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## Enhancing Gen Y Communication Skills

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By Jo Renee Fine

**Question:** Gen Y workers might have excellent technology skills but many need to improve their business writing and interpersonal communication skills. How can a manager help strengthen those skill sets?

**Answer:** Members of Gen Y, also known as Millennials, were born after 1980. They don't remember a world without computers, and in many cases they have honed their communication skills via e-mails, instant messages, and text messages rather than by talking on the phone or in person, or by writing letters, memos and reports.

Some individuals might genuinely be poor writers, but others might simply mask their excellent writing skills by so many emoticons and acronyms that it might seem that they are using a different language. Therefore, the first step in improving workplace communications is to make it clear what the organization considers to be good business writing. A list of do's and don'ts might be a good place to start. For example:

- Do use complete sentences.
- Don't use abbreviations.
- Do use proper capitalization and punctuation.
- Do spell words correctly.
- Don't begin an email with "hey".

For some employees, guidelines like these will be sufficient, but others might need additional professional development in order to relearn—or learn—the basics, such as noun-verb agreement, spelling and punctuation.

Less effective writers can be paired with experienced writers who can edit their work and advise them as they develop their own skills. Younger employees can be referred to the web for a wealth of information on grammar and word usage.

Teaching interpersonal skills may be even more of a challenge. For some younger employees, another do's and don'ts list might come in handy. For example:

- Don't text message during meetings.
- Do listen without interrupting.
- Do watch your language.
- Do say "hello" and "goodbye".

Seminars with role-playing and other exercises can be helpful—particularly with those employees whose time is largely spent using computers—so they can see appropriate behavior modeled and then practice what they learn.

It may also help to evaluate how important good writing and good interpersonal skills are for a specific individual's job responsibilities. Many companies have outstanding employees who are valued for their creativity and productivity—but do not need to write anything for external review or interact broadly with other staff.

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