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THE PRACTICE SUPERVISOR

Communication Skills

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication is the ability to send messages and have the other person understand those messages, even if they do not respond.

HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS?

We communicate through writing, speaking, and body language.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

What is your definition of a skilled communicator?

Think of a time when you are at your best as a communicator. What do you do? How do you act?

Think of a time when you are at your worst as a communicator. What do you do? How do you act?

Think of someone you know, perhaps through work (now or in the past), or in your network somewhere, who is an excellent communicator.

What makes that person stand out to you?

What things are they doing that we could learn from?

Do you also see things in them that you could learn to make yourself even better at communicating?

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Lots of things can get in the way of good communication. Here are some of the most common barriers.

EXPERIENCE

This barrier comes from one person always sharing their own experience, and not allowing others to provide input. This can also occur when a newer employee meets existing staff and feels that they need to prove themselves independently, instead of listening to or respecting the experience of their new colleagues.

EMOTIONS

Anger can stop us from hearing what someone says. Love can cloud our judgment.

BACKGROUND

If someone comes from a very wealthy or very poor background, we might make judgments about them. People can also make judgments based on the area that a person is from.

ATTITUDES

These can stop us from hearing, observing, and perceiving the truth. A negative attitude can prevent someone from adapting to a change. An overly optimistic attitude can stop someone from seeing what is really going on.

CULTURE

If we do not have respect for what other cultures contribute, or the positive attributes of our own culture, people experience discrimination.

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

If one person tries to push their knowledge on others, resentment can arise. On the other hand, if someone pretends to have knowledge and is lying, they will lose credibility and erode trust.

PREJUDICE

Prejudices are another thing that can cloud our judgment. Examine what triggers your prejudices (and why you have these thoughts) in order to deal with them.

MOOD

If we are tired, grumpy, or feeling upset, it's possible we won't hear others or want to engage with anyone. If we are excited and joyful about things and interrupting other people's work, it's possible they won't get things done either.

WORDING

How do you feel when someone starts an e-mail without a greeting? If this is also your style, it might be fine because there are no wasted words in the e-mail. Other people might feel that the tone is abrupt for no reason, or that the writer is angry at them.

EDUCATION

If I am intimidated because someone approaches me, and they have a lot more education than I do, even though they are asking me for help, I might become nervous, short tempered, etc.

NOISE LEVEL

If there is a lot of noise around and I don't hear properly, I'm not likely to get the entire message.

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

AMBIGUITY

Clear language helps to remove uncertainty and avoid confusion.

NON-VERBAL MESSAGES

Non-verbal messages can convey a lot of meaning, even if you aren't saying anything. If I enter your office and you turn your back to me, I will know you don't want to talk to me, even though I need to speak with you.

HEARING DIFFICULTIES

For messages to be understood, we need to express ourselves. For listeners who are hard of hearing, we may give up before they have understood, or we may avoid calling them to avoid having to take extra steps to make sure that they hear us.

ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Active listening means that we try to understand things from the speaker's point of view. It includes letting the speaker know that we are listening and that we have understood what was said. This is not the same as hearing, which is a physical process, where sound enters the eardrum and messages are passed to the brain. Active listening can be described as an attitude that leads to listening for shared understanding.

When we decide to listen for total meaning, we listen for the content of what is being said as well as the attitude behind what is being said. Is the speaker happy, angry, excited, sad...or something else entirely?

RESPONDING TO FEELINGS

The content (the words spoken) is one thing, but the way that people feel really gives full value to the message. Responding to the speaker's feelings adds an extra dimension of listening. Are they disgusted and angry or in love and excited? Perhaps they are ambivalent! These are all feelings that you can reply to in your part of the conversation.

READING CUES

Really listening means that we are also very conscious of the non-verbal aspects of the conversation. What is the speaker's facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture telling us?

- Is their voice loud or shaky?
- Are they stressing certain points?
- Are they mumbling or having difficulty finding the words they want to say?

DEMONSTRATION CUES

When you are listening to someone, these techniques will show a speaker that you are paying attention, providing you are genuine in using them.

Physical indicators include making eye contact, nodding your head from time to time, and leaning into the conversation.

You can also give verbal cues or use phrases such as "Uh-huh," "Go on," "Really!" and, "Then what?"

You can use questions for clarification or summarizing statements. Examples:

"Do you mean they were charging \$4.00 for just a cup of coffee?"

"So, after you got a cab, got to the store, and found the right sales clerk, what happened then?"

TIPS FOR BECOMING A BETTER LISTENER

- Make a decision to listen. Close your mind to clutter and noise and look at the person speaking with you. Give them your undivided attention.
- Don't interrupt people. Make it a habit to let them finish what they are saying. Respect that they have thoughts they are processing and speaking about and wait to ask questions or make comments until they have finished.
- Keep your eyes focused on the speaker and your ears tuned to their voice. Don't let your eyes wander around the room, just in case your attention does too.
- Carry a notebook or start a conversation file on your computer. Write down all the discussions that you have in a day. Capture the subject, who spoke more (were you listening or doing a lot of the talking?), what you learned in the discussion, as well as the who, what, when, where, why, and how aspects of it. Once you have conducted this exercise 8-10 times, you will be able to see what level your listening skills are currently at.
- Ask a few questions throughout the conversation. When you ask, people will know that you are listening to them, and that you are interested in what they have to say. Your ability to summarize and paraphrase will also demonstrate that you heard them.
- When you demonstrate good listening skills, they tend to be infectious. If you want people to communicate well at work, you must set a high example.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Write down the names of three people that you consider good listeners.

Did you write down the name of a person that you do not like?

Do any of the three people fit into one of these categories?

- Someone you like
- Someone you love
- Someone you respect

If you wish to be liked, loved, or respected, how is it that you need to behave?

QUESTIONING SKILLS

As a supervisor, one should be spending a lot of time asking questions and providing answers. When it comes to asking, however, we often aren't aware of our technique. Open questions often give us difficulty, which is unfortunate since they are the most important ones for us to become skilled at using. If you are having trouble with open questions, it can be helpful to get more comfortable with small talk and easing yourself into the conversation at hand.

Building relationships with others (including our employees and our co-workers) becomes easier as we become skilled at asking questions that give us more information about that person and their wants and needs. Questions help us find common ground with someone, show the person we are interested in them, and puts the emphasis on them rather than us.

OPEN QUESTIONS

These are broad, general questions that require your conversation partner to provide more than just a “yes” or “no” answer. They also permit the other person to decide how much information to give.

Open questions can do the following:

- Give us more information
- Encourage your conversation partner to speak openly
- Encourage people to share opinions and ideas
- Help us determine if people have interpreted what we say accurately

CLOSED QUESTIONS

Closed questions can be answered with a single word or two, such as a simple yes or no. They can begin the closing process in a conversation, or provide confirmation of a detail, but they don't usually lead to a richer conversation or gathering more information. The advantage of closed questions is that they give you control over the questions and the type of answers you receive. Closed questions are easy to interpret, and more questions can be answered in less time.

However, closed questions don't allow for detailed explanations or for the other person to share how they feel about a particular circumstance. If you wish to encourage a richer response or to encourage a frustrated person to talk freely, then you need to avoid asking closed questions.

Here are some examples of closed questions:

- “Does this make you angry?”
- “Do you think that meeting was fun?”

To open up those same questions, you could try these open-ended statements:

- “Please explain how you feel about this situation.”
- “Tell me how you feel about this meeting.”

PROBING TECHNIQUES

When we do not get enough information by using open-ended questions, we can use probes to expand the conversation.

VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL PROBES

A probe will encourage your conversation partner to add to their previous response. Verbal probes are often a single word or short phrase.

Some examples are:

- “Tell me more about that.”
- “That’s interesting. Tell me more.”
- “Really?”
- “Why?”
- “Can you give me a specific example of what you mean?”

Non-verbal probes rely on your body language and gestures to get the same results as a verbal probe.

Some examples are:

- Raising the eyebrows as if you are surprised
- Nodding
- Frowning
- Pursing the lips

PROBING TECHNIQUES

There are many ways that you can use probing in your conversations. We've provided some techniques for you below.

Ask an open question.

Some good questions include:

- “Can you describe that more clearly?”
- “Would you give me a specific example of what you mean?”
- “What do you think we should do?”

You'll soon recognize that if you ask too many of these questions, your conversation partner will feel like they are under interrogation, so use them carefully.

Pause

Many of us feel uncomfortable when silence overtakes a conversation, and we will fill the silence by expanding on what was said previously.

Use reflective or mirroring questions.

For example, if an employee says, “I just don't feel interested in my work anymore,” you may respond by just reflecting back to them, “Interested?” Then pause. Usually, the other person will provide you with an expanded answer without you asking more questions or interrogating. These kinds of statements also serve to focus or clarify and summarize without interrupting the flow of the conversation. They demonstrate your intent to understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings.

Paraphrase

Reflect what has just been said in your own words. “So, if I understand you correctly, you...” This technique shows that you want to understand your conversation partner and that you want to be accurate. It also allows the sender to hear back what they have said from someone else's point of view.

Use summary questions.

Summary questions are a helpful way of probing and winding up the conversation at the same time. “You have spoken to your colleague about his foul language in the office, you have tried to ignore it, and you remain concerned about the impact his swearing has on our visitors and staff. None of these techniques have worked to reduce the amount of swearing and now you are asking me to intervene. Have I got it right?”

Here is another example: when we asked an employee why it would take until next week to finish the project, one of her reasons was lack of cooperation from the production department.

Rather than come back with yet another question, you might just say “Cooperation...” in a reflective tone of voice and pause again. Usually, the other person will recognize that reflection as a clue to expand or provide you with additional information.

Summary statements or paraphrases sum up what has been said and will show that you have listened and absorbed what’s being said. Don’t use them to take over the dialogue.

The summary is the stronger cue that the conversation is winding down on that topic. However, if necessary or appropriate, you can follow this up with a fact-finding question (usually a closed question), such as, “Did you want to say more about the issue?”, or, “Do you have any other suggestions?”

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

PROCESS OVERVIEW

When dealing with an employee who is agitated or emotional (for example, very excited, frustrated, or angry), it can help to have a framework that we can use to guide our words and actions. We find this simple process to be very helpful.



BREAKING DOWN THE PROCESS

The first step is to acknowledge the employee's side.

- Acknowledge what they are feeling.
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings.
- Acknowledge their ideas for ways to deal with these feelings or to ease the situation.

The middle item is the bridge between you listening and you talking. You ask open questions to find out their opinions, ideas, and feelings. Only after employees have had their say do you go to the bottom three items in the funnel and:

- Inform people
- Direct them or give them instructions
- Criticize what they are doing

TIPS AND TRICKS

Here are some other tips for good communication:

- Focus on the goal (what you want to achieve).
- Pick a time and place that are conducive to having this conversation.
- Tailor the message to the other person's language, posture, background, etc.
- The outcome cannot be just what you want to happen; you must maintain the other person's self-esteem, build trust, and establish good rapport for the future.

SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

One goal of feedback is for it to contribute to an improvement in future performance. Even when it does not lead to a desired level of performance, the feedback meeting itself provides the platform to discuss expectations, results, motivation, and how to succeed. For employees who choose not to perform at an adequate level, the meeting serves as a benchmark within the larger performance management arena. If an employee refuses to comply, has been supported and coached to do well, and continues to refuse, then the supervisor has the necessary means to move into a disciplinary performance management plan.

When feedback is perceived to be negative (because of our own behavior, or perhaps because it is not well delivered), people will naturally try to avoid it, or at least minimize the negative effects. However, we need to let people know that it can be a great tool for personal development, especially when we include information on both the issues and the possible solutions. With this in mind, let's delve deeper into the six major characteristics of effective feedback.

1. IN PRIVATE

Feedback should be given in private if your comments can be embarrassing, and a formal feedback meeting should always be held in private. While some people like the attention that comes from sincere praise or celebrating an accomplishment in front of others, some do not, and no one wants negativity shared in front of their peers. (This should be apparent without having to state it, but sometimes we get excited and forget!)

2. BALANCED

Balance in this context is about designing the feedback session so that, even though there may be constructive criticism required, the employee does not feel attacked, or that all you have to say about his work is negative. We recommend that you avoid the older form of "sandwich approach" (by making a positive comment, a negative, and then a positive). However, you should still start any feedback with a positive comment about some aspect of the employee's work. If you are not comfortable with this, or not good at small talk, write some comments down ahead of time to keep yourself focused. Your employee will appreciate that you get to the heart of the meeting quickly instead of letting any anxiety build. Feedback that is delivered in specific terms and in a sincere manner is usually accepted well, even when we are receiving criticism.

3. RELEVANT

Keep the conversation focused on feedback that is relevant and job related, and to things which the employee has control over. For example, complaining about the way a letter looks when the employee only has access to an ancient printer that adds lines to everything, or asking for a sophisticated-looking brochure when there is no budget provided for the proper paper and licensed photography, only adds to the employee's stress and frustration.

4. SPECIFIC

Avoid general statements when you deliver feedback. “You seem unmotivated,” is not nearly as helpful as, “You arrived late to work at least three days a week, your last two assignments were late, and you did not attend the new employee lunch last week.”

5. DOCUMENTED

Base your comments on documentation, facts, and your own observation. Don’t rely on what another manager or a colleague told you, or what someone overheard, when you should be available to monitor what is going on yourself.

6. PERSONAL (IN THE RIGHT WAY)

Compliments or criticisms that are directed generally toward the team are meaning less to an employee. “We just don’t seem able to get out error-free invoices,” is not as constructive as, “Three of the last invoices you sent out had errors in them.” Describe the behavior that is unsatisfactory, rather than judge a person because of it. Base it on their actions, and don’t make a personal attack on the individual.

SKILL BUILDING

Think of somebody at work or at home that has earned some positive feedback. In the space below, describe the situation and the people involved. What feedback will you give?

Think of somebody at work or at home that you would like to give constructive criticism to. In the space below, describe the situation and the people involved. What feedback will you give?

RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Accepting criticism from others can be really difficult. We often hear criticism as a very personal attack on behavior that we already may not be proud of. It helps to think about criticism as feedback and as something to help you improve. This is what we refer to as positive intent.

While you may hesitate in doing this, it can be an outstanding opportunity for you to grow. It also means that you are going to follow up a feedback session by asking the other individual if your feedback was helpful, sensitive to their needs, and respectful.

Here are some tips on accepting criticism.

Listen attentively.

Make sure you understand the criticism and what needs improvement. You may even want to paraphrase the other person's remarks.

Ask for details.

Find out as much as you can about the incident(s) described. Ask lots of open ended questions to gather all the information that you can.

Find something to agree with.

You don't need to say that you were wrong if you weren't, but it does do a lot for your own integrity for you to say that you were wrong if you were. Of equal importance, you need to acknowledge the person's right to criticize and to recognize the importance of the person's concerns. If you cannot agree with the other person about any aspect of the criticism being offered, you could be perceived as rejecting the person as well.

Try not to take their comments personally.

If they've learned anything about offering feedback, they will know they need to speak to your behaviors and not your personal self, but not everyone knows this. Consider that they are being brave and offering feedback (not an easy thing for most people to do) as an opportunity to improve yourself.



COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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Learning Objectives

01 Identify

Identify and develop skills for effective communication in the workplace

02 Understanding

Deepen understanding of communication barriers


03 Strategies

Develop strategies for overcoming communication barriers through active listening skills, questioning skills, and probing techniques

04 Strengthen

Strengthen skills for providing feedback

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Communication Skills

Defining Communication (I)

What is communication?

Communication is the ability to send messages and have the other person understand those messages, even if they do not respond.



How do we communicate with others?

We communicate through writing, speaking, and body language.

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Communication Skills

Defining Communication (II)

What is your definition of a skilled communicator?



Think of a time when you are **at your best** as a communicator.

- What do you do?
- How do you act?

Think of a time when you are **at your worst** as a communicator.

- What do you do?
- How do you act?

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Communication Skills

Defining Communication (III)

01 Think of someone you know who is an excellent communicator.

02 What makes that person stand out to you?

03 What things are they doing that we could learn from?

04 Do you also see things in them that you could learn to make yourself even better at communicating?

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Communication Skills

Communication Barriers

01 Experience	08 Mood
02 Emotions	09 Wordiness
03 Background	10 Education
04 Attitudes	11 Noise Level
05 Culture	12 Ambiguity
06 Subject knowledge	13 Non-verbal messages
07 Prejudice	14 Hearing difficulties

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Communication Skills


Active Listening Skills (I)


01 Active Listening
Active listening means that we try to understand things from the speaker's point of view.

02 Listen and Understood
It includes letting the speaker know that we are listening and that we understood what was said.

03 Hearing
This is not the same as **hearing**, which is a physical process.

04 Attitude
Active listening can be described as an **attitude** that leads to listening for shared understanding.





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Communication Skills

Active Listening Skills (II)



Respond
Responding to feelings

Reading
Reading cues

Demonstration cues

- Physical indicators
- Verbal cues
- Questions for clarification
- Summarizing statements

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Communication Skills

Active Listening Skills (III)

Tips for Becoming a Better Listener

1 Make Decision
Make a decision to listen.



4 Start Conversation
Start a conversation file.

2 Don't Interrupt
Don't interrupt people.

5 Ask Questions
Ask a few **questions** throughout the conversation.

3 Keep Focus
Keep your eyes focused on the speaker and your ears tuned to their voice.

6 Demonstrate Listening Skills
When you demonstrate good listening skills, they tend to be **infectious**.

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10

Communication Skills

Questioning Skills (I)

Open Questions



Broad, general questions



Require your conversation partner to provide more than just a "yes" or "no" answer



Permit the other person to decide how much information to give

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11

Communication Skills

Questioning Skills (I)

Closed Questions



Can be answered with a single word or two, such as a simple yes or no



Can begin the closing process in a conversation or provide confirmation



Don't usually lead to a richer conversation or gathering more information


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12


Communication Skills

Probing Techniques (I)

Verbal Probes



"Tell me more about that." "That's interesting. Tell me more." "Really?" "Why?" "Can you give me a specific example of what you mean?"

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Communication Skills

Probing Techniques (II)

Non-Verbal Probes

01

Raising the eyebrows as if you are surprised

02

Nodding

04

Frowning

03

Pursing the lips

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Communication Skills

Probing Techniques (III)

Probing Techniques

- Ask an open question.
- Pause.
- Use reflective or mirroring questions.
- Paraphrase.
- Use summary questions.

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Communication Skills

The Communication Process (I)

Probing Techniques

See Their Side

-Encourage them to talk
-Recognize ideas

Build a Bridge

-Ask open questions to find out options, ideas and feelings

State Your Side

-Inform
-Direct
-Criticize

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Communication Skills

The Communication Process (II)

16

Tips and Tricks

Focus
Focus on the goal (what you want to achieve).

Message
Tailor the message to the other person's language, posture, background, etc.

Time and Place
Pick a time and place that are conducive to having this conversation.

Establish Rapport
You must maintain the other person's self-esteem, build trust, and establish good rapport.

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Providing Feedback

Six Characteristics of Effective Feedback

17

01 In private

04 Specific

02 Balanced

05 Documented

03 Relevant

06 Personal (in the right way)

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Providing Feedback

Receiving Feedback (I)

18

Accepting Criticism
Accepting criticism from others can be really difficult.

Criticism and Feedback
It helps to think about criticism as feedback and as something to help you improve.

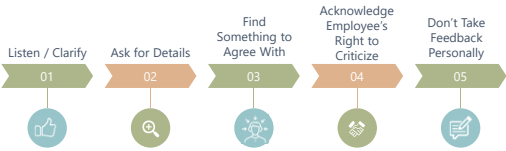
Positive Intent
This is what we refer to as **positive intent**.

Opportunity to Grow
It can be an outstanding **opportunity for you to grow**.

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Accepting Criticism

19



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