There is no question - technology offers many advances in communication and daily activities. Household management is simple with shared apps updating everything from financial records to grocery lists. Traveling for work or have family out of state? No problem with a quick video chat. Technology continues to influence relationships, in all forms.

**INCREASING OR IMPROVING?**

If technology really does increase communication, the question remains: “Does technology improve communication?” For all their luxuries, smart phones can be a source of tension and a relational distraction. The ability to be fully available is at odds with being fully present. Instead of giving our time and focus to the world and people around us, we fix our eyes on a screen.

**RELATIONSHIP ETIQUETTE WITH SMART PHONES**

While some people appreciate receiving a quick text to show support or acknowledgment, others grow frustrated when someone is consistently texting, web browsing, or trolling social media. By practicing awareness and respectful communication, we can build healthy relationships in our tech-savvy world. Consider these relational tips when debating the use of your smart phone.

- **Quality time** - Interrupting time reserved for a friend or loved one can leave them feeling unimportant. Being constantly connected to your phone takes away opportunities to connect and bond with those around you. Technology may also serve as a way to hide from conflicts when they do arise. Ask yourself “How does this use of technology improve the quality of my relationships?”

- **Physical intimacy** - The majority of communication occurs through body language and tone of voice. Physically speaking and interacting with a person releases oxytocin, a hormone that encourages affection and closeness.

- **Build trust** - Certain apps or social media outlets can discourage open and honest communication. Be aware of your relationship goals, and choose your actions accordingly.

- **Slow down** - Instant communication is an easy way to vent frustration or say regrettable statements. Think about the message you want to convey before making it a matter of public or interpersonal record, especially on social media.

Remember, there are real people beside us, on the other end of the phone, and behind the pictures posted online, so how we communicate within and about our relationships is important.
Have you considered the effect your thoughts or self-talk has on your daily life? How you speak, view, and think about yourself directly shapes your perspective. When you experience negative thoughts and engage in destructive self-talk, you change how your life events are viewed and experienced. This skewed perspective is like putting on a pair of misleading glasses that can alter the way you see your body, actions, and worth. If your internal dialogue about yourself is negatively at odds with reality, how could practicing positive self-talk help?

WHAT'S IN A NAME?
Research suggests one technique is as simple as saying your name. Try transitioning your thoughts from a first-person to a third-person voice. Remove the “I” and “me” and replace with your first name. This exercise gives you a “fly on the wall” perspective, changing the form of your sentences and providing some distance from yourself. This could be the key to promoting more self-love and acceptance by allowing you to be more rational, and therefore less emotional.

WORTH A TRY?
Does positive self-talk really work? Top athletes and highly-successful individuals have admitted to using this version of self-talk at pivotal moments in their lives. A recent University of Michigan experiment explored it as well, asking volunteers to give a speech with only five minutes of preparation time. Half the volunteers were told to address themselves as “I” while the remaining individuals were asked to use their names instead. Those referring to themselves by name were much kinder and supportive of themselves during their preparation. The “I” volunteers were reportedly more harsh and critical.

BENEFITS OF POSITIVE SELF-TALK
• Lower levels of distress and depression
• Greater resistance to sickness, such as the common cold
• Better psychological and physical well-being
• Lower risk of cardiovascular disease
• Increased coping skills and resilience in hard times

How we view ourselves is key. As a general rule, be gentle and encouraging with yourself. If you wouldn't say it to others, don't say it to yourself either. Practice positive self-talk today and enjoy the rewards.

THINKING WELL
A New Take on Self-Talk

Have you felt the time-crunch of a looming deadline on the jobsite? With a culture that praises productivity and performance, who can afford to stop and take a break? Getting the job done quickly can mean working long, hard hours and doing more with less. While this approach can be beneficial in the short-term, embracing this as a regular routine will leave you with a major case of workplace burnout.

PAUSING MATTERS
Why is it beneficial to take breaks? Though it might seem counterproductive, a short break can actually increase creativity and performance. Rejuvenate your mind by switching gears and watch your work improve. Our ability to concentrate is much like working out our physical muscles; fatigue sets in when overused. Without properly resting, muscle performance can suffer, and our desired results may take much longer.

So it is with the workplace. Appropriate breaks will not only enhance your performance, it can even boost the overall team morale. Workers who take regular breaks need less sick days, experience lower stress levels, and decrease their risk of burnout.

PEAK PERFORMANCE
How Breaks Can Improve Productivity

Have you felt the time-crunch of a looming deadline on the jobsite? With a culture that praises productivity and performance, who can afford to stop and take a break? Getting the job done quickly can mean working long, hard hours and doing more with less. While this approach can be beneficial in the short-term, embracing this as a regular routine will leave you with a major case of workplace burnout.

PAUSING MATTERS
Why is it beneficial to take breaks? Though it might seem counterproductive, a short break can actually increase creativity and performance. Rejuvenate your mind by switching gears and watch your work improve. Our ability to concentrate is much like working out our physical muscles; fatigue sets in when overused. Without properly resting, muscle performance can suffer, and our desired results may take much longer.

So it is with the workplace. Appropriate breaks will not only enhance your performance, it can even boost the overall team morale. Workers who take regular breaks need less sick days, experience lower stress levels, and decrease their risk of burnout.

BREAK IDEAS
• Commit to stop - Consider making a “back in 15 minutes” sign to follow through with a quick mental health break.
• Switch scenery - Take your lunch break in a different location than your normal work setting.
• Keep it social - Invite your coworkers to eat lunch with you.
• Get moving - Try starting a walking group during your lunch break. You could also consider walking while on a long phone call, or stepping outside for some fresh air.
• Turn on the tunes - Incorporate music into your break time for relaxation and rejuvenation.

We all have our list of reasons for not wanting to take that break. Almost everyone feels too busy with too much work. But remember, being constantly available will negatively impact our lives - both on and off the job. Sometimes the best way to get the job done is to power down, unplug, and take a break.
At the County of Santa Clara’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP), we often see couples, including parents/teenagers and coworkers/managers, who have prolonged misunderstandings with each other. The underlying issue is often a failure to communicate well.

As counselors, we have the opportunity to see first-hand the impact of technological changes on human communication. To illustrate, texting is a convenient way to communicate. It saves time, avoids telephone tag marathons and it makes for instant sharing...but it has its downfalls as well.

Texting is great when...

- we need to confirm safe arrivals and coordinate plans – I’m leaving now. I’ll be there in ten minutes. The plane just landed.
- we are asking or responding to a factual question – What is the name of that movie you recommended? When is that project due?
- it helps us focus on concise communication and expedites group problem-solving. Lengthy e-mails tend to get lost in space.

Texting is not great when...

- we use it as an invasive way to reassure ourselves that someone cares. We’ll text our loved one at work fifteen times and then get upset when they don’t respond after #15 or even after #1. What doesn’t get addressed is the need for such a high degree of reassurance or the effect the continued interruptions have on the relationship. BTW: This doesn’t include one quick ILU! (Just don’t send it to an unintended recipient).
- we use it to avoid a difficult conversation, such as a relationship breakup. Texting does not allow for face-to-face conversations so that each party can fully understand what has gone wrong. It can undermine any possibility for reconciliation. This one-sided delivery may avoid the face-to-face histrionics, but it ultimately shows a lack of courage to handle the tough stuff.
- we have prolonged texts with Person #1 while in the presence of Person #2. Person #2 can feel that they are less important to us and they may be right! Excessive (and hidden texting) fuels suspicions of affairs.
- it leads to misunderstandings or misinterpretations. For example, we may say something that, on the face of it, is unkind but our intent was not to hurt. Our non-verbal actions (e.g., facial expressions, body gestures and voice tones) convey our real message. Humans believe the non-verbal message over the words. With texting we don’t get that extra information. If we misread a text, we may respond in anger or withhold future open communication. These misunderstandings and misinterpretations - not cleared up at the beginning - can endure forever.

If you are currently facing relationship or communication issues, whether text-related or not, remember the County of Santa Clara’s Employee Assistance Program. You, your spouse or significant other, and/or your teenager can access free, confidential and professional counseling sessions that just might help improve the situation. Give us a call at (408) 241-7772.

The County of Santa Clara’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a labor-management sponsored, confidential, professional resource that provides counseling, assessment and referral services to County employees and their families who want help in solving personal and/or work-related problems.

When people are suffering from problems, it is easy to lose perspective. Life may seem confused and difficult for a time. Work performance may be negatively affected. If you have any questions or to schedule a counseling appointment, please call EAP at (408) 241-7772.
Standing up for yourself and your beliefs is necessary for healthy relationships at home, work, and play. You can respect the convictions of others, while clearly expressing yours, all with an assertive communication style. Being honest, fair, and empathetic are characteristics of good assertiveness skills.

**ASSERTIVE OR AGGRESSIVE?**

There are several tell-tale signs of an assertive personality as opposed to an aggressive one.

1. **AGGRESSIVE PEOPLE:**
   - Look out for only their best interests
   - Disregard the thoughts, feelings, or desires of others
   - Demand or take what they want
   - Care more about “winning” than what is truly important

2. **ASSERTIVE PEOPLE:**
   - Identify their worth - An assertive person recognizes the importance of their thoughts, needs, rights, and wants. Consequently, they also value these in others.
   - Clearly communicate - Asking for what you want and working toward those goals are key traits of assertiveness.
   - Receive compliments and criticism - Choosing a “growth mindset” allows an assertive person to benefit and reach optimal life goals.
   - Practice saying no - Assertive people know they cannot please everyone. Saying no to some things allows one to say yes to a better intention.
   - Recognize responsibility - Words and actions affect everyone around us. However, we are only responsible for our own behavior. Assertive people understand this.

**ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

Concerned you’re not assertive enough or are too aggressive in your communication? Rest easy, as assertiveness is a learned skill. Try implementing these communication tips to improve your assertive skillset.

- **“I” statements** - When sharing your wants or needs, lead with an “I” statement as opposed to “you.” For example, “I feel like you might not be clear on the directions” is much better than “You’re not getting it!”
- **Empathize** - Recognize the other person’s perspective first, and then communicate your needs. “I understand this project is important to you, but I need a new partner.”
- **Ask for time** - Delaying a response allows you to gain more information or calm emotions. For example, “Your message caught me off guard, but I hear what you’re saying. Let me get back to you after lunch.”
- **Repeat** - Never hesitate to communicate the same clear message until it is heard and respected. If necessary, increase your firmness. “We’ve talked about this three times. Now, let’s make this work.”