



Solutions EAP News

“Meta-Communication”: Understand It and Avoid More Conflicts

I like your new shirt ... I think...” Meta-communication refers to the underlying messages a person conveys beyond their actual words. It reflects how something is said—tone, body language, timing, and other cues. You notice it when the emotional message feels different from what was stated. While it is not always negative, addressing it early can prevent misunderstandings, stop conflicts from escalating, and protect morale. If you grew up where vulnerability was discouraged or authentic communication was rare, you may use meta-communication more often and detect it more readily—and sometimes even expect it when it isn’t there. Feeling frustrated by mixed signals? Sensing tension with a coworker? Talk with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). They can help you sort out what you’re experiencing and identify the next healthy step for maintaining positive workplace relationships.



First Impressions Count with Your Supervisor

Making a strong first impression matters if you are a new employee. Research with supervisors shows its importance. Your first week’s actions may shape how your supervisor sees you for months to come. What supervisors notice first are reliability, punctuality, follow-through on commitments, communication effectiveness, responding promptly, and engaging in conversations early on with professionalism. Also noticed is the ability to take initiative, showing curiosity, adapting to the team culture, and remaining confident even if unsure of how to handle problems or issues. What hurts first impressions are being late, appearing disorganized, and needing repeated reminders. The biggest misstep is acting like you know better before understanding how things are done. Most worrisome signs are negativity, low energy, boredom, and acting like you don’t want to do the job.



Learn more: addisongroup.com [search “first impressions”]

Create a Healthy Boundaries Checklist

If December feels overwhelming, consider creating a “healthy boundaries checklist.” More than a set of tips, it’s a simple “flight plan” to help you navigate the season with greater ease. Boundaries protect four things: time, energy, finances, and emotional well-being. If anticipating the holidays brings anxiety, you may fear one of these areas stretches you too far. Decide which events you’ll attend and which you’ll skip. Set limits on travel, gatherings, dinners out, and gifts. Build in downtime to decompress. Limit conversations that trigger emotional conflict, especially with family. Which boundary will you commit to this season for more calm and control?



Should You Participate in ‘Dry January’?

Dry January—originally a United Kingdom tradition—encourages people to abstain from alcohol for the month of January. The practice was inspired by concerns about frequent holiday drinking. Alcohol abstinence can bring noticeable benefits, including better sleep, increased energy, improved mood, less depression, and healthier weight management. These benefits overlap with those experienced by people recovering from alcohol use disorder (AUD). If alcohol is a concern, talk to your doctor before stopping drinking suddenly, as withdrawal can pose serious health risks and may even require medical supervision. If you are concerned your drinking has become problematic—meaning it negatively affects your life—contact your EAP for a confidential assessment. EAP professionals can provide guidance, resources, and support tailored to your needs, helping you determine whether alcohol use indicates a potential AUD and offering strategies to support your progress toward sobriety.



Five Stress Tips for the Holidays

Financial stress is a common holiday challenge. Many spend with abandon and use denial in the short term knowing that the bills will come due after January 1. To reduce or avoid this stress, consider these foundational tips: (1) Lock in on a budget. Stick to it. In doing so, you will be surprised at how easily you prioritize spending on special people, items, and events and easily ignore compulsive spending. The average consumer spent \$282 per month on impulse buys in 2024! (2) Make a gift list and prioritize it. Don't wander through the mall looking for gifts. Instead, sit, think, and explore gift idea sources. A good one is [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com), where individual users present millions of the best-of-the-best ideas. (3) Don't wait until the last minute to buy a gift. Being rushed and anxious can cause you to throw price consciousness to the wind and grab anything just to be done. (4) Turn your budget into cash (and safely store and guard it) or a prepaid debit card (even better) and use it for the holiday season. You will continuously be conscious of its balance and increase your chances of avoiding overspending. (5) Search now for seasonal events and community opportunities that cost little or nothing, and spend the time with a special someone—it can mean more than a costly gift.



The “Attention Economy” Wants You

Where is your attention going? Michael H. Goldhaber, a physicist and futurist, wrote about “The Attention Economy” in 1997. His argument: human attention, like time, is a limited resource, easily grabbed and manipulated. Being aware of the attention economy can help you improve focus, be more intentional with decisions, and stay in control amid daily digital bombardment. Not managing your attention can leave you vulnerable to interruptions, scattered thinking, and reduced productivity. So awareness is your first power, but it's a continually developing skill. The first step is understanding that your attention is what market forces seek to influence. Your decisions, values, and sense of what matters most all are targets. Recognizing this gives you pause, allows refocusing, and enables choices rather than being pulled into a vortex of agendas. Feeling in control gives you the satisfaction of directing your attention where you want.



Learn to “Read and Work the Room”

A room full of people you don't know can be intimidating, but being able to “read and work the room” at a business gathering will seriously enhance your value as an employee. Here's how to do it: (1) Avoid the panicky “Yikes! I don't know anyone here!” reaction. (2) Take a few minutes to observe conversation topics, body language, and the general mood. This allows you to be more confident, identify influencers, and consider those with whom you may want to build a relationship. (3) Notice the pace and enthusiasm of how people speak. Adjust your tone and body language to fit this flow. (4) Spot who's leading conversations and who people gravitate to. Who's keeping discussions moving? These may be well-networked individuals worth knowing. (5) Approach those you wish to engage with a relevant question, brief comment, or question that adds value, or mention a shared interest. Working a room takes a bit of practice. It's an acquired talent. With experience, you'll discover the power of reciprocal relationships and new opportunities for you and your employer. Learn more: *How to Work the Room* by Susan RoAne



Social Drinking Pressure and Safe Holiday Travel

None of us like feeling vulnerable to social pressure, especially when avoiding alcohol before a long drive. But it takes more than willpower. Holiday parties that include a manager, an influential coworker, strong group norms, or simply the expectation to “join in” can weaken your resolve and make drinking harder to wave off. Add a bit of after-work fatigue, stress, or that end-of-the-week desire to relax, and you're suddenly underestimating your level of impairment at the end of the evening. Planning ahead is far more effective than relying on moment-to-moment judgment trying to fight these challenges. Choosing a designated driver, arranging a rideshare, or one of the best-ever ideas—bringing a non-alcoholic beverage to keep in hand—will reduce social pressure and help you stay in control of your decisions.

