

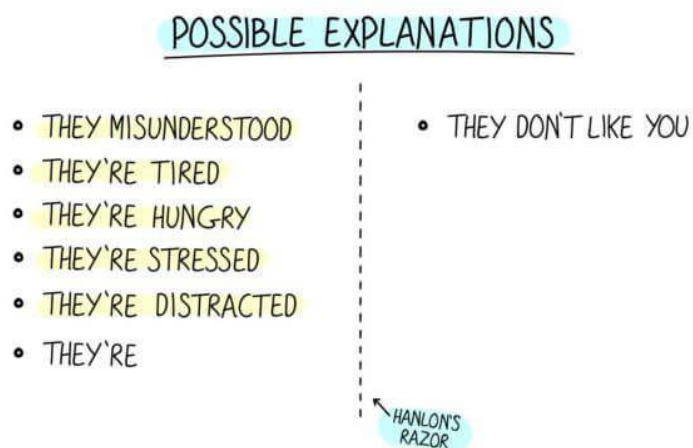
## Top Tips for remote communication

Taken from “Working across land and sea; tips for remote communication” by Jack Jenkins, Product Education Manager, Intercom (March 2020)

For remote workers, using chat (Teams, WhatsApp etc.) is often the simplest option for communication. But if most communication is non-verbal, how do you make sure what you say and see aren’t misinterpreted?

When speaking with someone in person, the words you use matter. If there’s any ambiguity in what you’re trying to say or how you feel, nonverbal factors such as body language and facial expression have a greater impact. I’ve learned this as a remote worker of nearly seven years, and I’m proud to say I’ve developed strong and effective working relationships with my teammates, without even meeting most of them in person. Here are three tips – **A.C.E.** – for effective remote communication:

### 1. Assume positive intent



If your words aren’t clear, the recipient is left to fill in the blanks with assumptions. Those assumptions not only derail whatever you’re working on, but can have a more lasting impact on the way your teammates perceive you, and vice versa.

I know it’s easy to say pause and breathe, but really... Pause. Breathe. If you read a message that seems negative, give yourself a minute before responding. **It’s highly likely there wasn’t any negative intent at all.** During this pause, consider **other explanations** for what was just said. [Hanlon’s Razor](#) says “**Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by ignorance**”. There are a host of reasons why someone might have come across negatively – which have nothing to do with you: anger, distraction, stress... We can all relate to these!

### 2. Clarify ambiguity

If we think of chat as a proxy for speaking, the onus is always on the speaker to make themselves understood. It never hurts to over-communicate or over-clarify online. An obvious example is



acronyms. These rarely translate well online, particularly when chatting across teams. If you must use one, always spell it out in the first instance, especially with someone you don't know well.

On the flipside, **if you're unclear about something, ask!** In real life, if someone says something that's left you scratching your head, you'd clear it up quickly. It probably happens several times a day, and you don't even think about it. So make this an online habit as well. It could be as simple as rephrasing and returning, e.g. *"Just so we're clear, what you're saying is..."* or more bluntly, *"It's not clear from your message how you feel about this."* Yes, it's direct, but it'll nip any confusion in the bud and get your conversation back into a productive, healthy place.

### 3. Express yourself

Communication isn't just getting information from A to B. It's how we actually connect and build relationships, something that happens so naturally in an office. So let's express ourselves better online! A great start is to explore the >3,000 standard emoji available on most messaging platforms.

As a remote worker, I'm begging you to stop using this emoji: 😊. You may think this shows you're happy, but it's the easiest to misinterpret as negative to someone who doesn't know you well. It could come across as passive-aggressive, sarcastic, unimpressed, etc. It's not representative of a real human smile (try making that face – feels fake?) so it's a poor proxy for expressing genuine happiness. We have a bevy of clearer expressions to choose from:



We can also use non-standard punctuation and text formatting to mimic our voice and tone. Note the differences between:

#### Sure!!! vs Sure...

We can also use phonetic spelling and letter repetition to reflect the inflections in our voice:

#### That's sooooooo good!

**WHAT!** (using all caps to indicate shouting)

**That's *highly unlikely*** (using italics to indicate tone of emphasis)

There's plenty to explore. I'd encourage you to play with this a bit.

Working remotely, we're uniquely challenged by the lack of nonverbal cues at our disposal. So to communicate effectively, follow these 3 principles and make them a habit to help you ACE your distance communication and build strong, lasting online relationships.

#### Assume positive intent

#### Clarify any doubts

#### Express yourself