EPISODE 145

# Communication Beyond Email, Slack and Zoom with Josh Little

The modes of communication available to us has grown exponentially over the past few decades. From email to texting, Slack to Zoom, we're communicating faster and more frequently than ever before. Yet, we can just as easily become overwhelmed by the apps and pings. Finding the optimal combination of tools can streamline communications while increasing productivity and strengthening relationships.

This guide contains an overview of communication modes, including some of the benefits of and optimal uses for each one. It also includes a brief frame for talking with your team about your current communication methods and tools, and how to experiment with new ones.

## Asynchronous Communication

Asynchronous tools enable us to communicate over a period of time and the benefits are plentiful. We can access and respond to the message at a time that's most convenient for us, not the sender, enabling us to have longer periods of focus time. We are no longer bound by the calendar or finding times that work for everyone. We can engage spontaneously and when it's needed most instead of waiting until the meeting.

Unfortunately, the challenges with asynchronous communications are just as robust. Alerts, pings and beeps distract us or interrupt our focus. The constant feeling that you need to be monitoring these apps so that you don't miss anything or can respond instantly adds to our already stressful workday. With messages coming through a variety of apps, communications get lost in the mix and it's not always easy to find what you're looking for.

It's important to set norms for how your team will use asynchronous tools in addition to customizing your settings so that you can avoid communication overload.

## Chat Apps

**EXAMPLES:**

- Slack
- Microsoft Teams
- Flock
- Chatwork

**BENEFITS:**

- A casual and typically fast form of communication
- Conversations are organized by topic making it easy to find information or get caught up on a topic
- Emojis and reactions can make communicating more fun and fast
- Easy to attach images, files, links, etc for sharing

> "Inevitably, written communication fails, because only 7% of the communication spectrum is delivered through the written communication itself. The rest is delivered through tone of voice and body language."

**OPTIMAL USES:**

- Short, simple messages that need a response within hours (not minutes)
- Brief and straightforward FYIs
- Building relationships through the sharing of images, links to entertaining content, gifs
- Quick input gathering e.g. polling

## Email

**EXAMPLES:**

- Gmail
- Outlook

**BENEFITS:**

- Ability to communicate with anyone / does not require a user account for a specific platform
- Widespread / global adoption
- Can utilize added features e.g. calendar invites, send later, remind me, templates, etc.

**OPTIMAL USES:**

- Communicating outside of your organization or team
- Sending longer, more complicated information in writing
- Messages that need a response within 24-48 hours
- Planned or recurring communications

## Text Messaging

**EXAMPLES:**

- iMessenger
- What'sApp
- Signal

**BENEFITS:**

- Highly noticeable given message is direct to mobile

**OPTIMAL USES:**

- Urgent alerts or reminders

"The average person types at about 19 words per minute, whereas we can speak at about 150 words per minute. And we can comprehend speech sped up to about 200 400 words per minute. We're elite athletes at communicating verbally."

## Video Messaging

**EXAMPLES - STAND ALONE MESSAGING:**

- Volley

**EXAMPLES - INTEGRATED VIDEO MESSAGING:**

- BombBomb
- Kommute
- Dubb

**BENEFITS:**

- Includes non-verbal communication elements which enhance the message
- Faster (and easier) to talk than to type, allowing more information to be included with the same time / effort
- Video is often more engaging than written text
- Video is more personal / strengthens relationships in ways that written text doesn't
- Democratizes who gets air time on a given topic

**OPTIMAL USES:**

- Relationship building
- Conveying long, nuanced information
- When typing / writing is inconvenient or time consuming

## Synchronous Communication

Synchronous communication happens when all participants are engaged at the same time. While many of us experience meeting overload or feel like we're at the whim of our calendar, synchronous communications, in the form of formal or informal meetings, play an important role in workplace collaboration.

It's important to be thoughtful about when a meeting is necessary vs when a meeting might be replaced by asynchronous communication. Additionally, when a meeting is the appropriate method, proper preparation will enable the meeting to be productive and engaging.

## Voice Calls

**EXAMPLES:**

- phone
- Uberconference

**BENEFITS:**

- Real-time discussion without the fatigue often associated with video meetings

**OPTIMAL USES:**

- 1-1 or small group (max 3 people)
- When the participants know each other well
- When participants are not able to be in front of a camera e.g. taking a walk, commuting
- When viewing content / visuals is not necessary

## In person / Virtual Meetings

**EXAMPLES:**

- Microsoft Teams
- Zoom
- Google Duo
- FaceTime

**BENEFITS:**

- Dynamic, energizing engagement
- Enables fast decision-making / alignment

**OPTIMAL USES:**

- Complex content that requires real-time back and forth group discussion
- Building new or reinvigorating old relationships
- When it's helpful to view the same visuals / content at the same time

## Optimize Your Team's Communication Tools

Before introducing a new tool to your communications toolbox, it helps to reflect on what you're already using and how it's going. Below is a suggested list of questions for your team to consider collectively as you determine what experiments you may want to try to enhance your communication.

**How do we currently communicate?** Brainstorm all the ways you currently communicate with one another as individuals and as a group.

**What's working well about our current communication practices / tools?** List as many things as possible about what's working, what's comfortable, and what you'd want to keep going forward.

**What's not working so well with our current communication practices / tools?** List as many problems, frustrations, pains and gaps in your current communication approach that you hope could be solved by this process.

**What could we do differently: Tools** Explore whether your current tools are serving you, and the enhancements will be made primarily through norms, or, if you also need to reconsider what tools are being used. If considering tools, reflect as a group on how you might use different tools for different purposes as well as any challenges that might arise from adding/integrating new tools into your workflow.

**What could we do differently: Norms** Generate ideas for ground rules that can guide how your team communicates. For example: Use the 'send later' feature if sending team emails outside of 8am-6pm M-F. If something needs an immediate response, send a text message and then call if no response within 1 minute.

For both the norms and tools, connect how they will either continue to support what's working or address a pain point / something that's not working.

"Extroverts tend to rule synchronous communications while introverts have always ruled on asynchronous. Asynchronous video brings the best of relationship building but allows people time to consider their response which levels the playing field."