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Paul McDonald • Aug. 21, 2017



Your accounting team works hard, and everyone stays in sync most of the time. But every once in a while you wonder why certain tasks aren't done well or why an

employee seems disgruntled. The problem could be you.

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1. Practice active listening. Effective communication is interactive, which means you need to truly hear what the other party is saying.

Whether you're engaged in a private conversation or listening to a roomful of employees, focus on paying attention. Engage in friendly eye contact. Give subtle cues that you're fully present, such as occasional head nods and verbal agreements. Don't interrupt. When someone else is speaking, show you understand and aren't just giving a cursory response.

2. Look for nonverbal cues. Sometimes vocal inflections and body language are louder than words. This is why text-based messages are more prone to misunderstandings than phone conversations, which are even less optimal than video conferencing or in-person meetings.

When speaking with staff, note whether they're quietly disagreeing with you — signs include subtly shaking their head and not making eye contact. If you sense conflict or tension, change your tactic so you can reach your employees better.

3. Learn from the best. Do you know someone who's a pro at getting staff buy-in and keeping the team happy? Watch the techniques he or she uses and follow the example. The details — gestures, tone of voice, email style and the ability to make small talk — can have a big impact on how your message comes across.

If possible, ask this guru to mentor you. You could also participate in Toastmasters, take courses and attend seminars on how to communicate better. The investment in time and money is worth it.

4. Alter your attitude. It can be difficult for certain staff members to be comfortable around management because of their supervisor's "boss persona." While you need not — and should not — be their work buddy, chances are you could loosen up a bit

so employees can better relate to you. Ways to build camaraderie include inviting

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Tailor your approach to meet the needs of each individual.

6. Get honest feedback. It's not always easy to determine how well you're communicating with employees. When in doubt, find out.

One way to do that is to get input from a few trusted staff and fellow managers. They're the ones who observe you at work on a regular basis and can advise you on how to improve this key leadership skill. Another method for gathering feedback is through a questionnaire, potentially where respondents have the option of choosing to remain anonymous.

Your ability to communicate effectively is a prerequisite for a **happy**, engaged and productive accounting team. Becoming a better speaker, writer and listener is also an asset for your career. So make it a priority to polish these key **nontechnical skills** — for your employees' sake and your own.

*Paul McDonald is senior executive director at **Robert Half**, the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm. He writes and speaks frequently on hiring, workplace and career-management topics. Over the course of more than 30 years in the recruiting field, McDonald has advised thousands of company leaders and job seekers on how to hire and get hired.*

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