COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1. **Practice good manners.** Good manners provide a solid foundation of basic civility, promote mutual respect, and offer an easy way to establish some social capital (goodwill). Interrupting is very disrespectful and should be avoided as much as possible.
2. **Lead with respect.** All interactions between people boil down to respect in one form or another. Respect is the foundation for fairness and honesty. The best way to get respect is to give respect. In my mind, the most fundamental aspects of respect are fairness and honesty, which lead to healthy interactions between people.
3. **Really listen.** The best way to be respectful of someone is to really listen to understand as opposed to just preparing your counter-attack. Reflective listening and asking questions help people understand each other better (e.g., "So, are you saying you feel I don't value you or your time when I am late?").
4. **Take your time.** Pausing is important as humans respond emotionally within half a second, and it takes about 10 seconds for initial emotionality to subside. "Let me think about that," is a great phrase and gives you permission to stop, collect yourself, consider different perspectives, and respond in a thoughtful manner.
5. **I statements.** Use "I" statements at the start of a sentence: "I think…," "I believe…," "I feel…" when stating your position. This is the opposite of starting a sentence with "You…" which implies an accusation, and the other person will feel as though they are being indicted and become immediately defensive.
6. **Non-verbals count a whole heck of a lot.** The old saying, "it's not what you say but how you say it" really is important to keep in mind because communication is 93% non-verbal; body language (hand gestures, eye-rolls, leaning forward, etc.) counts 58% and inflection (tone, pitch, volume, cadence) counts 35%. I make sure to talk soft and slow, sit down and fold my hands to better focus on what I am saying.
7. **Declarative statements come across like a hand grenade**, "Leaving our car at your friend's house was stupid!" Instead, we can ask, "What was the reason you decided to leave our car at your friend's house?" By doing so, we are giving the person respect as well as a chance to explain themselves and their positive intent (maybe they were drunk and chose not to drive, which is a good thing).
8. **Avoid categorical language** such as *never*, *always*, *nothing, everything, totally, all*, *worst, only,* etc. define people and situations in absolutes, is an assault on a person's character (the subtext of "You *never* take out the garbage." = "You are a lazy slob."), and is the same as calling them a bad person. Instead, describe issues in behavioral terms (e.g., "When you forget to take out the garbage, I feel like you aren't doing your part to keep our apartment clean.").

9. **Don't insult people** with words like "stupid," "dumb," "idiot," "crazy," etc. as these words insult peoples' intelligence. Basically, everyone will go to great lengths to avoid being regarded as unintelligent. I regard these words as worse than swear words. These words are poor substitutes for more insightful words - instead of saying '"That was so stupid," I could say "I don't think that was helpful," or "I would prefer if you did it this way instead." Also avoid swear words.
10. **You have the right to say "No.**" Being comfortable with this is an important and necessary life skill, otherwise, people will take advantage of you, because, as the old saying goes, "some people mistake kindness for weakness." Some examples from mildest to most direct are: "No thank you." "Not today." "Maybe next time." "I don't think that's a good idea." "I don't want to." "I would never do that." "No." "I already said 'No' and I mean 'No.'" "Stop pressuring me!" Setting limits firmly is even more relevant for females.
11. **Apologizing.** Apologize only when sincere as it's a matter of honesty and respect; an insincere apology benefits nobody. Also, be careful about including a reason or an excuse as there is a big difference between the two; a reason is more related to something out of our control (e.g., "Somebody crashed into my car on the way over and we had to exchange info and call the police." or "My son had an accident at home and I had to deal with it before I left.") vs an excuse which is not something beyond our control that is used as a reason and dilutes not only our sincerity but also our trustworthiness (e.g., "I decided to stop for a cappuccino and the line was really, really long." or "My friend Rick called me.").
12. **Praise in public and criticize in private.** This is a golden rule to practice both personally and professionally. With praising in public, we boost morale, garner respect, engender social capital, and foster supportive environments. With criticizing in private, we salvage the other person's dignity by not publicly humiliating them, and minimize defensiveness on their part, which helps the conversation to proceed more smoothly. And, we get to feel good about how we handled the situation. Everyone wins.
13. **Always try to end on a positive.** Our brains associate experiences mostly with how they end. If we end on a positive, both parties will, in all likelihood, be less apprehensive about the next interaction as opposed to, subconsciously, gearing for a battle royal because of how bad things ended previously. We will feel better about ourselves because humans have a profound need to get along with other human. And, we need to support one another and promote positive behaviors with each other as much as possible; this is especially true for couples, as the rest of the world will not see all the good deeds and sacrifices you are making for your family, but partners can, and should, provide supportive feedback to one another on a regular basis.

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