

Communication - FAQs

Is communication something that does not become relevant until I become a manager?

Absolutely not. Proper communication is crucial in all aspects of life, especially when beginning a new career in a company. Remember that communication involves much more than your ability to speak to colleagues. Communication depends on verbal skills, listening skills, observational skills, attitude toward others, and ability to persuade people to proper actions.

Is there a difference between hearing and listening?

Yes. Hearing is simply the physical process of perceiving sound with the ear. Listening, on the other hand, is a physical & mental process which allows one to consider situations with thoughtful attention.

Why is listening to customers and employees so important?

Individuals want to be recognized and remembered, as well as valued and appreciated. People typically wish to be respected and understood so they feel comfortable about a want or need. By not keeping these ideas in mind for all communications, you risk losing customers & employees to the competition.

If I'm really good at multitasking, why can I not just listen as I perform another task?

You very well may be able to hear two conversations at one time or hear someone talking as you do something else, but that is not communication. The best form of two-way communication is when there are no external distractions or any signs of impatience/lack of interest. Poor communication can easily lead to misunderstandings, lost opportunities, wasted time and added stress.

Providing negative feedback is so much easier since the employee has done something wrong.

Actually, it is much more difficult to give feedback to an employee who is not meeting performance expectations. This is because you need to specify the circumstance, clearly explain what action was said or done, and finally provide the outcome of the situation. It is also very important how you make statements of negative feedback so that the details focus on the behaviors and not the employee.

Within a work group, why is open communication crucial?

By keeping communication open within a work group, you are encouraged to have healthy conflict, which will prevent groups from becoming complacent with unchallenged ideas. In order for this to work, everyone needs to use proper communication skills that support positive reinforcement and constructive criticism. The supervisor's job is to keep conflict from getting out of hand and resolving issues timely by using the RESOLVE© model.

Communicating Clearly and Listening Actively

Overview: The importance of mastering communication skills is essential to one's success as a supervisor. The effectiveness with which a manager communicates depends upon his/her verbal skills, listening skills, observational skills, attitudes toward his/her people, the non-verbal skills he/she sends and his/her ability to persuade people to action.

1. The goal of a supervisor is to have your employees understand accurately what you want them to understand. This is accomplished through good communication skills, mainly (1) using simple, uncomplicated language to communicate ideas; and, (2) listening actively to insure understanding.
2. **Types of Communication:**
 - A. One-way communication: giving instructions or making announcements.
 - B. One-way communication with feedback: Leader presents the message and the group gives feedback on how they understood it.
 - C. Two-way communication: reciprocal process. Free exchange of ideas

The third type, two-way communication, encourages participation. While it takes more time than the other methods, it is more effective in the long run.

3. Communicating Clearly:

- Make your messages complete and specific
- Make sure your body language is consistent with your verbal message
- Repeat your message
- Ask for feedback concerning the way your messages are received
- Make sure that your body language communicates your attentiveness to the person.
- Listen and respond with empathy
- Paraphrase accurately the content of the message

4. What prevents effective listening?

- Trying to formulate our response before listening to the entire message;
- May feel the information is going to be boring;
- May feel the information is too complex, so we tune it out;
- Trying to listen to two or more conversations at once (employee, telephone);
- May not like the message being sent;
 - May not like the person who is speaking (ex. If the person has a whiny voice, we may tend to criticize the content more).
- May mistakenly think we can fake attention.

9. Why is listening so difficult?

We listen at 400 words per minute, but people speak at a much slower rate (125 words per minute). This allows time for mind wandering and daydreaming. When this happens, the eyes can drift away from the speaker, which sends the message that the "listener" is no longer attentive. Further, because of the difference between the rate of speech and the rate at which the brain can operate, there is a tendency to interrupt the speaker when you sense where the conversation is going.

10. Why is listening important?

- Get correct information
- Build rapport
- Can determine needs and wants of employees and customers more accurately
- Shows respect for the speaker
- Tells people that they are important and that you are interested in what they are saying

11. To be an effective listener, you must actively pay attention to the other person and try to understand what he/she is saying. Use the following guidelines to accomplish this.

- *DO prepare yourself to listen.*
- *DO give your full attention.*
- *DO NOT interrupt.*
- *DO concentrate on major points. This helps identify important elements and will give the individual facts meaning so that you can remember them.*
- *DO keep an open mind. Look for the positive aspects of what is being said.*
- *DO allow silence because it can take awhile for the other person to think of their response.*
- *DO repeat back what you think the other person has said in your own words.*
- *DO ask questions to clarify what is not understood when it is your turn to speak.*
- *DO withhold judgment, evaluation and decision until the speaker has finished.*
- *DO be aware of your body language. Acting impatient or uninterested while the other person is speaking may cause him/her to get angry or end the communication.*
- *DO keep eye contact.*

12. A good listener communicates with the body by:

- Leaning the body toward the speaker. This indicates support and energy.
- Positioning yourself at eye level with the speaker.
- Maintaining an open position with your body. Do not cross arms.
- Being an appropriate distance from the speaker.
- Avoiding distracting gestures (i.e., drumming fingers, and crossing and uncrossing your legs and other similar movements, which indicate nervousness rather than attentiveness).
- Maintaining eye contact.
- Helping to keep the environment from distracting the speaker. Move away from other employees. Take the employee to your office. Put your phone on cover. Turn off the radio.

13. Being able to respond appropriately after carefully listening is important in getting the entire message from the speaker. The most difficult part of responding after listening is to remain objective.

A. **Respond with empathy** to help defuse strong negative feelings or to connect with someone that something very positive to share. Respond to the speaker in a manner that shows you have heard and understood the feelings and the situation that caused the feelings. By reflecting the feelings of the speaker without judging the content of the emotions, you will help calm an employee, making it easier to focus on the situation.

B. **Paraphrasing.** Making a concise statement of what the speaker just said by presenting the information in a different way to improve understanding.

14. **Conclusion:** Listening is an active skill. You must concentrate on the speaker; his/her message both verbally and non-verbally, while simultaneously being aware of your own body language and openness to receiving the message. Your ability to master effective listening skills will improve your relationships with your employees, peers and with customers.

Managing Conflict

Overview: All relationships experience some kind of conflict. On any healthy team, conflict is inevitable, and useful. Managing conflict effectively can bring positive change to your workplace. This information will outline effective conflict resolution skills that can help you solve problems confidently.

1. **Introduction:** Conflict is inevitable in human relations. When it occurs, a supervisor should deal with the conflict in a timely and positive manner. The key to resolving conflict is ongoing communication. The purpose of this section is to outline effective conflict resolution skills so that you can solve issues promptly and positively.

2. **When confronted with conflict**, we have a choice on how to respond. Many of us become defensive.
 - **Why do we become defensive?**
 - If we are attacked personally;
 - Even if not attacked personally, we may take it personally.
 - We're all sensitive about things.
 - *It is very easy to misinterpret comments as judgmental or accusatory.*

3. **When we encounter defensiveness** in others, we respond in equally inappropriate way.
 - What are some examples of how we respond when someone is defensive toward us?
 - Shut down (run for cover)
 - Become defensive (counter attack)
 - Create a diversion (change the subject)

4. **Open communications** is critical to creating and maintaining positive work relationships. In any work environment, conflict is common and even useful. Without it, groups become complacent and bad ideas are unchallenged. A supervisor's job is to keep conflict from getting out of hand and resolving the issues timely. How do we approach resolving a conflict?

5. **The RESOLVE© model** is a practical approach to resolving conflict:
 - Recognize shared interests and differences.
 - *Empathize with the other person's position.*
 - Separate the person from the point of view.
 - Offer solutions.
 - Listen actively.
 - Verbalize feelings.
 - Expect behavior change.

6. **Recognize shared interests and differences.** Find a common goal. This will allow you to start the resolution process on common ground.

7. **Empathize with the other person's position.** Empathize with the other person's position. Never assume you know what he/she is thinking. Listen to make sure you understand the other person's position.

8. **Separate the person from the point of view.** The goal is to resolve the issue, not attack the person. Avoid personal affronts. Focus on the ideas. Acknowledge that everyone's ideas have merit. When debate heats up, single out the most upset member and acknowledge the merit of his/her position. Example: "I can see the advantages of Bob's suggestion; for example (list a few). But I'd like to suggest another line of thinking."

9. **Offer solutions.** Brainstorm ideas together to create a solution that will work for all parties. Use smoothing statements. Don't let people take sides. Encourage them to see the other side of the issue: "Maybe there is another interpretation..." or "What about the possibility that...?"

If you can't get the group to consensus, step back and analyze the situation. Review your employees' positions. This will give you time to regroup, to suggest revisions and ask more questions. It will give your employees the opportunity to do the same.

10. **Listen actively.** You must focus on the person to really understand what his/her issue is. Remember to watch the non-verbal cues. Only by paying close attention will you be able to resolve the conflict satisfactorily.

Ask questions so you can learn more of the other person's issues. Open-ended questions will illicit more information.

11. **Verbalize feelings.** Be honest about your feelings. Accept that others' feelings are legitimate.

12. **Expect behavior change.** All parties must be committed to your solution for it to be successful.

13. **Conclusion.** No one likes to deal with conflict, but it can be used as a tool for implementing positive change. The RESOLVE© model is one tool to help supervisors in their daily challenge of managing conflicts in the workplace. We have no control over the attitudes and personalities of our employees and peers. But, actively changing the way we approach resolving a problem may help change the way others approach issues as well. By carefully choosing what we say, how we say it, expressing ourselves in a clear manner, and listening objectively, we will improve our communication and encourage others to do the same.

Coaching and Feedback

Overview: Coaching and feedback can be used to reinforce positive behavior or to correct problems in performance. This section will discuss the relationship between giving feedback and improving results.

1. Introduction: This section will discuss the importance of consistent coaching and will outline basic coaching techniques for supervisors. Feedback is an essential part of business coaching. It is a tool for supervisors to encourage positive behavior change, to correct inappropriate behavior, and to help others see themselves more clearly. This information is designed to outline the steps to coach employees and give effective feedback to employees when they have, and when they have not, achieved the goals or performance expectations you have set for them.

- Competence grows when people:
 - Know what is expected;
 - Know where to get help;
 - Measure their own performance against their goals;
 - Are comfortable that rewards will follow achievement.

2. The first step in coaching employees is to establish direction. How do you set direction for employees?

- Set clear expectations up front
- Clear accountability
- Clarify results and how they are to be achieved

3. The next step in coaching employees is to ensure success through feedback:

- Give ongoing feedback and direction
- Have individuals track their own performance
- After the event, discuss specific performance

STAR© Format:

- Situation/Task: Specify the circumstance
- Action: What was said or done
- Result: The outcome

4. Giving positive feedback is a fun part of a supervisor's position. When an employee is meeting and/or exceeding expectations, it should be acknowledged. Feedback should be given as soon as possible. Daily, Weekly, and Monthly.

- General tips you should know? (Do's and Don'ts)
 - Praise the behavior (sincerely).
 - Do it right away.
 - Be specific about the actions/behaviors based on hard evidence, measures & objective observations.
 - Tell the person what they did right.
 - Tell them how great you feel about it.
 - Encourage the person (sincerely).

5. It is much more difficult to give feedback to an employee who is not meeting performance expectations. General tips on giving feedback when faced with an employee who has not met expectations on an item, project or goal:

- Decide whether the feedback should be to the entire group or to an individual. If you are giving feedback to an individual, decide whether it should be in private.
- Use the STAR © format: State the circumstances, what action (inaction) employee took, and the result.
- Be specific. Feedback on generalizations is not helpful. For example, to be told that one is dominating is not useful. Instead, tell the employee that “when our group met, you did not allow anyone else to give input on how we could improve our errors.”
- Show respect for the employee. Instead of using “you,” use “I” phrases. When you use “I” phrases, it is less accusatory and the employee will be less defensive. Make sure to express that you value the person.
- Focus on the behavior rather than the employee.
- Discuss what action must be taken as a result of the discussion.
- Encourage the employee and emphasize the positive. Reaffirm that you think well of the employee but not of their performance in this situation.

6. The third step in coaching employees is to encourage continual progress:

- Compare actual performance to agreed upon goals
- Review trends, successes and causes of failures
- Focus on improvements achieved
- Keep developmental in nature

7. Conclusion. When supervisors coach employees to take responsibility for their own performance, supervisors will have more time for other responsibilities. Coaching encourages employees to share ideas for improvement and problems before they get out of hand and employees take more ownership in their positions and in the company performance. Employees want to know how they are doing. Use these coaching and feedback techniques to improve productivity in your areas, and to improve relationships with your employees.