



IN

SURANCE

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ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION MAY BE QUICK AND EASY, BUT SCIENCE SHOWS FACE-TO-FACE CONVERSATIONS CAN BE GOOD FOR OUR BRAINS AND OUR WORK RELATIONSHIPS.

 LINDSAY ROBISON



Would you rather send an email to a colleague or get out from behind your desk to go talk to him or her?

If you picked the former, you're not alone. Honestly, you're in the majority. A 2017 survey says 86 percent of professionals choose email as the favorite mode of communication.

No one can really blame anyone else for liking emails. They can be sent from virtually anywhere ... pun intended. They are quick. They can be efficient. And they're just plain easy, especially if the subject is a tough one.

But if you're a leader who prefers email to face-to-face conversations — regardless of the topic — you might want to re-evaluate your preference.

Why? It has nothing to do with getting closer to the 10,000-step-per-day goal, but it does have something to do with overall personal wellness — and business wellness, too.

Communicating face to face has significant impacts on our brains. Studies have shown that in-person social interaction can help with depression. And, believe it or not, it helps synchronize people's brains. According to some 2012 research featured in the *Journal of Neuroscience*, research subjects experienced similar left inferior frontal cortex brain activity while engaging in a face-to-face conversation.

They did not have similar brain activity when having the same conversation with their backs to one another.

According to psychologist and UCLA professor emeritus Albert Mehrabian's decades-old research that still is widely cited, face-to-face communication does wonders for context. On average, 55 percent of what is said during a conversation is interpreted through facial expressions; 38 percent is interpreted through the way words are said; and only 7 percent is interpreted through the actual words.

So, when messages are coming through in a text-only manner, there's a lot of room for interpretation ... that is often incorrect

"Think about it on a level outside of email," says John Parrish-Sprowl, Ph.D., director of the Global Health Communication Center and professor of communications studies at IUPUI. "Think about the difference between reading a book and watching a movie [based on the book]. Even if the dialogue is exactly the same, it translates differently.

"The cues are taken from the text itself," he continues. "But when someone says the same thing, cues are taken from the paralinguistic and facial expression aspects as well. Plus, if what is said is unclear or triggers more conversation, people can engage in a more immediate response than texting or email allows."

Therefore, it can take away some stress from employees who tend to read into or overthink an electronic message. Face-to-face communication is also where trust is built, according to Gregory Northcraft, Ph.D., a professor emeritus of business administration at the University of Illinois' Gies College of Business.

"Technology has made us much more efficient but much less effective," the professor of executive leadership with a doctorate in social psychology told the university's news bureau. "Something is being gained, but something is being lost. That something gained is time and the something lost is the quality of relationships. And quality of relationships matter."

Trust is a key strategy Tracy Butz, owner of Think Impact Solutions, focuses on when speaking about workplace communication. "Trust is so much easier to build when you're face to face," she says. "I look at trust as equaling dependability plus likability. If you want to increase dependability, you need to lead by example and be explicit with your requests and explanations. If you want to increase the likability component of trust, meeting face to face and getting to know team members on a personal basis have the biggest impact.

"The number one thing people really want from their supervisors is a four-letter word. And that is care," Butz continues. "They want their supervisors to care about them. Not only as a professional but as a human being. It's not tough stuff, we just need to focus on it."

And it's much better when it's not done from behind a desk. 

