

Coping with Changes

Brought by COVID-19



When Communicating Online, PICK Your Words

Throughout the last few weeks, tensions for many of us have reached an apex. We're experiencing stress, grief, loss, fear, anxiety, rage, and hopelessness. Many have lost their jobs and are terrified about their financial futures, while others have discovered that working and living in the same space 24 hours a day might not be optimal for their wellbeing. [We're engaging defense mechanisms](#), suffering from depression, and feeling emotionally and physically exhausted.

Lashing out at one another – in both workplace settings and in personal settings via social media – has become more commonplace. But it doesn't have to be so. During times of stress, focusing on our own wellbeing – and by extension, the wellbeing of others – can be incredibly helpful.

As you feel frustrated by communications that may trigger you in some way, take a breath before responding, and **PICK** your words.

Patience: In addition to being [good for your health](#), patience is more important now than ever. As record numbers of employees work from home office spaces (and [are feeling cramped by their loved ones](#), who are usually their sources of joy) or are losing their jobs, it's important to remember one thing.

[NOTHING IS NORMAL RIGHT NOW.](#)

[You're probably not sleeping well.](#) [Your eating habits are likely different.](#) You may be juggling multiple priorities as a parent, as a brand new homeschool teacher, or you may be feeling lonely as you isolate by yourself. And the person you're communicating with? They're likely experiencing the same things.

As you read that infuriating email or social media post, give people more room than you'd normally be inclined to give. *Then give them more still.* [Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations](#), but you have the power within yourself to take a deep breath and remember that on the other side of the screen is a human who is experiencing many of the same stressors you are feeling.



Earl E. Bakken Center for
SPIRITUALITY & HEALING

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

For more tips about health and wellbeing, visit [Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing](#), provided by the University of Minnesota's Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing.

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Intention: It's always a good idea to [avoid assuming the sender's intention when you're reading an email](#). After all, their message could mean a variety of things. Their simple response of "Let's discuss later" to your well-crafted message sharing your best idea ever could mean a variety of things, including - "I'm not interested in this discussion," "I don't understand this, so let's talk about it some more," or it could actually mean, "I'm reading this on my phone in between meetings and I look forward to discussing it with you later." In the PICK model, however, "intention" refers to the practice of setting the intention of your own message before crafting it. Exactly what would you like to say in your message? How would you like to respond? What point would you like to make? How can you ensure that the receiver understands your message as you intended it to be received? "Setting an intention" is an ages-old mindfulness practice that can easily [be brought into digital communication](#). As you compose your message, consider what you would like the outcome to be, and how you can best convey that desired outcome.

Clarity: In her book *Dare to Lead*, Brené Brown writes, that "Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind." To use the previous example, the response of "Let's discuss later" could have been far more clear and direct. Whenever possible, try to ensure that the recipient of your message understands your perspective. And always remember the Communications 101 rule: [Concise is best](#).

And keep in mind during this time of abundant emails and fast replies that people hate [jargon](#) and corporate acronyms. [Really, really, really, really, really](#) hate them.

Consider clarity in your emails and your social media posts a kindness that you can share with others; by taking a mindful moment to re-read your message before you hit the send or post button, you're doing your best to ensure a positive outcome for both the sender and the receiver.

Kindness: Finally, as you send your message or your post, be kind. A comprehensive study from MIT found that in social media, [false news and lies spread faster than the truth](#). Oddly, in this study, news generated by bots seemed to spread at an equal pace whether positive or negative, while false news spread much faster via human connections, most likely due to an emotional response. Studies have suggested that



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[kindness boosts happiness](#), yet it seems hard to be kind to others in an online world where [meanness can be cathartic or offer a sense of control](#). As you begin to respond to messages or posts in snarky ways, consider the impact that it will have on others, and also on yourself. [Being kind to others benefits not only them, but you, too](#). Kindness can also [make you a better leader](#). And in the end, isn't it better - and more productive - to focus your limited energy during a time of global upheaval on making the world a better place, not just for you, but for your colleagues, loved ones, and generations to come? In a world where you can be anything, be kind. This doesn't mean you should avoid sharing difficult news or messages - but when doing so, be empathetic, and frame messages in kindness.

Next time you're frustrated by an email from a colleague or a social media post from your former college roommate, PICK your words, and exercise mindful, kind communication.

PICK

- Patience:** Take a deep breath and remember that there's someone on the other side of the screen.
- Intention:** Think about what you want to say, and what outcome you want your message to have.
- Clarity:** Be mindful about how you communicate, and be concise yet clear.
- Kindness:** In a world where you can be anything, be kind.

