

The Touch Points Of Communication

By Nancy Friedman

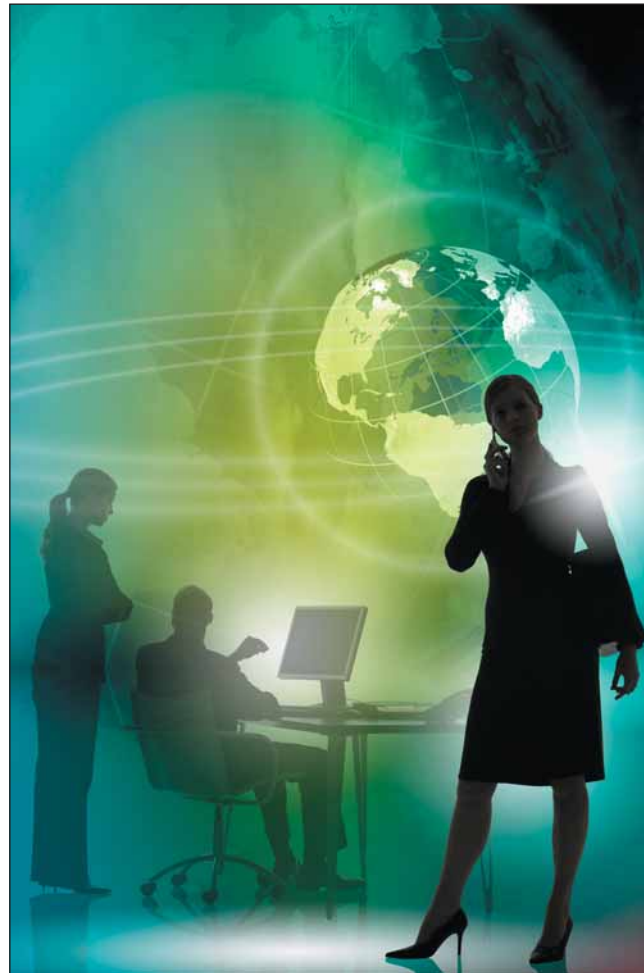
Are you aware of all the six touch points of communications? The six ways you can enhance or foul up a business or a personal relationship? You should be familiar with them all. Let's go over each point because throughout the day, both in business and your home life, we all have the ability to "touch" people in a variety of ways. And with each point there are pros and cons. Here we go.

Touch Point #1 – The phone. And not just your business or home phone. Your cell phone, too. Telephone Doctor surveys show that more than 80 percent of all business transactions involve a phone call at one point. The telephone is what's known as a "synchronous" method of communication. And what that means is that you're in sync with the person you're communicating with. You can have a simultaneous two-way exchange of information. Both parties need to be communicating at the same time for maximum effectiveness.

That doesn't mean you need to agree with the person you're talking with. More importantly, you both are able to communicate immediately. The best part of the telephone touch point is the ability to hear the tone of voice being used. That stimulates the listener's imagination--almost like the radio.

On the phone, there is no sight. Just sound. And how you perceive those sounds makes a whole lot of difference. So tone of voice is critical with the first touch point. Two people can say the same thing to one person, and yet the listener can hear it differently from each.

That being said, the telephone is a very effective



and popular method of communication (providing you've reached your called party). It gets answers quickly. And rapid response. As you might imagine, this touch point is a personal favorite. (I don't want caller ID. It takes all the fun out of a phone call.)

Touch Point #2 – E-mail. Ah yes, the beloved e-mail. Well, it's "asynchronous," meaning you communicate information one direction at a time. And you may not get immediate communication back. With e-mail, you have relinquished interpretation of the tone of voice to the other person. What you write can be "heard" whatever way that person wants to hear it. This can be dangerous. Remember,

e-mail etiquette is new. However, suffice to say when you e-mail something, it needs to be short, sweet, and to the point.

Plus, it needs to be obviously friendly. It's a delivery method that has the ability to "sit" for hours and sometimes days without an answer. (When should you meet rather than use e-mail? A client once told us, "When there are more than two e-mails on the same subject going back and forth, it's time for a face-to-face meeting.") That's easy to say for those of us who work in the same area; however, if your e-mails are international or even regional, they are your critical touch point.

Be careful in your e-mails. Many hurt feelings have come about due to insensitive writing. That's a good place to practice all your "pleases" and "thank-you's." Short, terse, one-word answers are perceived as rude (as they do in any touch point).

Touch Point #3 – Voice Mail. Again, this is an "asynchronous" means of communication. You can leave a voice

message for someone, and when you get an answer—if ever—is up to him or her, not you. And it's not instantaneous, like speaking with someone on the telephone. So here again, your voice mail needs to be special.

There are three types of voice mails: poor, average, and great. When you leave a voice mail, make it a great one. Remember, you get to use your tone of voice. That's a real plus. Your listener can hear the laughter, the smile, and the tone. Use it to your advantage.

Touch Point #4 – Snail Mail (U.S. Mail, UPS, FedEx, etc). Things like letters or package delivery. These are some of the original forms of business communication. And we've used it and continue using it as a great method of communication. As is true with e-mails, though, the written word can be miscommunicated very easily. So e-mail, voice mail, and snail mail are very similar when communicating. All are "asynchronous," and you wait for an answer.

Touch Point #5 – The Fax Machine. Remember when that method of communicating came on the scene? It seems we didn't know how we operated without it. And today, it trails sadly behind the other touch points. Yet, it's still there and being used, just not as much or as often. And a reminder, it is "asynchronous"—one-way information waiting for an answer.

Touch Point #6 – Face-to-Face Communication. Obviously this needs little, if any, explanation. When we communicate in a face-to-face situation, we have it all. Sight, sound, tone of voice, facial expressions, body language—the entire package. Just like television. It's the ultimate "synchronous" touch point.

Maintaining eye contact is key in this special touch point. Those who will not make eye contact while communicating with us are sometimes judged "suspicious." We suspect that they may be hiding something.

Be careful, too, in a face-to-face situation that your head doesn't look as though it's on a spindle. Focus on the person, or people, you're talking with. They deserve your full attention. And you'll find you soon notice when someone is talking with you if they're concentrating on you and the topic or if their eyes are wondering around looking elsewhere—anyplace but with you.

And yet, with all these touch points and helpful hints, we often still miscommunicate. In the workplace, we probably use all six touch points many times a day. A few simple guidelines can help focus on which touch point to use when. And how to make them work for you and not against you.

- Telephone - If you reach your called party, great. That's immediate. It's also good for leaving messages that don't need an immediate answer. If you need immediate action, try to reach another person. The telephone is only synchronous when you have reached the called party.
- Voice Mail - That would be asynchronous, leaving

messages that will be returned when the called party decides to return it (if ever).

- E-mail - Again, one-way communication. Keep it short, sweet, and to the point. Use your manners. Remember, one word answers are perceived as rude.
- Courier - Still a great way to communicate. But be careful with the written word. Keep in mind how possible miscommunication might occur. More than once, words have come back to haunt the writer.
- Fax - For those that still use this method of communication, one-pagers are appreciated. And again, written words need to be checked and double-checked to be sure they won't be misunderstood.
- Face-to-Face - The ultimate method of communication. Immediate reaction, tone, sight, sound, and body language. Total synchronous communication. And that smile or handshake makes it all worthwhile! ■

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