

Interpersonal Communication



Strengthening Your People Skills in the Workplace

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Learning objectives	5
What is effective communication?	6
The circle of communication.....	7
Workplace communication issues: A quiz	8
Sending clear, respectful message	10
Appropriate and precise language	11
Appropriate language: Positive versus negative	12
Nonverbal communication: A few words on how we communicate without words ..	13
Forms of nonverbal communication	14
Achieving shared understanding through feedback	15
Giving and receiving feedback	16
Listening is hard work: Huh? What? What's that you say?.....	19
The best listener you know.....	20
Listening analysis.....	21
Listen up!.....	22
Listening actively and respectfully.....	23
Active listening skills.....	24
The impact of listening	25
Listening exercise.....	26
What keeps us from listening?	27
Poor listening habits.....	28
Case study: What's wrong with this communication?.....	29
Defensive versus supportive communication climates	30
Establishing a supportive communication climate	31
Human relations skills: How comfortable do people feel around you?	32
Trust and communication	33
Interpersonal relationships	34
Taking care of people in interactions = developing rapport.....	35
Giving recognition and acknowledgment.....	36
Sample expressions of acknowledgment and appreciation.....	37
Personal action plan.....	38

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As a result of participating in this course, you will be able to:

1. Use a checklist for assessing clear, respectful speaking.
2. Describe the effectiveness and uses of feedback in achieving mutual understanding.
3. Use a checklist for assessing active, respectful listening.
4. Identify the differences between defensive and supportive communication climates through analysis of case studies.

“WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE”

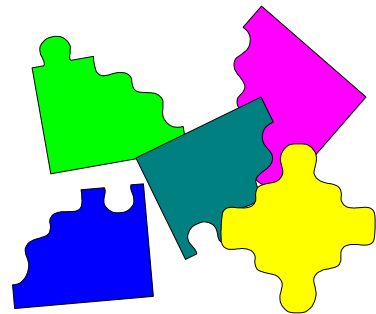
We would probably all agree that effective communication is essential to workplace effectiveness. And yet, we probably don't spend much time thinking about how we communicate, and how we might improve our communication skills. The purpose of building communication skills is to achieve greater understanding and meaning between people and to build a climate of trust, openness, and support.

To a large degree, getting our work done involves working with other people. And a big part of working well with other people is communicating effectively. Sometimes we just don't realize how critical effective communication is to getting the job done. So, let's have an experience that reminds us of the importance of effective communication. Actually, this experience is a challenge to achieve a group result without any communication at all! Let's give it a shot.

“IT'S A PUZZLEMENT”

Observations and Insights

- ◆
- ◆
- ◆
- ◆
- ◆



“Every piece of the puzzle that doesn't fit gets you closer to the ones that do.”

WHAT IS EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION?

We cannot not communicate.

The question is: Are we communicating what we intend to communicate?

Does the message we send match the message the other person receives?

Impression = Expression

Real communication or understanding happens only when the receiver's impression matches what the sender intended through his or her expression.

So the goal of effective communication is a mutual understanding of the message.

In simple terms, effective communication means this . . .

You say it.

I get it.

But how do we know if the other person “gets” our message? We don't know until we complete the communication.

Until a message is complete, the best we can say about its meaning is this:

The meaning of a message is not what is intended by the sender, but what is understood by the receiver.

So what does it take to complete communication? It takes completing the loop. It takes adding one more step. It takes feedback.

In simple terms, complete or effective communication means . . .

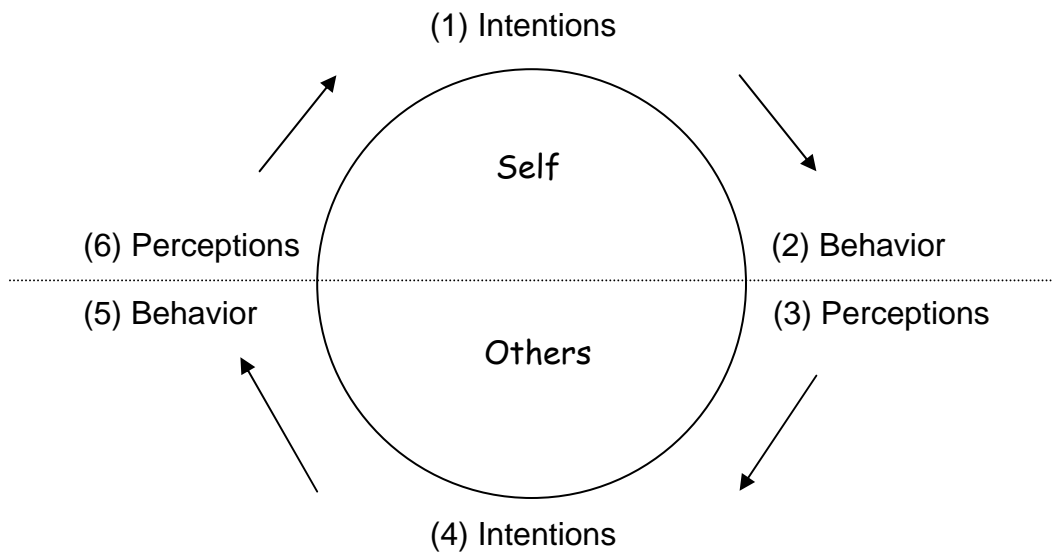
You say it.

I get it.

You get that I got it.

So far, then, we've defined effective communication and what makes it complete. Let's now explore the process, or circle, of communication to see how, where, and why it breaks down.

THE CIRCLE OF COMMUNICATION



COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

What are some of the barriers that cause communication to break down?

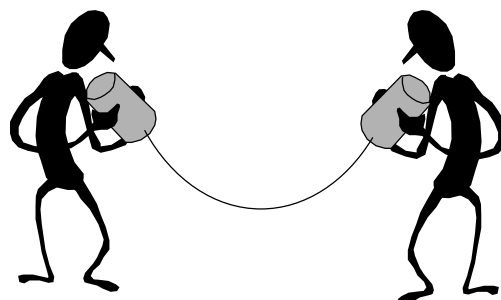
Now that we've looked at the basics of communication, let's explore some workplace communication issues.

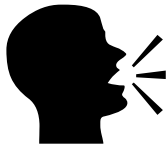
WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION ISSUES: A QUIZ

1. A good definition of communication is the sending of information from one person to another. T F
2. Good working relationships between people form an important foundation for effective communication. T F
3. Empathy is one of the most important concepts in communication. T F
4. The best way to get feedback is to ask, "Do you have any questions?" T F
5. A person's attitude toward the value of communication is more important than the skills or methods used to communicate. T F
6. Everyone should be responsible for effective upward, downward, and horizontal communication. T F
7. A sender has failed to communicate unless the receiver understands the message the way the sender intended it. T F
8. The grapevine is usually an accurate source of information, and should be used intentionally to communicate. T F
9. If people don't understand, they will usually indicate so by asking questions or by saying they don't understand. T F
10. In order to have an effective communication program, top management must take an active part. T F
11. Where persuasion is needed, oral communication is better than written communication. T F

WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION ISSUES: A QUIZ (CONT.)

12. In keeping others informed, it is better to under-communicate than over-communicate. T F
13. The best way to be sure we understand a communication is to repeat it back to the communicator. T F
14. The use of effective visual aids by a speaker usually provides a significant increase in the audience's understanding of the message. T F
15. The use of a large vocabulary helps greatly in a person's communication effectiveness. T F
16. Most people can listen approximately four times faster than they speak. T F
17. Information is usually distorted when it is orally communicated through more than two people. T F
18. In getting people to listen, subject content is more important than the manner in which the subject is communicated. T F
19. People will accept a logical explanation even if it ignores their personal feelings. T F





SENDING CLEAR, RESPECTFUL MESSAGES

Do you ensure your messages are clear? Do you speak with others in a way that conveys respect?

The checklist below identifies elements of clear, respectful speaking. How does your speaking measure up?

Do you . . .

- ___ 1 - **Strive to maintain** the self-confidence and self-esteem of others when you interact with them?
- ___ 2 - **Know your purpose** and state it? (*Communicate with a purpose. Know why you are communicating and what the goal of your communication is.*)
- ___ 3 - **Organize your thoughts** for easy understanding and impact?
- ___ 4 - **Adapt your communication**—both your words and “nonverbals”—to the needs of your audience?
- ___ 5 - **Use appropriate language?** (*Use words the listener will understand, and avoid using jargon or language the listener will not understand.*)
- ___ 6 - **Use precise language?** (*Use language that is specific and concrete. Also, use examples and give your listeners the reasons for your conclusions.*)
- ___ 7 - **Work from what** is familiar to what is unfamiliar when communicating with others? (*Relate any changes to ideas already understood by your listeners.*)
- ___ 8 - **Focus your messages** on the situation, topic, issue, or behavior, rather than on the person?
- ___ 9 - **Ensure your “nonverbal”** and “verbal” communications match?
- ___ 10 - **Ask for feedback?** (*Encourage your listeners to identify and summarize the main ideas of your message as they understand them. Also, ask questions about your message. This way you’ll ensure that any misunderstandings are uncovered and cleared up.*)

“Say what you mean, mean what you say, but don’t say it mean.”

--Author Unknown

APPROPRIATE AND PRECISE LANGUAGE

A key point about using appropriate and precise language is to be conscious about the words you use. As they say, "It's not what you say, but how you say it that matters." In other words, some ways of saying things are better than other ways of saying things. These better ways achieve clearer and more respectful messages. Here are several examples.

AVOID SAYING THIS	INSTEAD TRY THIS
<i>Can't... or won't...</i>	Try to discuss what you can or will do. Instead of saying <i>We can't get that to you today</i> , say <i>We can get that to you first thing tomorrow morning</i> .
<i>I'll try...</i>	However, if something can't be done, don't be wishy-washy about it and leave people unsure. Instead, say clearly that it can't be done.
<i>Have to...</i>	"Have to" sounds like a burden. What sounds better? <i>I have to check...</i> or <i>I'd be glad to check...?</i>
<i>To be honest with you...</i>	Simply don't use this phrase. It makes others wonder what you've been before.
<i>I'm really not too sure...</i>	Typically this is our wishy-washy way of saying we don't know. It's better to say we don't know, strongly and confidently. For example: <i>I don't know, but I'll be glad to research it and get back to you with an answer</i> .
<i>I'd hate to...</i>	Why take the negative approach? Far better than saying <i>I'd hate to give you outdated data</i> , is: <i>I want to give you the most current figures</i> .
<i>...around 11:00</i>	When you are not able to be specific, replace <i>around</i> with <i>between</i> . For example: <i>I'll have that report between 11:00 and 12:00 today</i> .
<i>...okay?</i>	Changing a statement into a question by adding a tag phrase like <i>okay</i> , weakens the message. For example: <i>The staff meeting is changed to next week, okay?</i>

APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE: POSITIVE VERSUS NEGATIVE

Also, when it comes to sending clear, respectful messages, positive and friendly words work better than negative words.

NEGATIVE WORDS	POSITIVE AND FRIENDLY SUBSTITUTES
<i>You can't</i>	<i>You can</i>
<i>You made a mistake</i>	<i>Will you please</i>
<i>You have to</i>	<i>Will you please</i>
<i>You should</i>	<i>You'll need to</i>
<i>I'll try</i>	<i>I will</i>
<i>As soon as possible</i>	<i>Before _____ o'clock</i>
<i>I'm just</i>	<i>I am</i>
<i>There is nothing I can do</i>	<i>I will or Here's what I can do</i>
<i>Could you / Why don't you / Can you?</i>	<i>Will you please</i>
<i>Why didn't you</i>	<i>Will you please</i>
<i>You know / maybe / sort of / kind of / I guess / perhaps / probably</i>	<i>Be more direct and definitive</i>

Also, common courtesy phrases are always helpful:

- *Please*
- *Thank you*
- *You're welcome*
- *I appreciate it*



NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION:

A FEW WORDS ON HOW WE COMMUNICATE WITHOUT WORDS

- ☞ We communicate a lot to each other outside what we say.



HOW MEANING—TRUST AND BELIEVEABILITY—IS COMMUNICATED			
_____ %	by	words	
_____ %	by	vocal expression	
_____ %	by	facial expression and posture	



- ☞ We create confusion when our verbal and nonverbal messages don't match.

- ☞ When verbal and nonverbal messages don't match, we tend to "listen" to the nonverbal one.

(Intuitively, we generally view others' "body language" as a more reliable indicator of their attitudes and feelings than their words.)

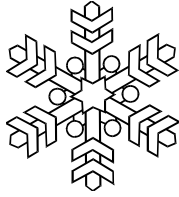
- ☞ We can learn to read the meanings of nonverbal behaviors.
 - The key is discovering an individual's behavior patterns—there is a predictability to their meaning.
 - However, be careful—people can mask their feelings.
 - Also, trying to read something into every movement others make can get in the way of effective interactions.

FORMS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

1. **Ambulation** is the way one walks. Whether the person switches, stomps, or swaggers can indicate how that person experiences the environment.
2. **Touching** is possibly the most powerful nonverbal communication form. People communicate trust, compassion, tenderness, warmth, and other feelings through touch. Also, people differ in their willingness to touch and to be touched. Some people are “touchers” and others emit signals not to touch them.
3. **Eye contact** is used to size up the trustworthiness of another. Counselors use this communication method as a very powerful way to gain understanding and acceptance. Speakers use eye contact to keep the audience interested.
4. **Posturing** can constitute a set of potential signals that communicate how a person is experiencing the environment. It is often said that a person who sits with his/her arms folded and legs crossed is defensive or resistant. On the other hand, the person may just be cold.
5. **Tics** are involuntary nervous spasms that can be a key to indicate one is being threatened. For example, some people stammer or jerk when they are threatened. But these mannerisms can easily be misinterpreted.
6. **Sub-vocals are the non-words** one says, such as “ugh” or “um.” They are used when one is trying to find the right word. People use a lot of non-words trying to convey a message to another person. Another example is the use of “you know.” It is used in place of the “ugh” and other grunts and groans commonly used.
7. **Distancing** is a person’s psychological space. If this space is invaded, one can become somewhat tense, alert, or “jammed up.” People may try to move back to reestablish their personal space. The kind of relationship and the motives toward one another determines this personal space.
8. **Gesturing** carries a great deal of meaning between people, but different gestures can mean different things to the sender and the receiver. This is especially true between cultures. Still, gestures are used to emphasize our words and to attempt to clarify our meaning.
9. **Vocalism** is the way a message is packaged and determines the signal that is given to another person. For example, the message, “I trust you,” can have many meanings. “*I* trust you” could imply that someone else does not. “I **trust** you” could imply strong sincerity. “I trust **you**” could imply that the sender does not trust others.

It's not just what you say, but how you say it.

ACHIEVING SHARED UNDERSTANDING THROUGH FEEDBACK



The Snowflake Test



THE IMPORTANCE OF FEEDBACK

- Studies show that the lack of clear communication is a major factor in every organizational problem
- Unless people clarify and confirm understanding when they “communicate,” there is great likelihood that the message received will not be the message intended
- The effective use of feedback skills helps insure the accurate transmission and reception of messages

“I never know what I have said until I hear the response to it.”
--Norbert Weiner

WHEN TO USE FEEDBACK

Of course, you don't need to use feedback to clarify everything that is said during the day, but there are key times to get feedback:

- When you have any doubt about the meaning of a message
- When you have any doubt about how to proceed
- When a message is highly complex
- When you're dealing with an important process or project
- When you're dealing with information that is new to you

When in doubt, check it out!

GIVING AND RECEIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

The purpose of constructive feedback is to help someone understand the effect of their behavior on other people, and if appropriate, make any desired changes. For example, with feedback, presenters can adjust their behavior to achieve more positive outcomes with their audiences.

Constructive feedback is different from criticism. Criticism, even when constructive, comments on a person's behavior as it relates to some standard. Thus, it can be debated because we define and accept standards differently. Feedback, on the other hand, comments on the effect a person's behavior has on another. Thus, feedback is not arguable because it is an expression of the impact felt by the person giving the feedback.

For constructive feedback to result in changed behavior, two things are necessary. First, the person receiving the feedback must want it, i.e., must see the value of considering it and possibly changing their behavior because of it. In receiving feedback, the question to ask is, "Is the person's reaction to my behavior what I want it to be?" If it isn't, then the receiver of the feedback will see changing their behavior as beneficial. Second, the person giving the feedback must do so using behaviors and techniques that are non-judgmental.

Constructive feedback, both positive and negative, can enhance effective communication. Positive feedback comments on what a person does well. Negative feedback comments on what a person does poorly. Also, feedback, positive or negative, should always be constructive. Destructive feedback is never helpful. Constructive feedback helps a person learn, while destructive feedback simply undermines and devalues a person.

	Destructive (undermines the person)	Constructive (helps the person)
Positive (what the person does well)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saying what the person wants to hear • Giving unwarranted praise • Flattery 	Information about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the person does well • What is appreciated by others • Successes • Behavior that is helpful to others
Negative (what the person does poorly)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put downs • Insults • Non-specific criticisms • Hurtful comments 	Information about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the person does poorly • Failures • Behavior that hinders others



GIVING AND RECEIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK (CONT.)

GUIDELINES FOR GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

1. Be descriptive, not evaluative.
"You interrupted other group members four times in the last ten minutes."
rather than... *"You talk too much."*
2. Be specific, not general.
"You started the meeting with your solution and didn't ask others for their ideas."
rather than... *"You always dominate our meetings."*
3. Focus on modifiable behavior.
"You respond so fast, I'm not sure you are listening to what others say."
rather than... *"When you're in charge, you always stifle ideas."*
4. When possible, wait until feedback is asked for.
"You wanted to know whether you kept the meeting on track."
rather than... *"Your meeting was a waste of time."*
5. Give feedback as close to the event as possible.
"Your assigning action items during this meeting is very helpful."
rather than... *"Your help added a lot to our meeting last month."*
6. Check with the receiver for understanding.
"Do you remember the situation I'm referring to?" or
"What do you make of what I've said?"



ADDITIONAL POINTERS FOR GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

- ◆ Respond based on the effect the person has on you. Were you informed, confused, motivated, annoyed, etc.?
- ◆ Use personal statements such as
 - I felt...
 - It seemed to me...
 - My reaction was...
- ◆ Be direct and to the point. Attempt to understand rather than to judge.
- ◆ Be honest. If you're unsure or confused, say so. *"I didn't follow when you said..."*
- ◆ Suggest changes the person can make. *"It would help me if you..."*

GIVING AND RECEIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK (CONT.)

GUIDELINES FOR RECEIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

1. **Listen carefully.** Assume the intention of the person giving the feedback is to be helpful. Assume the insight you receive may be a useful perspective you haven't had before.
2. **Check to be sure you understand.** Paraphrasing the feedback you receive will help ensure you understand it clearly.
3. **Check others' perceptions if possible.** If other people are involved, try to get their view. Several views will give you a more complete picture.
4. **Thank people for offering their feedback.** You may learn something very valuable from them. And for most people, giving the gift of honest and helpful feedback is not an easy thing to do.
5. **Respond to feedback as necessary.** Getting needed clarification (if any) and saying thank you may be all that's needed. Here are a few responses that may be appropriate for certain situations.
 - *"I am sorry you are disappointed with my progress on the project. Could you please tell me what I need to do to get back on track?"*
 - *"I'm pleased you found the data helpful. What part was most helpful for you?"*
 - *"Thank you very much for your feedback. I will take some time to consider it."*
6. **Consider the feedback.** Others have a right to give constructive feedback. It's up to you to decide what to do with it. You can accept it or reject it.

EXERCISE

After reading pages 11-14, finish one of the statements below:

1. Something I learned or relearned about feedback that would be helpful for me to use is...
2. Something I want to discuss about feedback to understand better is...

**LISTENING IS HARD WORK:
HUH? WHAT? WHAT'S THAT YOU SAY?**

**"Lots of times people don't really listen to each other.
They just take turns talking."**

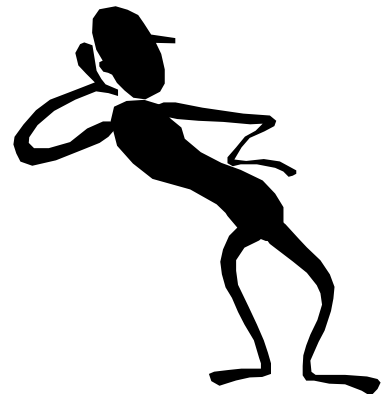
Hearing and **listening** are not the same. They are separate activities.

Hearing is what happens when a sound vibration hits the tympanic membrane in your ear. It is a **passive** activity.

Listening is making sure that you attach the correct meaning to that vibration. It is an **active** effort to understand what you hear.

A LISTENING QUIZ

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.



THE BEST LISTENER YOU KNOW

Think about the best listener you know. Then in the spaces below, list the qualities or characteristics that make them so.



LISTENING ANALYSIS

The purpose of this listening analysis is to help you reflect on how effective you may be as a listener. It is a self-analysis. You will not have to share it with others. So be very honest with yourself as you complete it. Also, over the years, many of us have been told things by others about our listening abilities. You may want to consider this information as well.

Part I

Using a scale of 0 to 100 (100 = Excellent) how would rate the following people as listeners? What words would you use to describe these people as listeners? Consider their listening behaviors, characteristics, effectiveness, impact on others, etc.

	0-100	Descriptive words		
A. A close co-worker	_____	_____	_____	_____
B. Your supervisor	_____	_____	_____	_____
C. A subordinate or co-worker	_____	_____	_____	_____
D. The best listener you know	_____	_____	_____	_____

Part II

Using the same rating scale and descriptive word technique, show below how these same people would rate you as a listener.

	0-100	Descriptive words		
A. A close co-worker	_____	_____	_____	_____
B. Your supervisor	_____	_____	_____	_____
C. A subordinate or co-worker	_____	_____	_____	_____
D. The best listener you know	_____	_____	_____	_____

Part III

Using the same rating scale and descriptive word technique, rate yourself as a listener.

	0-100	Descriptive words		
Yourself	_____	_____	_____	_____

Part IV

Note any insights you've gained about yourself as a listener.



LISTEN UP!

There are three levels of listening. Level 1, at the top, is the most effective. Level 3, at the bottom, is the least effective. Having an awareness of these listening levels can help us recognize at what level we are listening at any given time. Of course, we should always try to *LISTEN UP*. In other words, if we recognize that we are listening at either level 2 or 3, we should start listening at level 1. The chart below describes the characteristic behaviors of the three levels. It also lists guidelines that we can use to *LISTEN UP*, i.e., move up to level 1 and stay there, and the benefits of doing so.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Level 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Looks for an area of interest in the speaker's message <input type="checkbox"/> Sees listening as a chance to get new & useful information <input type="checkbox"/> Aware of their personal biases and their attitudes <input type="checkbox"/> Avoids making automatic judgments about others <input type="checkbox"/> Avoids being influenced by emotionally charged words <input type="checkbox"/> Suspends judgment <input type="checkbox"/> Empathizes with the speaker's feelings <input type="checkbox"/> See things from the speaker's point of view <input type="checkbox"/> Inquires about rather than advocates a position <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipates the speaker's next statement <input type="checkbox"/> Mentally summarizes the speaker's message <input type="checkbox"/> Mentally questions or evaluates what the speaker said <input type="checkbox"/> Asks clarifying questions <input type="checkbox"/> Consciously notices nonverbal cues <input type="checkbox"/> Listens with understanding and respect 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>LISTENING UP Guidelines</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Be attentive ◆ Be interested in the speaker's needs ◆ Listen from a caring attitude ◆ Act like a mirror (reflect their feelings, summarize what they've said) ◆ Don't let the speaker hook you (don't get personally involved, i.e., angry, etc.) ◆ Use verbal cues (<i>uh-huh, I see, Tell me more, etc.</i>)
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Level 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Mainly listens to words, the content of the message <input type="checkbox"/> Does not fully understand what the words mean <input type="checkbox"/> Zeroes in on the words and often misses the intent <input type="checkbox"/> Misses what is being said nonverbally through voice tone, body posture, gestures, facial expression, eye movement <input type="checkbox"/> Appears to be listening by nodding head in agreement 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>LISTENING UP Benefits</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Others openly suggest ideas and share feelings ◆ Encourages honesty, mutual respect, understanding, and a feeling of security in the speaker ◆ Encourages others to feel self-confident
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Level 3</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Tunes out speaker, daydreams <input type="checkbox"/> Forms rebuttal or advice internally <input type="checkbox"/> Fakes attention while thinking about other things <input type="checkbox"/> Is interested more in talking than in listening <input type="checkbox"/> Judges, finds fault, gets defensive or overly emotional <input type="checkbox"/> Closes off to anything said that they disagree with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Builds others' self-esteem and a feeling of being empowered ◆ Promotes creative team problem-solving instead of blaming & finger-pointing ◆ Creates a positive, mutually rewarding work relationship

Source: Adapted from HR Magazine article, November 2001, by Madelyn Burley-Allen.

LISTENING ACTIVELY AND RESPECTFULLY

Do you really listen? Do you listen actively? Do you convey respect when you listen?

The checklist below identifies elements of active, respectful listening. How does your listening measure up?

Do you . . .

- ___ 1 - **Spend more than 50%** of your communication time listening? *(This is especially important when in a leadership role.)*
- ___ 2 - **Give others a** chance to air their views completely before you give your opinion?
- ___ 3 - **Listen for ideas**, not just facts. *(Listening only for facts prevents you from grasping a speaker's meaning.)*
- ___ 4 - **Avoid jumping to** conclusions when someone is speaking? *(Don't anticipate what a person is trying to say.)*
- ___ 5 - **Try to stay** interested in what a person is saying even though the delivery may be boring or wordy? *(Avoid the tendency for your mind to wander. Use your "thought speed" to organize what the speaker is saying.)*
- ___ 6 - **Keep your mind** open and delay evaluation? *(Keep listening for ideas and avoid the tendency to become upset by strong words that may tend to irk you.)*
- ___ 7 - **Avoid rushing or** interrupting the speaker? *(Make sure the speaker is finished before you change the subject.)*
- ___ 8 - **Ask questions to** clarify points and to let the speaker know you're paying attention?
- ___ 9 - **Tell yourself that** every person is a person of worth and is important enough to listen to? *(Make a firm commitment to listen to other people.)*
- ___ 10 - **Give full attention?** *(Resist faking attention or planning your rebuttal.)*
- ___ 11 - **Listen between the** lines? *(Listen for feelings and messages that are implied but not stated in words.)*
- ___ 12 - **Remain attentive to** nonverbal clues?
- ___ 13 - **Use empathy when** listening? *(Try to understand the speaker's point of view, and try to find out what the speaker wants you to know, think, feel, or do.)*
- ___ 14 - **Use active listening** skills—for example, paraphrasing, perception checking, and summarizing?

ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Focus attention

The first requirement for effective listening is to pay attention—to be completely focused on the speaker. To hear the speaker you must be tuned-in to him/her. Listen intently and block out distractions. Show you are paying attention with eye contact and both verbal (e.g., *Uh-huh, I see*, etc.) and nonverbal (e.g., head nodding, etc.) indicators. However, don't use these indicators to fake attention.

Reflect content

- ◆ **Repeat** a portion of the message. Repeat a few of the exact words used by the speaker. This lets the speaker know you are trying to understand, but do not yet have enough understanding to put the speaker's message in your own words.
- ◆ **Paraphrase** the message. Use your own words to paraphrase the message to check your understanding of what the speaker is saying. If your understanding is off target, the speaker will try again and give the message in different words to help you understand.

Reflect feelings

Acknowledge the feelings you hear behind the speaker's message. This is also known as perception checking. It lets people know you understand the feelings they have about what they're saying. For example, "It sounds like you are feeling anxious about the meeting."

Request more information

Ask the speaker to continue talking. Say something like, "Go on," or "Tell me more." Also, a nod of the head can be a signal to the speaker to keep talking. At some point, you want to reflect content and/or feelings to ensure you're understanding the speaker's message.

Summarize

In some situations, it's desirable to reflect the speaker's content and/or feelings at the end of their message. This ensures a shared understanding. It's also important to summarize a work discussion that involves decisions, agreements, or assignments so, for example, everyone is clear on "who will be doing what by when."

THE IMPACT OF LISTENING

Respectful and generous listening is the interpersonal skill that makes productive communication possible.

WHEN PEOPLE DON'T FEEL LISTENED TO

Listening is fundamental to creating effective relationships. When people don't feel listened to, they make up that:

- ◆ You don't care.
- ◆ You don't like them.
- ◆ They aren't valued.
- ◆ What they have to say isn't important.
- ◆ And many other things.

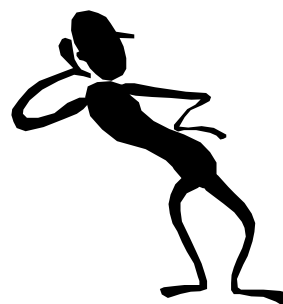
WHEN PEOPLE FEEL LISTENED TO

Listening is the gift that allows speaking. If you listen, wonderful things can happen:

- ◆ People feel supported.
- ◆ Issues get clarified.
- ◆ Upsets disappear.
- ◆ Creativity emerges.
- ◆ Self-esteem soars.

TO LISTEN COMPLETELY MEANS . . .

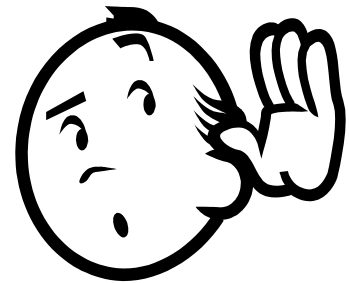
- ◆ Being interested; paying attention; listening actively.
- ◆ Allowing them to finish without interruption.
- ◆ Checking to see if they are complete.
- ◆ If necessary, checking to see if they need a response.
- ◆ If they are complete and don't need a response, you may begin a new conversation.



If you start listening to what people say, they start tending to what they say.
They say things they don't mean when no one is listening.
--Amy Nimmer

Source: InterACTION! Project, Oregon State University.

LISTENING EXERCISE



Exercise

You will work in pairs to practice listening skills. When you are the speaker, you will talk about one of the topics listed below. The trainer will tell you the specific length of time to speak (it will be between 2-3 minutes).

When you are the listener, you will practice both silent listening and active listening skills (refer to page 20). The challenge is to find a natural balance that gives the listener the experience of being listened to. Do not do any of the following:

- Talk about your own experiences
- Try to change the speaker's point of view or feelings
- Give advice
- Disagree
- Criticize
- Judge
- In short, do not engage in a conversation—just listen

When the trainer calls time, the speaker will give feedback to the listener. This feedback should include answers to these questions:

- 1 - Did I feel listened to?
- 2 - Why? Why not?

In other words, give specific information to the listener to let them know what they did well, and what they might do differently, to give you the experience of being listened to.

Topics

- (1) Tell me about yourself.
- (2) Tell me about your current reality. What are you facing? What's on your schedule for the next couple weeks?
- (3) Tell me about a current project or idea you are excited about.
- (4) Talk about some part of work that's not going well.
- (5) What are you looking for from this course? What prompted you to enroll?
- (6) What do you bring to a group? Choose a group that you are a part of and share about what you add to it.
- (7) When did you recently experience making a difference?
- (8) Tell me about an experience you've had that altered your view of the world.
- (9) Tell me about your family.
- (10) Tell me about the neighborhood where you grew up.
- (11) What experiences did you have as a child that were truly significant.
- (12) Talk about a time when you took the "road less traveled" and it made all the difference.

WHAT KEEPS US FROM LISTENING?

Identify the things that get in your way the most:

- ❑ **Preoccupied** (Thinking about someone or something else.)
- ❑ **Busy** (Don't have time right now.)
- ❑ **Multi-tasking** (Keep on working or doing something else.)
- ❑ **Negative thoughts** (About the person speaking)
 - "Here we go again."
 - "Don't they ever do anything but . . . ?"
 - "Can't they ever get to the point?"
 - "You aren't as good as you think you are."
 - "I don't trust you."
 - "Do you know what in heck you are talking about?"
 - "Oh, get a life!"
- ❑ **Not interested in the topic**
 - "This is boring. When will it be over?"
 - "We've been over this before."
 - "This is not relevant."
 - "How can I get out of this conversation?"
- ❑ **Make some connection** (Off thinking about something else.)
- ❑ **Concerned about myself**
 - "Is this about me?" (Feeling defensive)
 - "What do you think of me?"
 - "What's in it for me?"
 - "How am I doing?"
- ❑ **Waiting to say something** (Having my own agenda.)
- ❑ **Get lost in the conversation**
 - "What are we talking about?"
 - "I have no clue what they are saying."
- ❑ **Get hooked by certain things**
 - "I hate exaggeration."
 - "You aren't listening to me."
 - "Show me; prove it to me."
- ❑ **Feel like I'm being given advice I don't want**

Sometimes, we don't listen from the very beginning of a conversation. At other times, we stop listening part way through the conversation. In the moment you notice that you are not listening, you have an opportunity to start.

Source: InterACTION! Project, Oregon State University.

POOR LISTENING HABITS

"The major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove the statements of the other person." --Carl Rogers

Editing

You hear only what you want to hear.

Rehearsing

You think about what you want to say while the other person is speaking.

Delving

You focus on finding a hidden message, rather than listening to what the other person is saying.

Daydreaming

You let your mind wander.



Personalizing

You relate everything the person is saying to your own life and allow your thoughts to wander.

Arguing

You focus on finding something to judge or ridicule.

Agreeing

You nod your head to everything in order to avoid conflict.

Switching

You change the subject quickly, as soon as the person stops speaking.

"Good listeners are not only popular everywhere,
but after awhile they get to know something."

CASE STUDY: WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS COMMUNICATION?

The communication example that follows is an actual transcript of a radio exchange released October 10, 1995 by the Chief of Naval Operations:

Messenger No. 1:

"Please divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision."

Messenger No. 2:

"Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision."

Messenger No. 1:

"This is the captain of a U.S. Navy ship. I say again, divert your course."

Messenger No. 2:

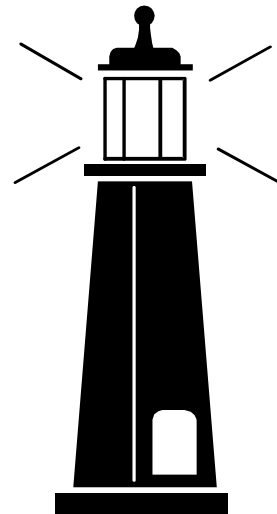
"No, I say again, divert YOUR course."

Messenger No. 1:

"THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER
USS ENTERPRISE. WE ARE A LARGE WARSHIP
OF THE U.S. NAVY. DIVERT YOUR COURSE
NOW."

Messenger No. 2:

"This is a lighthouse. Your call."



DEFENSIVE VERSUS SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION CLIMATES

(1) How effectively did the two parties **listen** to each other?

Not well at all _____ *Very Well*

(2) What kind of **feeling climate** was stimulated by the interaction?

<i>Competitive</i>	_____	<i>Cooperative</i>
<i>Judgmental</i>	_____	<i>Empathetic</i>
<i>Controlling</i>	_____	<i>Problem solving</i>
<i>Superior</i>	_____	<i>Equal</i>
<i>Negative</i>	_____	<i>Positive</i>
<i>Defensive</i>	_____	<i>Supportive</i>

(3) How satisfied did the two parties seem with the **interaction**?

Very dissatisfied _____ *Very satisfied*

(4) How satisfied did the two parties seem with the **outcome**?

Very dissatisfied _____ *Very satisfied*

ESTABLISHING A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION CLIMATE

Defensive communication

- Goal: To control or prevail
- Results:
 - Evaluation
 - Strategizing
 - Superiority
 - Certainty

Supportive communication

- Goal: To understand (via dialogue, listening, and exploration of differences)
- Results:
 - Empathy
 - Spontaneity
 - Problem solving
 - Synergy

Barriers to supportive communication

- Cultural training
- Lack of time and energy
- Risk of being changed
- Negative feelings toward others

Facilitating supportive communication

- Have a genuine desire to be open
- Listen actively
- View problem solving and communication as a shared responsibility

HUMAN RELATIONS SKILLS:

HOW COMFORTABLE DO PEOPLE FEEL AROUND YOU?

☺ ___ APPROACHABILITY

How approachable are you? Are you easy to meet and deal with? Or are you known for giving people a hard time? Approachable people make eye contact, smile, and put others at ease in interactions. They listen without interrupting. They are willing, available, and glad to give help. They are sensitive to the needs of others. They empathize and show compassion.

☺ ___ DIPLOMACY

Do you handle awkward, stressful situations tactfully? Or do you get in a person's face? Diplomatic people get their point across without arousing hostility in others. They respect others' points of view. They disagree politely and without judging. They don't slam doors, or call others names.

☺ ___ PATIENCE

Are you patient with others? Patience is waiting for people to "catch up." Patient people take time to explain things to others. And they give others time to comprehend.

☺ ___ TOLERANCE/ACCEPTANCE

Are you tolerant and accepting of others? Tolerant people accept others as they are. They refrain from being judgmental. They respect differences. They recognize that all of us have quirks and idiosyncrasies.

☺ ___ POSITIVE SENSE OF HUMOR

Does your sense of humor make others feel comfortable? Effective people use humor positively. They take themselves lightly. They avoid sarcasm and offensive jokes. They never make jokes at someone else's expense. They understand that jokes that make fun of others, even if presented in an "only kidding" way, may offend.

☺ ___ TRUSTWORTHINESS

Are you trustworthy? Trustworthy people hold confidences. "Loose lips sink ships," interpersonal relationships, and even careers. Either learn to hold confidences, or don't make commitments to hold them. Also, trustworthy people are dependable. They do what they say they'll do. If they make a promise, they keep it.

Source: Adapted from a Statesman Journal article, August 24, 2000, by Meg Rice.

TRUST AND COMMUNICATION



GOSSIP

Here are the key points to remember about how gossiping impacts our relationships:

1. Effective relationships require trust.
2. Gossiping destroys trust.
3. Sometimes people have a tendency to gossip.

So, how should we handle gossiping in the workplace? It depends on whether we want to build and strengthen our work relationships or destroy them. There are six different ways to respond to gossip:

1. Join in.
2. Listen, and hope it stops.
3. Excuse yourself.
4. Change the conversation.
5. Say something like, “This conversation doesn’t work for me. Let’s talk about something else.”
6. Say something like, “Positive relationships are important to me, and to our team. It doesn’t work for me to talk poorly of people who are not here.” And then ask the others something like, “Where are you with this?”

Obviously, if you want to destroy effective working relationships, by all means, “join in” on the gossiping. If you do, you can expect to see more of it in your group. On the other hand, if you want to maintain effective working relationships, state your feeling that gossip is unacceptable and that there’s no place for it. If you do this, you’re well on your way to putting a stop to gossip. This is the most difficult and the most uncomfortable response to make, but it’s also the best response.

CREATING TRUST THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- Straight talk** (what’s my opinion)
- Commitment** (what I will do)
- Follow-through** (keeping my word)
- Credibility** (being dependable)
- Trust** (a history of keeping my word)



Building trust starts with straight talk—saying clearly and directly what you think or feel. Then following that with a commitment as to what you can do. This requires keeping your word on what you say you will do. Being dependable makes you credible. Over time, being credible builds trust.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

How are your relationships with others? We can see how our performance, satisfaction, and development are limited by ineffective relationships. Yet, we don't work on our relationships much. Most of us have just settled for the way our relationships seem to be. But we can improve them, and our effectiveness.

Relationships can be difficult and frustrating:

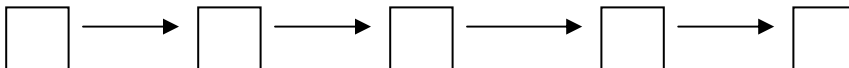
- ◆ They seem to constantly run down.
- ◆ People misinterpret what we say and do.
- ◆ People get out of sorts and we don't know why.
- ◆ We just can't read people's minds.
- ◆ People make up things all the time and what they make up isn't always terrific.
- ◆ Not speaking doesn't work, yet we don't speak.
- ◆ Listening is critical and we don't listen.



How are you in relationships? How are you perceived by others?

- What is it like to talk to me?
- How do I come across to others?
- What do people get left with after speaking with me?
- How do I relate to people in general?
- What stops people from speaking with me?
- Do I really listen?
- Am I willing to be expressive?
- Is there too much of me in conversations?
- Do people sense they can challenge my thinking?
- Where would others say I need a breakthrough?
- Do people have to be careful around me? About what?
- Am I great to be around?

Tip: Think of your relationships with people as a series of conversations. More specifically, think of a relationship as your last five conversations with a person.



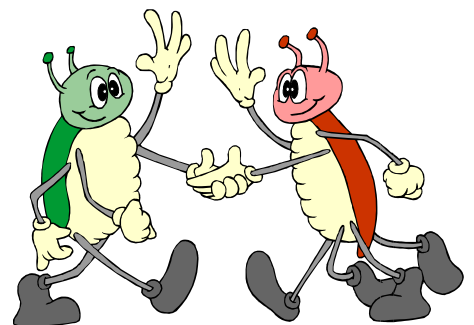
With this in mind, where are you with your relationships?

Source: InterACTION! Project, Oregon State University.

TAKING CARE OF PEOPLE IN INTERACTIONS = DEVELOPING RAPPORT

Rapport is a common bond you create between yourself and others. It helps them identify with you and feel better about you. It helps you communicate with them and influence them. But most importantly, it lets them know you care about them. Consider the following practices and ideas to take care of people in your interactions. (Many of these ideas are especially helpful in meetings.)

- Acknowledge people—greet them with a smile and a warm hello.
- Use people's names, and pronounce them correctly. Ask for the correct pronunciation if you need to.
- Ask about their interests. Show interest in their interests.
- Search for common interests or passions. When you find them, explore them fully.
- Let people know when you get value from what they say. Also, build on what they say. Credit people with changing your thinking.
- Really listen and pay attention to people. Spend more time listening than speaking.
- Ask people for their views and advice, especially on matters in which they consider themselves to be expert.
- Avoid distractions (e.g., a ringing telephone) when people are speaking with you.
- Invite people into conversations.
- Check back later with people if appropriate.
- Be polite. Use “please,” “thank you,” and “excuse me.”
- Acknowledge significant contributions.
- Apologize if you don't take care of someone.
- Give people credit whenever possible.



A recent Gallup Organization study shows that most workers rate having a caring boss as more important than money and fringe benefits.

-- Cited in the March 2001 issue of *Training Magazine*

GIVING RECOGNITION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We've all heard that it's important to "catch people doing things right." Many employees complain that the only time they hear from their supervisors is when things are going wrong. Also, people generally agree that positive feedback, recognition, acknowledgment, and appreciation don't happen enough in the workplace.

People want to contribute and make a difference at work. And when they do, they know that they do, and they feel good about it. But it's not enough that they know this for themselves. They want to be told this by others. And they especially want to receive acknowledgment and appreciation from their supervisor.

One reason people don't give recognition is because they are uncomfortable doing so. This is understandable especially when they haven't had any models to learn from. One way to overcome this discomfort is to start giving recognition—that is, to practice. It doesn't have to be perfect, but it does have to be sincere.

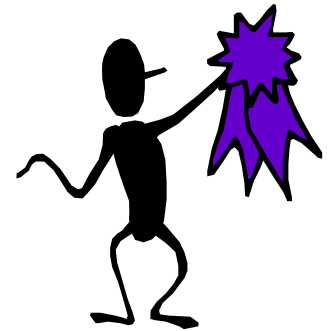
A second reason people don't give recognition is that they don't know how to give it effectively. Use the "STPS" model to make your recognition effective:

S _____

T _____

P _____

S _____



A third reason people don't give recognition is that they don't know what to recognize. Here are some questions to consider to give you some ideas:

- (1) What do you count on others for and so take for granted that it never occurs to you to let them know?
- (2) What do you really appreciate about the people you work with?
- (3) What do you tell others about someone but never tell them?
- (4) What do you think about letting people know, but don't?
- (5) What is it that you see others providing to the group that you think is special?
- (6) What recent results, accomplishments, and actions should we be proud of?

A fourth reason people don't give recognition is that they don't think it's necessary. It is. People want to be acknowledged and appreciated for who they are and what they contribute.

SAMPLE EXPRESSIONS OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND APPRECIATION

Larry,

I am pleased that you are a part of the team here. I have appreciated your efforts to help us all improve the organization. Thanks!

Jill,

I realize we don't always see things the same way. So, I just want to be sure that you know that I really value you as a colleague.

Jim,

We need to find a way to put what your group is doing out as a model for others. I sense that you are finding ways to keep your heads above the layer of despair and upset that permeates other groups. I just want you to know that your work is not going unnoticed.

Gwen,

This is a belated thank you for all you've done for me in the past few months. I have kept your words and ways of dealing with things in mind and they have truly helped. Thank you.

Bob,

I just wanted to say thank you for your time and commitment. I know you had to go out of your way to make time for this committee. I, for one, truly appreciate it.

Sue,

You are so thoughtful and patient with everyone in our group meetings. I can see that people are shifting and really working on making a contribution as a result.

John,

Thanks for listening to me the other day. I appreciate the way you can listen to me and then ask me the right question to help me sort things out. I also just feel better after I speak with you.

_____,

Compliment: I like what you did. I like what you have.

Acknowledgment: I like who you are. I like the impact you have on me.

Source: InterACTION! Project, Oregon State University.

PERSONAL ACTION PLAN



- (1) List several ideas of value that you learned or rediscovered in this training.
 - (2) Choose one idea from your list that you would like to work on or use more.
 - (3) Identify a situation in the next two weeks in which you can apply this idea.
 - (4) Describe the result you want to achieve by using this idea.
 - (5) Describe your plan for applying this idea to achieve this result. (What exactly will you do and/or say, and when?)

 - (6) *After applying your idea, evaluate how it went. (What worked and what didn't? What did you learn? What will you do differently next time?)*
-