

Conversations at Work: Survival Strategies for Speaking Up!

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Workshop Description

In today's team-based work environment, interpersonal communication is a critical element of effective collaboration and conflict prevention. How well you communicate can make or break how others view your work performance, your approach to team-work and even your chances for career advancement.

This highly practical and interactive workshop will help you to communicate more effectively at work. You will leave confidently with new strategies and tips for *listening* with intent and *speaking up* with professionalism and respect.

Upon completion of this workshop, you will:

1. Describe the elements of successful communication within workplaces.
2. Describe the importance and power of positive, non-verbal communication in building rapport.
3. Explain the importance of body language in the listening process.
4. Apply techniques to enhance communication and assertiveness in the workplace.
5. Identify personal goals for enhanced interpersonal communication at work.

Rolling Agenda

1. Setting the Stage for Learning: The 5 Ps
2. Communication Enhancers
3. Active Listening
4. Five Essential Communication Techniques
5. Practice Activity
6. Wrap-Up and Evaluation

Communication <i>Enhancers</i>	Communication <i>Blockers</i>

Exercise: Eye Color

For one day, make a mental note of the color of the eyes of every person you meet. You don't have to remember the color, just take notice. That's it. Couldn't be simpler.

Yet this simple exercise alone will massively increase self-confidence, eye contact, and rapport skills without you doing anything intimidating.

Source: *Convince them in 90 Seconds* by Nicholas Boothman

Body Language

Body language is the clearest truth-teller. It tunes in to the attitude of the other person. Here's what to look for:

When Sitting

- Leaning forward in the seat – tension, heightened attention.
- Lounging back – not necessarily relaxed. Sometimes this is an attempt to *look* relaxed. Need other clues to verify this.
- Changing positions – looking for a comfortable place to settle in; too much movement means some discomfort; hard to settle down.

Hands

- Clasped: possible tense, but notice how tightly they're clasped. Do you see fingers opening and closing? Another sign of tension.
- Open and relaxed: a good indicator that this person is feeling comfortable, in a listening mode, and in control.
- Fiddling with objects: unsure; needs tangible touching to feel comfortable and anchored. Also, signifies a person with highly charged energy.
- Clutching chair arms: looking for grounding and support. Can be another sign of tension.

Eye Contact

- Steady gaze: calm interior, sense of security or inner strength.
- Shifting glance: unable to hold his ground to confront you head on. Much more nervous and concerned about the conversation.
- Looking over your head or looking down: a solo-monologue, not taking the other person into account. This can mean arrogance and self-centredness, no concern for the other person or the subject of the conversation, or a mind that is already made up.

Source: "How To Talk So People Listen" by Sonya Hamlin

SOLERA

Active Listening Tips

S _____

O _____

L _____

E _____

R _____

A _____

Source: Management Development Program, Health Association Nova Scotia

Active Listening Self-Assessment

Use this self-assessment to think about how you actively listen. Check the box next to the number in the column that best describes your listening habits.

While someone is talking, I:	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
Plan how I'm going to respond.	1	3	5
Keep eye contact with the speaker.	5	3	1
Take notes as appropriate.	5	3	1
Notice the feeling behind the words	5	3	1
Find myself thinking about other things while the person is talking.	1	3	5
Face the person who is talking.	5	3	1
Watch for significant body language (expressions, gestures)	5	3	1
Control fidgeting or other distracting habits.	5	3	1
Interrupt the speaker to make a point.	1	3	5
Am distracted by other demands on my time.	1	3	5
Listen to the message without immediately judging or evaluating it.	5	3	1
Ask questions to get more information and encourage the speaker to continue.	5	3	1
Repeat in my own words what I've just heard to ensure understanding.	5	3	1
Totals for Each Column: _____ + _____ + _____			
Grand Total: _____			
Scoring: 49-65 = You are an effective active listener. 31-48 = You are a good listener with room for improvement. 13-30 = You need to focus on improving your active listening skills.			

Source: "Harvard ManageMentor – Coaching Tools", Harvard Business School Publishing.

FIVE Essential Communication Techniques

People are seldom direct in verbally expressing their true feelings and concerns. To be an effective listener, it is important to create an atmosphere in which the speaker feels heard and understood. This can only help to build trust and respect.

Active listening not only helps the listener to better understand the speaker, but it also helps the speaker to clarify his or her own thoughts and feelings. These techniques can assist you in actively listening to another person.

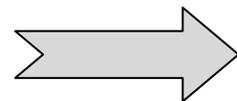
“I” Messages

It is important to use the pronoun “I” to take responsibility and to promote cooperation and understanding when making statements to others. By starting off your statements with the pronoun “I”, you are taking 100% responsibility for what you are saying. In addition, by using the pronoun “I” you are taking ownership for your statement. By doing so, you promote cooperation and understanding. You are also less likely to be threatening, especially to someone of higher authority.

This is in contrast to “you” statements, which tend to promote an atmosphere of conflict by sounding accusatory, judgemental and threatening to others. Whether you are critiquing someone’s performance or disagreeing with someone at a team meeting, the difference between getting cooperation or resistance is often based on which pronoun you use – “I” or “You”.

When you start statements with the pronoun YOU, you may be establishing an atmosphere of conflict. People may react defensively or negatively to what you’ve said because the word YOU can sound accusatory, judgemental, and threatening.

The following steps do not have to be followed in the exact order. While the formula will help raise issues constructively, the delivery should feel comfortable and fit in the specific situation. Remember; practice makes perfect.



1. "When X happens..."	Describe the person's behaviour in factual and specific terms. Do not judge, blame, insult or generalise.
2. "I feel....."	Describe how the person's behaviour affects you (emotionally), talk about the impact the behaviour has on you.
Depending on the situation, you may next use one of the following:	
3. Pause	Let the other person respond.
4. "I would like...."	Describe the change in behaviour you want the other person to consider.
5. "Can we find some time to talk about this?"	You have to make sure timing and location are appropriate.
6. "What do you think..."	Be open. Use active listening techniques (ask questions, reflect, summarize, etc...). Be assertive (express your thoughts, feelings and opinions).
7. "How can we resolve this..."	Focus on meeting others needs as well as your own. Generate and explore potential solutions.
8. "If this behaviour occurs again the consequences will be.."	When dealing with uncooperative people and when all your previous best efforts have failed, you may have to issue a * CONSEQUENCE.

* CONSEQUENCES: In the real world, you may encounter disturbing conflicts with people who are totally uncooperative. Or you may even face a conflict where you are being unjustly treated, or where someone acts without integrity or ethics. In such situations, and when all your previous best efforts have failed, you may need to use CONSEQUENCES. A consequence is an action or sanction that states to the other person the likely outcome of continuing a problematic behaviour.

My "I" Message Script

Reflecting Feeling

Communicates your understanding of how the person is feeling. Also provides the other party the opportunity to hear and reflect on their own experience.

How to: Identify the person's emotions or feelings.

"You seem really upset..."

"It sounds like you were very frustrated..."

Statement	Example of Reflecting Feeling
"I can't believe I could be so stupid! Why do I always make mistakes on these forms?"	
"Nothing ever seems to ever work out. It makes me wonder why you should even try anything new. You're just setting yourself up to fail".	
"I can't believe we got through that clinic so slowly – I've had to miss my son's baseball game – something's got to change."	

Empathic Assertion

Similar to reflecting feeling, empathic listening focuses on the feelings underlying the concerns a person is speaking to. Something as simple as “yes, that must be very frustrating for you” can have a powerful effect on a conversation and transform it into one where the person feels heard, understood and is willing to stop fighting as they see that you appreciate their feelings in the matter.

This technique can be very powerful even when tensions are very high. It is crucial that we watch our tone and choice of words when using this approach, as a condescending tone will add fuel to the fire rather than transform the situation into a more positive experience. If we are genuine, we will communicate this and the other person will pick up on it.

Purpose:

- focus on the feeling component of the other person’s experience
- expresses empathy for person’s experience
- similar to reflection of feeling in this sense
- different from reflection in that it adds on an **assertion** of what you want/need in the situation.

Sample Dialogue:

Jacques says: *“Carole, I understand that you are pretty frustrated with me right now; however, I think it would be a good idea for us to discuss what has been happening with us”*

Carole could respond by using the same technique as follows:

Carole says: *“Jacques, I can appreciate that you would have a strong need to discuss this right now; however, I really need some time to think about this before we chat.”*

Broken Record

Sometimes it is effective to simply re-state your assertion. This can be done when another person appears to be reacting strongly to your statements or ignoring them for some reason. You simply repeat words in a calm voice. To prevent sounding like a broken record, it is important to respond to legitimate points that are made by the other person and to pay close attention to your tone of voice.

Purpose:

- helpful when the other party is clearly not hearing your message
- simply re-state your words, calmly and evenly
- this simple repetition can often increase the likelihood that the words are heard

Sample Dialogue:

In the same scenario, Jacques may persist in his need to discuss the issues now. Perhaps he becomes angry that Carole hasn't told him directly. Perhaps he is simply frustrated with Carole's communication behaviour in the situation. Broken record could be used as follows:

Jacques (in a harsh tone): *"Come on Carole, that's not fair. You have been upset with me now for months and I want to talk about it."*

Carole (using a soft, even tone): *"Jacques, I am not comfortable talking about this now"*

Jacques (getting louder): *"I can't believe how unreasonable you are being. What about that conflict resolution course we took. Sure we took it together. They said you should talk about stuff right away!"*

Carole(continuing to use an even tone of voice): *"Jacques, I am not comfortable talking about this now"*

Jacques: *"Okay. Okay. Then when can we talk?"*

Carole: *"Thanks Jacques, I know you really want to discuss this now. How about tomorrow first thing"*

Jacque: *"Okay I'll see you here"*

Restating Content

This technique is especially effective for ensuring that you clearly understand what the other person is saying or asking for. You simply repeat back to them what you heard and ask if this is correct. It serves to ensure that you understand the other person as well as communicating to the other person that they are being heard. It also gives you time to assess the situation.

How to: Restate the basic ideas, facts or information.

“So you think that...”

“So you are saying that...”

“If I understand you correctly, what you are saying is ...”

Statement	Example of Restating Content
“This job is going nowhere – I do good work but what does it get me? Maybe I should look at something else or go back to school.”	
“One day she is really nice and the next day she complains about everything. There is no way to know what is coming next.”	
“We have to stop people from just dropping into the office. I can’t plan anything or get into any work while people are popping in and asking stupid questions.”	

Matching Exercise

	Technique	Insert Letter		Description
1	Basic Assertion		A	Giving factual information to an individual who has a false belief about a situation or circumstance.
2	Probing		B	Sometimes it is effective to simply re-state your assertion. This can be done when another person appears to be reacting strongly to your statements or ignoring them for some reason. You simply repeat words in a calm voice.
3	Confronting		C	Making inferences and then clarifying the accuracy of the assumption.
4	Information Giving		D	By starting off your statements with the pronoun "I", you are taking 100% responsibility for what you are saying. In addition, by using the pronoun "I" you are taking ownership for your statement. By doing so, you promote cooperation and understanding.
5	Summarizing		E	Conveying interest and encouraging the speaker to keep talking. Use neutral statements or open ended questions that do not convey either agreement or judgment. "I see." or "Can you tell me more about that?"
6	Interpreting		F	This technique is especially effective for ensuring that you clearly understand what the other person is saying or asking for. You simply repeat back to them what you heard and ask if this is correct.
7	Silence		G	Asking for more information to further clarify or to obtain relevant details.

8	Self-Disclosure			H	Organizing and bringing together all that has been discussed about a particular issue.
9	Validation			I	Clearly and simply stating our need/desire without qualification or excuses. You simply use one of the following stems: "I want..." or "I need..."
10	Encouraging			J	When an individual needs to vent or dump (pent up complaints that need to be released), this technique may facilitate the process.
11	I – Statement			K	Pointing out either verbal or behavioral discrepancies. For example, drawing attention to one's denial that he/she is angry while his/her body language indicates intense anger.
12	Restating Content			L	Acknowledging the value of a person's concerns and feelings. "I can appreciate your frustration with this situation."
13	Broken Record			M	Can normalize feelings and build trust when used for the purpose of showing empathy or support for another.

*Adapted in part from:

1. *Counseling the Older Adult*, McDonald & Haney, 1988
2. Nova Scotia Department of Health. (2005). Conflict Resolution. *Building a Better Tomorrow Atlantic Provincial Primary Health Care Initiative*. Halifax: Author.

THREE Behaviour Types

Passive Behaviour:

- you may not be able to express your own thoughts, feelings and needs.
- may express your own needs in such an apologetic way that other people think you are unimportant.
- passivity can give the message that your thoughts and feelings are less important than the other persons.

*This behaviour enables us to avoid conflict
at the cost of our own needs.*

Characteristics of passive behaviour include:

- ✓ Rambling
- ✓ Letting things slide without comment
- ✓ Beating about the bush - not saying what you mean
- ✓ Apologizing inappropriately in a soft, unsteady voice
- ✓ Being unclear; averting gaze
- ✓ Posture - backing off from others, slouching shoulders
- ✓ Wringing hands; laughing when expressing anger
- ✓ Covering mouth with hand
- ✓ Using phrases such as, "If it wouldn't be too much trouble", "...but do whatever you want", "I...er...um..would like...um...you..er...to do..."

Aggressive Behaviour:

- comes from a desire to have your own needs met, but abuses the needs of others.

Characteristics of aggressive behaviour include:

- ✓ Not respecting personal space
- ✓ Staring the other person out
- ✓ Sarcastic or condescending voice
- ✓ Certain gestures (e.g. finger pointing)
- ✓ Threats (e.g. "You'd better watch out", "If you don't...")
- ✓ Put downs (e.g. "You've got to be kidding", "Don't be so stupid")
- ✓ Comments such as "should", "bad", "ought"
- ✓ Discriminatory remarks (e.g. references to a person's appearance)

Assertive Behaviour:

- involves standing up for your rights and expressing your thoughts and feelings directly and honestly in a way which respects the rights of others.
- goal of assertiveness is to communicate clearly with each other.
- allows us to express what we think while valuing the opinion of others and being open to exploring areas of conflict.

Characteristics of assertive behaviour include:

- ✓ Really listening...actively
- ✓ Firm but relaxed voice
- ✓ Direct eye contact
- ✓ Erect, balanced, open body stance
- ✓ Voice appropriately loud for the situation
- ✓ "I" statements (e.g. "I like", "I want", "I don't like")
- ✓ Cooperative phrases (e.g. "What are your thoughts on this?")
- ✓ Clear statements of interest (e.g. "I would like to...")

Suggestions for being more assertive...

1. Use "Positive Self Talk" to encourage you to take a chance and express your needs in a reasonable manner.
2. Draw up a list of what the potential advantages for you and your relationships could be if you can start being more assertive in your behaviour. Use this as a motivational tool when you are trying to muster the courage to express yourself in a more assertive way.
3. Set yourself realistic specific targets - don't expect that you will become completely assertive overnight.
4. Congratulate yourself for any successes you have in behaving a little more assertively, however small, and try to build on them.
5. Don't put pressure on yourself to be perfect. Just do your best and seek support if appropriate.
6. Practice! Practice! Practice!

Observation Form

Sender:

What worked well?

Suggestions for improving Communication

Receiver:

What worked well?

Suggestions for improving Communication

Self-Reflection



Start!



Continue!



Stop!