might need to reference during the call. Be respectful of the person on the receiving end. Ask and then listen; talk and then pause. If you receive a call and cannot speak with the person at the moment, be polite. Ask when is a convenient time to call back, or whether someone else can help in the interim.

Face to face. While personal interactions are still the most effective means of communication. Remember, though, your nonverbal cues—gestures, facial expressions, posture, tone of voice—can convey as much meaning as your words. Used effectively, these cues can strengthen interpersonal exchanges. Your ability to communicate effectively on *multiple* levels will be a key to your success. ■



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Checklist

How to Become a More Effective Communicator

- Be clear and concise in your writing. Stay vigilant about grammatical and typographical errors.
- When on the phone, use a clear, positive voice. And smile when you speak—it affects the tone of your voice.
- When consulting with others, succinctly summarize your questions and answers. Remember that people have limited time. They don't want to hear everything you know, only the most important points.
- Be sensitive to how your communication style works with others—everyone is different. But never be patronizing or arrogant.
- Become an avid and expert listener. Synthesize what you hear and learn.
- Stay focused on the other person before thinking about your own agenda. What is this individual saying, asking and generally conveying to you?
- Practice and improve your communication skills. Attend training programs, ask to be videotaped in action, obtain feedback and get coaching in skills you don't possess.
- Look for opportunities to regularly get together with your colleagues and clients. Law is still very much a personal, relationship business.