The California Contractor

News for the Western Regional Master Builders Association

July-August 2026 Volume 51 No. 4

Working across language barriers

Today's workplaces are more diverse than ever, and many small businesses employ team members whose first language is not English. These employees bring valuable skills, perspectives, and experiences that strengthen the workplace. At the same time, language differences can sometimes create communication challenges, particularly during training, safety instruction, customer interactions, or day-to-day operations.

Managers play an important role in creating an environment where all employees can understand expectations, perform their jobs successfully, and feel like valued members of the team. With thoughtful communication strategies, businesses can reduce misunderstandings and help every employee thrive.

When communicating with employees who are still learning English, it's helpful to use clear, straightforward language. Speaking slowly and clearly—not loudly—can make conversations easier to follow. Avoid using slang, idioms, acronyms, or expressions that may be unfamiliar. For example, phrases such as "hit the ground running" or "touch base" may confuse someone who understands English literally.

Breaking instructions into smaller steps and focusing on one topic at a time

can also improve understanding, especially when training new employees or explaining unfamiliar tasks.

Show, Don't Just Tell

Many people learn best by seeing a task demonstrated. Rather than relying only on verbal explanations, show employees exactly how a task should be completed. Demonstrations, photographs, diagrams, checklists, and labeled equipment can reinforce spoken instructions and reduce confusion.

For service businesses, visual examples of proper merchandising, cleaning techniques, or customer service expectations often communicate more effectively than lengthy explanations alone.

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At A Glance

Stand-up meetings make the most of your time at work

Make a small decision today for lasting change tomorrow

Understand recycling and composting law

Store your customers' data safely

Proper ladder use

… and more

Boost productivity with stand-up meetings

For small businesses, time is one of the most valuable resources. With employees often wearing multiple hats and managing competing priorities, staying organized and keeping everyone on the same page can be a challenge. One simple yet highly effective way to improve communication and productivity is by holding regular stand-up meetings.

A stand-up meeting is a short, focused team meeting that typically lasts between 10 and 20 minutes. Originally popularized in the software development industry, stand-up meetings have become a valuable management tool for businesses of all sizes, including retail stores, offices, service providers, and hybrid or remote teams. The goal is to share important information, identify priorities, and resolve obstacles without spending excessive time in lengthy meetings.

The term "stand-up" comes from the practice of holding the meeting while everyone is standing. Although not always necessary, standing naturally encourages participants to keep discussions brief and focused. Whether employees are gathered in person or meeting virtually, the emphasis should remain on concise updates rather than detailed problem-solving.

A successful weekly stand-up meeting usually follows a simple structure. Team members briefly discuss what they accomplished during the previous week, what they plan to focus on in the coming week, and any challenges or obstacles that may be affecting their work. This format provides managers with valuable insight into ongoing projects while giving employees a chance to share successes, ask for assistance, and coordinate with coworkers.

For retail businesses, stand-up meetings provide an excellent

opportunity to review sales goals, upcoming promotions, inventory concerns, or staffing schedules. Managers can share updates about new products, policy changes, or seasonal events while recognizing employees for outstanding customer service or recent accomplishments. These meetings help ensure that everyone begins the week with the same information and understands the team's priorities.

Office-based businesses can use stand-up meetings to discuss project deadlines, client updates, departmental goals, or upcoming meetings. Employees can identify where collaboration is needed, preventing small issues from becoming larger problems later in the week. Remote and hybrid teams also benefit from regular stand-ups because they create opportunities for face-to-face interaction and help employees feel connected despite working in different locations.

One of the greatest advantages of stand-up meetings is that they encourage accountability. When employees share their goals with the team, they are often more motivated to complete their tasks and follow through on commitments. At the same time, managers gain a better understanding of workloads and can identify opportunities to redistribute tasks or provide additional support when necessary.

These meetings also help uncover potential obstacles early. An employee may mention waiting for vendor information, needing approval for a project, or experiencing technical difficulties. Addressing these issues promptly can prevent delays and keep projects moving forward. If a particular topic requires a lengthy discussion, it can be scheduled as a separate meeting involving only those directly affected, allowing the stand-up meeting to stay on track.

To keep stand-up meetings productive, it's important to start and end on time. Creating a consistent schedule—such as every Monday morning—helps employees plan their work accordingly. Managers should encourage participation from everyone while keeping conversations respectful and focused. Avoid turning the meeting into a lecture or status report delivered solely by management. Instead, foster an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing ideas, asking questions, and offering solutions.

Finally, remember that stand-up meetings are not just about tasks—they're also an opportunity to build team morale. Taking a few moments to celebrate recent successes, welcome new employees, or recognize birthdays and work anniversaries can strengthen workplace relationships and create a more positive culture.

For small businesses, weekly stand-up meetings require very little time but can produce significant benefits. Improved communication, greater accountability, quicker problem-solving, and stronger teamwork all contribute to a more productive workplace.

Meaningful change begins with the first step

Self-improvement is one of those ideas that feels both inspiring and overwhelming. At the start of a new season—or after a major life event—it's easy to imagine sweeping changes: new routines, better habits, a more organized and focused version of yourself. But real, lasting improvement rarely comes from dramatic overhauls. More often, it's the result of small, consistent shifts that compound over time.

If you're looking to make meaningful changes without burning out, it helps to approach self-improvement less like a sprint and more like a long-term investment.

Start Small—and Make It Specific

One of the most common pitfalls in self-improvement is setting goals that are too broad: "get healthier," "be more productive," or "stay organized." These are useful intentions, but they don't provide a clear path forward.

Instead, focus on small, concrete actions:

- Take a 10-minute walk after lunch
- Spend 15 minutes organizing your workspace at the end of the day
- Write one paragraph instead of aiming for an entire article

Specific, manageable actions reduce resistance and make it easier to follow through. Once a small habit is established, it can be expanded gradually.

For Achievable Goals, Build Systems

Goals give you direction, but systems—your daily routines and processes—are what create results.

For example:

- A goal might be to "read more books"
- A system might be to "read for 10 minutes before bed every night"

The system is what makes the goal achievable. When you focus on building repeatable routines, progress becomes more automatic and less dependent on motivation.

Make Consistency the Priority

It's easy to assume that improvement requires big effort. In reality, consistency matters more than intensity.

Doing something small every day is more effective than doing something big once in a while. A short daily practice—whether it's writing, exercising, or learning a new skill—builds momentum and reinforces identity. You start to see yourself as someone who does the thing, not just someone who intends to.

Missed days will happen. The key is not to let them turn into missed weeks. A simple rule—like "never miss twice"—can help you stay on track without expecting perfection.

Pay Attention to Your Environment

Your surroundings play a bigger role in your habits than you might think. Small changes to your environment can make good habits easier and bad habits harder.

Consider:

- Keeping a book on your nightstand instead of your phone
- Preparing workout clothes the night before
- Organizing your workspace to reduce distractions

When the path of least resistance leads to a positive behavior, you're far more likely to follow through.

Track Progress—But Keep It Simple

Tracking your efforts can be motivating, but it doesn't need to be complicated. A simple checklist, calendar, or notes app can help you see patterns and maintain accountability.

The goal isn't to measure everything—it's to create awareness. When you can see your progress, even in small increments, it reinforces your commitment and helps you stay engaged.

Expect Plateaus and Adjust Accordingly

Progress is rarely linear. There will be periods where improvement feels slow or even nonexistent. This is normal.

Instead of abandoning your efforts, use these moments to reassess:

- Is your goal still realistic?
- Does your routine need to be adjusted?

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Don't fall afoul of California's recycling laws

For small and midsize businesses in California, recycling and composting are no longer just sustainability initiatives—they're legal requirements. As regulations evolve and enforcement increases, companies that take a proactive, organized approach to workplace waste management can reduce costs, improve compliance, and demonstrate environmental leadership.

At the center of these changes is California's landmark organics law, Senate Bill 1383 (SB 1383), which affects nearly every business in the state.

Understanding California's Composting Law (SB 1383)

SB 1383, which took effect in 2022 with enforcement ramping up in 2024, requires businesses to separate organic waste and recyclables from landfill trash.

The law's goals are ambitious:

- Reduce organic waste sent to landfills by 75% by 2025
- Recover at least 20% of edible food for human consumption

This matters because organic waste—food scraps, paper products, and plant materials—produces methane when buried in landfills, a potent greenhouse gas.

What Businesses Are Required to Do

Most businesses must:

- Separate waste into three streams: landfill (trash), recycling, and organics (compost)
- Subscribe to collection services or self-haul materials to appropriate facilities
- Provide clearly labeled bins for employees and customers
- Train staff on proper sorting practices

Even businesses that don't serve food are affected, as organic waste includes paper products and other compostable materials.

Setting Up a Simple, Compliant System

For most offices and workplaces, compliance starts with a straightforward "three-bin" system:

- Blue bin: Recycling (paper, cardboard, bottles, cans)
- Green bin: Organics (food scraps, food-soiled paper)
- Gray/black bin: Landfill waste

Place bins together in common areas—kitchens, break rooms, and near

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Improvement: Flexibility, adaptation are key

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- Are you trying to do too much at once?

Sometimes a small tweak—like reducing the time commitment or changing when you do an activity—can make a big difference.

Balance Structure with Flexibility

While routines are important, too much rigidity can backfire. Life changes, schedules shift, and unexpected events happen.

Building flexibility into your approach allows you to adapt without losing momentum. For example:

- If you miss your usual workout time, aim for a shorter session later
- If your schedule is disrupted, focus on maintaining just one core habit

This balance helps you stay consistent over the long term, even when circumstances aren't ideal.

Focus on Identity, Not Just Outcomes

One of the most effective ways to sustain self-improvement is to shift how you see yourself.

Instead of focusing only on what you want to achieve, consider who you want to become:

- A person who writes regularly
- Someone who takes care of their health
- A professional who stays organized and prepared

When your actions align with your identity, habits feel less like obligations and more like natural choices.

Don't Overlook Rest and Recovery

Improvement isn't just about doing more—it's also about knowing when to step back. Rest is essential for maintaining energy, focus, and motivation.

Burnout often comes from trying to change too much, too quickly. Incorporating downtime—whether it's a day off, a break in your routine, or simply time to relax—helps you sustain progress over the long term.

The Bigger Picture

Self-improvement isn't about becoming a completely different person. It's about refining what's already there—building skills, strengthening habits, and making choices that align with your goals.

The most effective approach is also the most sustainable: start small, stay consistent, and adjust as you go. Over time, those incremental changes add up in ways that feel both manageable and meaningful.

You don't need a complete overhaul to move forward. Often, the next step—done consistently—is enough.

Recycling: Even small offices generate waste

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printers—to make proper sorting intuitive. Consistency matters: employees are far more likely to participate when the system is visible and easy to use.

Clear signage is equally important. Labels with images (not just text) reduce confusion and contamination.

Best Practices for Office Recycling

A well-run recycling program goes beyond simply providing a bin. Contamination—placing the wrong items in recycling—can render entire loads unusable.

Paper and Cardboard

- Recycle clean office paper, envelopes, and flattened boxes
- Shred sensitive documents, but confirm your hauler accepts shredded paper
- Avoid recycling heavily soiled or greasy paper (these belong in compost under SB 1383)

Cans and Glass

- Rinse beverage containers to prevent contamination
- Recycle aluminum cans, steel cans, and glass bottles/jars
- Avoid placing broken glass in recycling unless your hauler permits it

Plastics

- Focus on rigid plastics like bottles and containers
- Empty and rinse items before recycling
- Avoid plastic bags, films, and multi-layer packaging unless specifically accepted

Keeping recyclables clean and dry is one of the simplest ways to improve outcomes and ensure materials are actually processed.

Composting in the Workplace

For many office environments, composting is the newest—and often most confusing—requirement.

What Goes in the Organics Bin

- Under SB 1383, organic waste includes:
- Food scraps (including meat, dairy, and bones in many jurisdictions)
- Coffee grounds and tea bags
- Food-soiled paper (napkins, paper towels, pizza boxes)

Practical Tips

- Line bins with compostable liners or paper to reduce mess
- Empty bins frequently to prevent odors
- Place compost bins in kitchens and eating areas

Even small offices generate a surprising amount of compostable waste, particularly from paper products and food packaging.

Training and Engagement: The Missing Piece

One of the most common compliance challenges isn't infrastructure—it's behavior.

- Employees need clear, simple guidance:
- Provide short onboarding or refresher training
- Use signage and reminders in shared spaces
- Assign a point person or "green champion" to monitor and improve the system

Regular communication helps reinforce expectations and reduces contamination over time.

Benefits Beyond Compliance

While the regulatory driver is clear, effective recycling and composting programs can also deliver business value:

- Lower waste disposal costs by reducing landfill volume
- Improved workplace culture through visible sustainability efforts
- Stronger brand reputation with clients and partners
- Alignment with ESG goals and environmental initiatives

In many cases, the operational changes required for compliance also create efficiencies in how materials are handled and tracked.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Businesses often run into trouble when:

- Bins are not co-located (leading to improper sorting)
- Signage is unclear or inconsistent
- Employees are not trained
- Recycling is contaminated with food waste or trash
- Compost bins are underused or poorly maintained

A simple, well-communicated system is far more effective than a complex one that employees don't understand.

Untangling the problem of safe data storage

Data has become as essential as inventory or equipment while doing business. Customer records, financial information, contracts, marketing materials, employee documentation, and operational files all need to be stored, accessed, and protected—often by teams working across multiple devices and locations.

The challenge for many businesses is no longer simply where to keep files, but how to balance accessibility, cost, security, and long-term reliability. Modern companies have more storage options than ever before, ranging from cloud-based systems to traditional local storage and hybrid solutions that combine multiple approaches. Understanding the strengths and limitations of each can help business owners make informed decisions that support both productivity and data protection.

One of the most widely used solutions today is cloud storage. Services such as Google Drive, Dropbox, and Microsoft OneDrive allow businesses to store files remotely and access them from virtually anywhere with an internet connection. For many small businesses, cloud storage offers a practical and affordable solution because it eliminates the need for expensive physical infrastructure. Subscription pricing also allows companies to scale storage as they grow, while built-in collaboration tools make it easier for employees to work together in real time.

Cloud storage does, however, come with trade-offs. Businesses rely heavily on internet connectivity to access their files, and ongoing subscription costs can add up over time. There are also security considerations. While major cloud providers invest heavily in cybersecurity, improperly configured sharing settings or weak employee password practices can still expose sensitive information. Companies using cloud platforms must therefore pair convenience with thoughtful security policies.

Traditional local storage methods, including external hard drives and desktop-based storage, remain common

as well. These systems provide businesses with direct physical control over their data and avoid recurring subscription costs. Local storage can also offer faster access speeds when internet connections are unreliable.

At the same time, relying solely on hard drives or local devices presents significant risks. Physical equipment can fail, become damaged, or be stolen, potentially resulting in permanent data loss if backups are not maintained properly. Local systems also tend to be less flexible for businesses with remote or hybrid employees, since sharing files between team members can become cumbersome.

Some companies choose to invest in on-premises servers, which allow organizations to host and manage their own data internally. This approach provides a higher level of control and customization, making it attractive for industries with strict confidentiality requirements or specialized operational needs. Businesses can establish their own security protocols, determine exactly where data is stored, and avoid depending entirely on third-party platforms.

However, maintaining secure servers requires significant investment in hardware, maintenance, and IT expertise. Small businesses without dedicated technology staff may find these systems costly and difficult to manage. Servers are also vulnerable to physical disruptions such as fires, floods, theft, or power failures unless additional safeguards and off-site backups are in place.

As a result, many organizations are moving toward hybrid storage models that combine cloud services with local storage or servers. In a hybrid setup, businesses might store active working files in the cloud for easy collaboration while maintaining secure local backups for critical or sensitive information. This approach provides flexibility and redundancy, helping businesses recover more quickly from technical failures or cyberattacks. While hybrid systems can be more complex to manage, they often provide a strong balance between accessibility and control.

Regardless of which storage method a business chooses, security has become one of the most important considerations in data management. Small businesses are increasingly targeted by cybercriminals because they often lack the extensive security resources of larger corporations. Customer information, financial records, contracts, payroll documents, and proprietary business information all represent valuable targets for theft or ransomware attacks.

Protecting sensitive data requires more than simply choosing the right storage platform. Businesses should implement multi-factor authentication, strong password policies, and role-based access controls that limit employee access to only the files necessary for their work. Encryption is another essential tool, helping protect data both while it is stored and while it is being transferred online. Regular backups are equally important, ensuring that files can be recovered in the event of accidental deletion, hardware failure, or cyberattack.

Employee education also plays a major role in security. Many breaches begin with phishing emails or simple human error. Training employees to recognize suspicious links, use secure passwords, and follow company data policies can significantly reduce risk.

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SAFETY ... IT PAYS

Climb safely with the right ladder for the job

Ladders are common tools in many workplaces, from retail stores and warehouses to offices and service businesses. Employees may use them to stock shelves, retrieve supplies, change light bulbs, hang signs, or perform routine maintenance. Because ladder use is so familiar, it's easy to underestimate the risks involved. However, falls from ladders are among the most common causes of workplace injuries and can result in serious accidents.

Fortunately, most ladder-related injuries can be prevented by following a few basic safety practices.

Choose the Right Ladder

Not every ladder is appropriate for every job. Before beginning a task, select a ladder that is the correct height and designed to support both the worker and any tools or materials being carried. Using a ladder that is too short often leads employees to stand on the top steps or overreach, increasing the risk of losing balance.

It's also important to consider the work environment. Fiberglass ladders are generally recommended when working near electrical equipment because they do not conduct electricity, while aluminum ladders should never be used around energized electrical sources.

Inspect Before Every Use

A quick inspection before using a ladder can help identify problems that could lead to an accident.

Check for:

- Loose or missing steps
- Cracked rails
- Bent or damaged components
- Worn or missing non-slip feet
- Loose hinges or locking mechanisms
- Oil, grease, or other slippery substances

If a ladder is damaged, remove it from service immediately and report it so it can be repaired or replaced. Never attempt to use a ladder that appears unstable or defective.

Set Up Safely

Place ladders on a firm, level surface whenever possible. Avoid using boxes, pallets, or other objects to gain additional height, as these create unstable working conditions.

For extension ladders used outdoors, follow the manufacturer's instructions for the proper climbing angle and ensure the ladder extends far enough above the landing surface to provide a secure handhold.

Keep the area around the base of the ladder clear of boxes, merchandise, cords, and other trip hazards.

Climb Carefully

Always maintain three points of contact while climbing—either two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand on the ladder at all times. Carry tools in a tool belt or hoist them separately instead of climbing while holding objects in your hands.

Never stand on the top step of a stepladder unless it is specifically designed for that purpose. If you cannot comfortably reach your work area, climb down and reposition the ladder rather than leaning or stretching to the side. Overreaching is one of the leading causes of ladder falls.

OSHA CORNER

Please visit the following address on the web to download helpful safety posters, guides and pamphlets for a safer workplace.

https://www.osha.gov/publications

State of California
CAL OSHA
Department of Industrial Relations

Language: Prioritize safety communication

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Confirm Understanding

One of the most common communication mistakes is assuming that a nod or a simple "yes" means an employee fully understands the instructions. Sometimes employees may hesitate to ask questions because they don't want to appear disrespectful or embarrassed. Instead of asking, "Do you understand?" try asking the employee to explain the task in their own words or demonstrate what they will do. This approach helps confirm understanding without making the employee feel as though they are being tested.

Encourage Questions

Managers can help create a supportive workplace by making it clear that questions are welcome. Employees who feel comfortable asking for clarification are less likely to make mistakes and more likely to perform their jobs safely and confidently.

Regular check-ins during the first few weeks of employment are especially valuable. Brief conversations give employees opportunities to ask questions, receive feedback, and discuss any communication challenges before they become larger issues.

Prioritize Safety Communication

Clear communication is especially important when discussing workplace safety. Employees should fully understand emergency procedures, equipment operation, hazard warnings, and reporting requirements before performing potentially hazardous tasks.

Whenever possible, supplement verbal safety training with written materials, diagrams, demonstrations, or multilingual resources appropriate for your workforce. Clear signage, color-coded labels, and standardized safety symbols can also reinforce important information for employees regardless of their primary language.

Strong Communication Benefits Everyone

By speaking clearly, providing visual instruction, encouraging questions, and creating an atmosphere of patience and respect, managers can help employees perform their jobs with confidence.

When employees feel understood, supported, and included, they are better equipped to work safely, provide excellent customer service, and contribute to the success of the entire organization.

Storage: Sharing documents requires caution

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File sharing has become another critical issue for modern businesses, particularly as remote and hybrid work arrangements continue to expand. Teams need fast, reliable ways to collaborate on documents without sacrificing security. Most cloud storage providers now include built-in sharing tools that allow businesses to control who can view, edit, or download files. These systems often include version tracking, access logs, and permission settings that help organizations maintain oversight of shared materials.

Platforms such as Box and ShareFile are designed specifically for secure business collaboration and document management. These services provide additional administrative controls and compliance features that may be particularly valuable for companies handling confidential financial, legal, or medical information.

Sharing files with clients requires even greater caution, especially when contracts, financial records, or other sensitive documents are involved. Standard email attachments remain common, but they are not always the safest option. Secure file portals, password-protected links, encrypted transfer services, and electronic signature platforms can all provide safer alternatives. Many businesses are also adopting systems that automatically expire shared links after a certain period of time, reducing the likelihood of unauthorized long-term access.

Ultimately, there is no single storage solution that fits every business. The best approach depends on a company's size, budget, operational structure, industry regulations, and security needs. For many small and midsize businesses, a cloud-first or hybrid strategy combined with strong security practices offers the most practical balance between convenience, cost, and protection.

As businesses continue to rely more heavily on digital operations, data storage is a fundamental business decision that affects efficiency, security, customer trust, and long-term resilience. Companies that invest in reliable systems and thoughtful data management practices will be better prepared to protect their information and adapt to an increasingly digital workplace.

"The CALIFORNIA CONTRACTOR" is a published bi-monthly newsletter of the Western Regional Master Builders Association. Annual subscription is available with membership in the Western Regional Master Builders Association. For membership information, call (562) 296-8854.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to "Western Regional Master Builders Association" at 12501 Seal Beach Blvd. Suite 250, Seal Beach, CA 90740.