

Tips for Communication in Stressful Times

1. **Focus on the Shared Purpose and the Larger Meaning of your Work:**
Rally people to the shared objective ... “Let’s get back to changing the world for the better ...”
2. **Create Shared Agreements as a Team** to stay focused on your goal.
Think of situations that could come up (or already have) that could derail your focus.
What can we do to prevent them? How will we deal with them, when they come up?
 - **Create a ‘code’ word** that members agree will bring them back to the shared objective.
 - **Use humor** as prevention or to break tension (but do so carefully or it could backfire).
 - **Set breaks.** Energizers (e.g. dance party) and calming (e.g. walks or calming music).
 - **Pair off** to be sure each person has a ‘buddy’ willing to help them when they get stressed.
3. **Pause:** Resist saying something when you are upset. You can go back but it’s hard to take it away.
 - *Face to face:* If you can’t separate yourself, take a few deep breaths, and be curious (#4 below). When possible, as calmly as possible, ask “Can we take a break and come back to this at a later time?” Then take time to reflect on what you want and need regarding the task and the relationship.
 - *Via email: Shift to Phone* if you sense misunderstanding or potential conflict. Resist the urge to continue via email. If an email is the only possibility, write one and then either ...
 - a. *Walk away from it for as long as possible* (ideally overnight) then reread out loud for a fresh perspective. Step back and ask yourself:
 - i. What’s my motivation in sending this?
 - ii. Did I achieve it? Can I add anything to soften the tone?
 - iii. Can I delete anything that might be misunderstand and/or cause a spark?
 - b. *Send it to a colleague or friend for their perspective.*
4. **Be Curious vs. Judgmental** – Seek to Understand. Don’t assume you know what is going on with the other person. Stop and say, “I’m curious ... please help me understand your thinking”. Listen fully.
5. **Assume Positive Intent.**
6. **Be Empathetic.** Each person is seeking to survive physically and psychologically. Consider:
 - What need might the other person’s emotion (e.g. anger, etc.) come from?
 - What fear or danger might this person be experiencing?
 - What is she or he really asking for?
7. **Practice Patience** – It’s a choice that leads to a better outcome.
 - Patience is a choice we make over and over again.
 - Practicing patience is enhanced by seeing ourselves as still learning.
 - Just because you weren’t patient with this situation, doesn’t mean you will always be impatient.
 - It is not all about us and what is happening is not personal. Rule #6: Don’t take yourself so seriously.¹

Also see: Openness and Learning Questions and Transactional Trust & Cycle of Mistrust..

¹ The Power of Patience, M.J.Ryan and The Art of Possibility, R.S. & B. Zander.