For graphic designers, it's not just about cmyk or rgb, pixels or points, raster or vector. You must also master the fine art of communication. Here's where good communication skills are a necessity for design pros:

the talk | the teamwork | the pitch

3 CRITICAL COMMUNICATION AREAS for successful Graphic Designers

by Margaret Kelly, graphics instructor, SPECS HOWARD SCHOOL OF MEDIA ARTS
The first step to success for a designer is learning to work well with colleagues. Standard etiquette and clear communication help build effective relationships with people on your team and outside the group. These relationships are vital to getting work done quickly and laying the foundation for successful efforts in the future.

A team that shares information, honest feedback and debate is able to move fast and accomplish great results quicker. For this to happen, team leaders should assign clear roles so team players understand their responsibilities and more importantly, know what is expected from them. An asset management system like “drop box” or “base camp” serves as a virtual home for the project where team members can sign in with passwords, to access digital assets for the particular job. This is an essential step in facilitating communication and ensuring efficient work flow.

Documents that establish goals, like Creative and Brand Briefs, should be distributed to team, and a schedule posted with important due-dates for each member. Understanding what is expected, spelling out the roles team members will assume, and deadlines for deliverables are all necessary for your team to stay engaged and move forward toward a common goal. Because of the speed that most projects happen, it’s important that team members can pop in and out of a project with important questions that are answered in a central place with easy access the same information.

Building the interpersonal skills to communicate with a group is often overlooked, but it is vital for a graphic designer. Treating team members with respect, no matter where they fall on the hierarchal totem pole, is good common sense. Graphic designers can be nomads, following the work to that next big job, so the next boss could very possibly be the intern that was hired on the job from last year. So keeping the communication respectful, positive and clearly focused on the task at hand not only helps your current team succeed, but lays the foundation for your next team.

The graphic design field can be very competitive, yet simple rules of fair play should always be followed. Because of the close team relationships, ethical practices suggested by the AIGA (http://chapters.aiga.org/resources/content/3/5/9/6/documents/aiga_ethics09.pdf) are highly recommended. Word of mouth reputation is important in the design community. News travels fast in our world, so play fair and you’ll enjoy a rewarding, long career in a great but challenging profession.
The second area where good communications skills are needed is in the development of the design. Design is an iterative process that feeds off updated information and input from several sources: clients, colleagues, pop culture, current events and more. Understanding the process of incorporating feedback can be challenging. How people plug in and contribute effectively, and then be able to navigate the demands from different vantage points demands a strong understanding of design principles and vocabulary along with exceptional communication skills. There are times when you need to eloquently defend a concept or an idea that you passionately believe in, which leads us to Critique...

The Critique system relies on analysis, feedback and open debate. Being neutral but informed during this process can facilitate the necessary changes to your project to make it better. Avoid absolute terms like “never” or “always,” yet be as specific as possible. The ability to analyze and defend certain choices in typography, navigation and color, while suggesting differentiating benefits can help the designer carve out their personal brand and lasting value as a creative leader.

The ability to incorporate tough, but necessary feedback from clients and different areas of a team requires the synthesis of information, and a flexible mindset that allows for change while still maintaining control of the design. It also helps to have thick skin that enables you to keep from taking criticism personally!

Thanks for downloading this e-book! Check your email for some samples of some documents you'll find useful in your graphic design communications: the presentation checklist, the brand brief and the creative brief.
The third and most dynamic area is the Pitch. This is the fun part where graphic designers use visual tools to sell or communicate with imagery, shape, color, grid, navigation, composition, typography and context. Selling the design requires understanding of the target market through research and comparison, and then distilling the information into a strong foundation for the design work.

Using design vocabulary and along with tried and tested presentation techniques like breathing exercises and multiple rehearsals and revisions before a big presentation help sell important ideas to a prospective client or employer. Having your presentation complete and immaculate should be at the top of your checklist.

Also, make sure that you check out the room where you will present and ensure the equipment is running smoothly. Knowing exactly who will be in the room and having handouts available for each attendee is also a must!

To sum it up, using common etiquette, design thinking and vocabulary, and presentation techniques like preparation and rehearsal to support solid understanding of your subject matter can round out the effective communication habits of a successful graphic designer.