

Civility and Respect at Work: Do's and Don'ts in Remote Work



This tip sheet aims to complement existing job aids and other tools to support remote work.



Respect in the workplace: What does it look like?

"Working together in a spirit of openness, honesty and transparency that encourages engagement, collaboration and respectful communication."

[Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector](#) - Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada

Working in a virtual context profoundly shapes and transforms how public servants communicate with each other. Communicating the same message virtually or in person may have a different impact on the person receiving the message.

Here are tips to support maintaining a culture of civility and respect in a virtual workplace.

How is virtual communication different?

A physical workspace generally provides options to communicate in person and virtually. Channels of communication are more restricted in a remote work environment, as it relies mostly on technology. This influences how we are perceived and the impact we have on others.



Active listening

When not on camera, it is difficult to pick up on non-verbal cues, so it is important to practice active listening to demonstrate respect. Fully concentrating on what your colleagues are saying, rather than just hearing what is being said, will allow you to maximize understanding and minimize miscommunication.

Non-verbal cues

Working remotely influences how we interpret non-verbal cues. If using your camera for meetings, consider working from a table or a desk if possible, rather than your couch or bed. Stand up straight, dress appropriately, and show you are actively listening. Working from home can decrease our professional awareness, so ensure that when on camera, you and your workspace reflect appropriate levels of professionalism.



Tone of written messages

Not being physically in the same space influences how we interpret written text. The content of your messages – including tone and emotion – can be misinterpreted more frequently. To help maintain a positive tone, consider including a personal greeting or a 'thank you' message in your communications. You may also want to offer a follow up call, should the subject of the message be more complex.

When in a virtual meeting:



Know who you are engaging with, and mindfully set the tone accordingly. The level of formality commonly increases with seniority. This also applies to someone you don't know or a partner.



Practice patience: When using teleconference or videoconference, be patient and give people space to talk. There might be lagging due to connectivity.



Be mindful about eyerolling and other physical signs of obvious dissatisfaction, like breathing loudly or sighing.



Be sure to mute your line when you are not speaking to avoid others hearing your background noise.



Visibly looking busy while colleagues are talking is distracting. This includes talking to someone – even if you are muted – and looking at your phone.



If you move between rooms or if there are visual distractions near or behind you, turn your camera off to prevent distracting your colleagues.

The Canada School of Public Service's [Mental Health Job Aid for Managers on Civility and Respect](#) offers more information on the topic and contains an extensive list of resources on civility and respect in the workplace.