

Digital Body Language

Leveraging Emotional Intelligence (EQ) to improve your remote work and digital communication.

The modern digital workplace and remote work have provided new opportunities and some challenges to how we communicate. Digital communications through texting, instant messages, email and video chat are now the norm.

Digital body language are the subtle cues and signals underlying our digital messages. Just like physical body language, understanding digital body language can help us communicate more effectively and build healthy, productive relationships.

Examples of digital body language: all of these examples send subtle messages in addition to the content of our communication. When well understood and used effectively, we can communicate more clearly and completely. When misunderstood or misused, we can erode trust and create more work.

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|---------------------------------|--|--|
| • Word choice and tone | • Choice of communication medium | • Email signature line |
| • Length of message | • The choice and order of email recipients | • Use of punctuation, shorthand, acronyms and emojis |
| • Response time or no response | • Time of day of a communication | • Who you cc and bcc |
| • Level of formality | • Profile picture | • Email chain on a forward |
| • Use of camera and mute button | • How you announce yourself | • Use of importance level on email |
| • Teams availability indicator | • Use of passive aggression and sarcasm | |

In the world of digital communication, nothing is neutral. Everything is open for interpretation. While there are no absolute rules, before hitting “Send,” ask yourself these questions:

1. Did I give enough context? Does the audience know the “why” behind the message?
2. Is my meaning clear? Am I sending the information and message I intended?
3. What do I know about my audience and how my message may be interpreted (or misinterpreted).
4. What are the norms for the use of digital communication? Are there rules for what communication tools to use, when and how?
5. How formal should I be given the level of trust and authority I have?
6. Is the communication tool appropriate? Does it align with the complexity, formality and length of the message?
7. Am I striking the right emotional tone? Am I injecting my own emotions when they aren't relevant?
8. Is the communication as brief as possible?
9. Am I clear on any calls to action?
10. Do I need to ask for clarification?



Source: Adapted from [Digital Body Language](#), by Erica Dhawan

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6 tips for improving your digital messages

1. **Manage clarity and brevity.** Messages that are shorter and actionable need more clarity.
2. **Seek to understand the message and the intent.** Assume good intent but ask for clarification.
3. **Pick your communication tool wisely.** Use the right tool for the right message and audience.
4. **Respond carefully.** Proofread with care. Use empathy and EQ to predict the audience response.
5. **Learn the language.** Read and use digital body language cues and signals.
6. **Recognize power differentials.** Identify and use levels of trust and authority to guide your communication.

Whether we are aware of it or not, our digital communications are full of cues and signals that send subtle, underlying messages. Sometimes **how** we communicate is just as powerful as **what** we write and speak. Consider your comfort level with digital communication tools and your familiarity with digital body language. By leveraging the power of digital body language, we can communicate more clearly, build trust and have more productive relationships.

For more information visit Totalhealth.cat.com.

For confidential support, free of charge, contact Caterpillar's **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**:

📞 1-309-820-3604

🌐 EAP.cat.com

📞 1-866-228-0565

🌐 CaterpillarEAP.com

For global access numbers by country



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Common examples

DBL Signal	Possible Meaning and Guidance
Length of message	Longer message or more formal and may be perceived as more serious. Use longer messages when detail and complexity are higher. Avoid longer messages on less robust communication mediums such as text and instant messaging.
Response time	A slow response can send the message that the communication (or person) is less important.
Level of formality	Informal language can be a way of making a message more personal and intimate. Use more formal language when addressing leaders and when trust or familiarity is low.
Use of camera and availability indicator	Avoiding the camera and consistently being marked as “busy” gives the impression you are less connected or do not wish to connect with others.
Choice of communication medium	The tool you use to communicate sends messages about the level of importance, formality and urgency.

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