

Communication is Key to Workplace Success



Conover

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Introduction

Everything in the life revolves around communication!

Communication happens when information is shared between two people. Successful communication relies just as much on the person receiving the message as it does on the person sending the message.

Most of the time, you can't control who you communicating with, but you can increase the likelihood that your communication with others will be successful by developing your own communication skills. By improving your ability to speak clearly and understand what others are trying to say, you will increase effectiveness of your team or organization exponentially.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

When most people think of communication, they probably think of talking, or verbal communication. However, that's only one form of communication!

In addition to verbal communication, you can communicate nonverbally with body movements and by the look on your face. There is also the written form or electronic form of communication!

With each form of communication, there are different rules to guide you and help you become a better communicator.

Good communication skills will not only improve your personal relationships, but also your success in the workplace.

Good communication skills will not only help improve your personal relationships, but also your success in the workplace.

This short book will teach you the following six communication skills to improve your communication in the workplace:

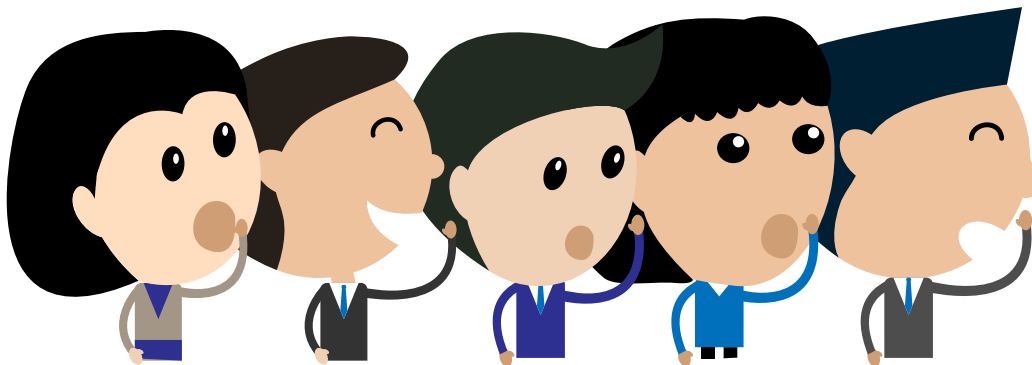
- 1** *Listening*
- 2** *Verbal Communication*
- 3** *Nonverbal Communication*
- 4** *Emotional Awareness*
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Chapter 1: *Listening*

You Have Two Ears and One Mouth

Have you ever played the “telephone game”? The way it works is one person whispers a word or phrase to another person, who whispers it to the next person and so on, until it gets back to the original person. In most cases by the time the phrase gets back to the beginning, it has changed dramatically from the original phrase. Somewhere along the way, someone misheard what was said, and passed the wrong word or phrase on to the next person, and this was amplified as the message went along.

So, what caused the wrong message to be heard, and how can we keep this same mistake from happening again?



The telephone game proves that there is a difference between simply hearing and listening. We use our sense of hearing every day. When people speak to us, we hear them talking. We hear music on the radio, and we hear the birds chirping when we walk outside.

But what does it mean to listen?

A lot of people don't realize this, but listening is the most important part of communicating.

Listening is not the same as simply hearing. When you listen to someone speak, you are engaged with them, and making an effort to understand exactly what they are trying to say.

When people don't listen to each other, the entire communication process breaks down. In order to be an effective communicator you must first learn to be a good listener.

FOCUS ON THE PERSON SPEAKING

How many times have you "listened" to someone, only to have no idea what he said by the time he finished speaking? You heard him or her talking, but you didn't listen to what was said. This happens because you were distracted by something, which kept you from really hearing what was said. Maybe it was someone else in the room, or perhaps it was your own thoughts that kept you from focusing.

Let's take a look at a situation that happens on a daily basis. A manager (Stefan) is giving his employee (Andrew) some instructions in a busy office and is impressed that she is able to focus on what he is telling her.

Stefan: Once you finish writing the guest list I'd like you to call the reception hall to confirm the date. Then start working on writing the invitations. Did you get all that? I know it's crazy in here today with lots of distractions.

Andrew: I think so. You want me to finish the guest list, call the reception hall and start writing the invitations. Am I missing anything?

Stefan: No that covers everything. I'm impressed you were able to catch everything with so many distractions in here!

Andrew: I just tried to block out everything else around me and focus on what you were telling me.

Stefan: Listening is a great skill to have in this profession. Keep up the good work!

In order to really listen, you need to focus when people are speaking and try to understand what they are saying.

Look at the person who is speaking, whether the person is talking only to you or to you and 100 other people. If you are having a conversation with one other person, make eye contact with the person as you listen. If you notice your mind wandering or your eyes moving away from the speaker, force yourself to bring your attention back to the speaker.

This takes some practice, but it is extremely important to learn as it shows the person speaking that you are interested in what they are saying to you.

MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND

Sometimes, no matter how well you listen, you just can't quite understand what is said. Maybe the speaker used a word that you don't know the meaning or is talking about a topic that you don't understand. For whatever reason, the speaker finishes talking and you still don't quite understand what was said. It's important to recognize when you don't understand what was said and then ask the speaker to explain what she meant.

This will help with two things:

- 1** You'll understand what exactly the speaker meant
- 2** The speaker will feel like you are really listening to him or her. This process can be used in any setting, big or small.

WAIT FOR YOUR TURN TO SPEAK

When listening to people speak, let them finish talking before responding to what they have said. It is impolite to interrupt someone, or talk before the person is finished talking. It's distracting and could cause them to forget what they were going to say. If you think of something you want to say while a person is talking, save your question or comment until they are done. If you are in a meeting or lecture where the speaker will be talking for a long time, it is a good idea to write down your comment or question and save it for the end.

Imagine a manager running a meeting about a new vacation policy. Before he can further

explain that they are not cutting vacation days an employee interrupts and goes off on a tangent on how she has vacation already planned. Now, she has to cut short her vacation and figure out how she is going to get her security deposit back on the all inclusive she paid for. Little did she know, that the manager is changing the process in which you ask for days off, not giving less vacation. If the employee just waited to ask her question instead of interrupting the whole situation would have been avoided.

SHOW INTEREST

When having a conversation, try to show the person who is talking that you are interested in what they are saying. When you fail to show interest while listening, it is distracting to the person speaking. Instead of focusing on what they want to say, they will wonder whether or not you're paying attention.

Not only is it respectful to show interest when someone is talking to you, but it also helps you to focus on what is being said. Here are a few ways to show interest while someone is talking to you:

- Make eye contact
- Nod your head to show you understand
- Respond by changing your facial expressions
- Respond by talking

REPEAT WHAT WAS SAID IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Even if you think you understood what was said, it's important to rephrase, or repeat what was said out loud and in your own words. Repeating it in your own words forces you to put thought into what was said. This will help you to better understand the message and will help make it stick in your mind. This gives the speaker a chance to correct you if you heard wrong or didn't quite understand the message.

This active listening technique is something that sounds redundant, but it really does help. Think about how many times someone said one thing only to mean something else. You can eliminate mistakes and improve efficiency when you repeat what was said in your own words.

Chapter 2: *Verbal Communication*

Talk to Me



“If you can’t explain it to a six year old, you don’t understand it yourself.”

Albert Einstein

Verbal communication is sharing information with the use of speech or language. More simply stated, verbal communication is talking. Now I know you’re probably thinking, ‘I already know how to talk, why do I need to learn about talking?’ While that’s true, there are verbal communication skills that go beyond talking. These skills will help you succeed in the workplace.

If verbal communication was really that simple, there wouldn’t be nearly as many arguments in the workplace. That’s because a lot of arguments happen as a result of misunderstandings, originally caused by poor communication. For example, maybe a word you used offended a customer, but you didn’t even realize you offended the person. If you had chosen your words more carefully, the misunderstanding might not have happened.

If you’ve never thought about verbal communication skills before now, it will take some time and practice to learn. Start by focusing on these five verbal communication skills:

- 1 *Speaking clearly*
- 2 *Choosing your words carefully*
- 3 *Using the appropriate tone*
- 4 *Considering your audience*
- 5 *Responding appropriately*

1. Speaking Clearly

A great place to start when learning verbal communication skills is speaking clearly. It doesn't matter what words you say if you don't say them clearly enough for someone else to understand them. In order to speak clearly, talk loudly enough for the other person to hear you easily. The second part of speaking clearly requires that you pronounce, or say, your words completely. Sometimes we get lazy in our speech and forget to fully or correctly pronounce words. When you're in the workplace, focus on sounding out each syllable so that the person you're talking to can understand you easily.

Situation: An employee (Joshua) is frustrated because customers can never understand him over the phone. His coworker (Toby) suggests that he works on speaking more clearly.

Joshua: There must be something wrong with my phone. Customers are always asking me to repeat myself. It's hard to be an effective salesman when potential customers can't understand me!

Toby: It might be your phone, or maybe it's the way you're speaking?

Joshua: What do you mean?

Toby: Well maybe you're not talking loudly or clearly enough for people on the other end of the phone to understand you. That could be why customers are always asking you to repeat yourself.

Joshua: Oh, I guess I never thought of that but maybe you're right.

Toby: Next time you're on a call, make an effort to talk clearly into the phone and pay attention to the way you pronounce your words. See if that makes a difference.

Joshua: Thanks, I'll try that!

2. Choosing Your Words Carefully

Now that you've learned to speak clearly, it's time to start focusing on your words. It's always important to put thought into the words that you say, but it's especially important in the workplace.

The words you use should be appropriate by anyone's standards. If you ever find yourself wondering whether or not a word is appropriate for the workplace, it's probably best not to use it.

Practice using words that show your intelligence and professionalism. Learn and understand the buzzwords, or words that are important in your industry. Use these buzzwords when talking with your co-workers, supervisor and customers when it is appropriate.

Situation: A nurse (Lisa) is explaining a medical procedure to a patient (Shirley) using professional language.

Lisa: We'll need to take a blood sample to check your white blood cell count. If it's high that could be a sign of infection and we'll want to prescribe you some antibiotics.

Shirley: Okay, that sounds like a good plan to me. Thanks for taking the time to explain this to me. I can tell you know what you're talking about but it's nice to have a nurse who uses words I actually understand.

Lisa: Any time! Just doing my job!

Shirley: It seems like a lot of nurses and doctors like to use confusing medical terminology in order to impress their patients.

Lisa: I always try to use words that are relevant but still easy to understand, but if you ever find yourself confused by a word I use please don't hesitate to stop me and ask about it.

Shirley: Thanks, I will.

3. Using the Appropriate Tone

Your tone, or sound of your voice, says a lot about what you're saying and how you feel. Even if the words you use are nice, if your tone isn't nice, your message might sound angry. For example, if you tell your coworker "Good job," but you say it in an angry tone, she might think you don't really mean what you say.

When thinking about an appropriate tone, think about how you're feeling. Also think about how you want the person you're talking with to feel.

Situation: A manager (Terry) talks with his employee (Dominick) about his tone of voice and the impression it gives to others.

Terry: How's it going today, Dominick?

Dominick: (In a bored tone of voice) It's going good, I just got done restocking produce.

Terry: Great! Nice work. Hey, I just wanted to talk to you about something while you're here. Are you enjoying your work?

Dominick: (Still in a bored tone) Sure, I like what I do.

Terry: Well, the reason I ask is that your tone of voice gives me the impression that you are bored and don't really care about your work. But you do good work, so I

wanted to check with you before I jump to the wrong conclusion.

Dominick: No, I sure like working here. I'm sorry if that's the impression I gave off.

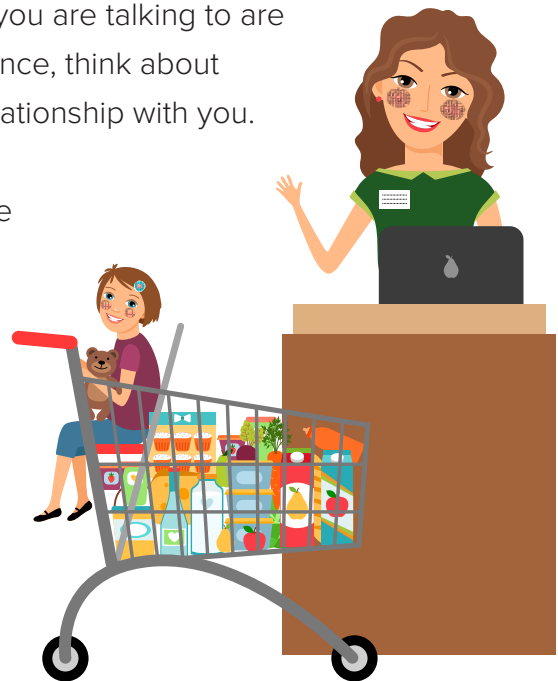
Terry: That's okay. Maybe just pay attention to your tone of voice while you're at work. Your attitude says a lot about you, even if it's not your intention.

Dominick: I will. Thanks for the advice.

4. Considering Your Audience

Sometimes you might want to change your communication style or how you communicate, depending on who you are talking with. The people you are talking to are called your audience. When you consider your audience, think about characteristics of that person or persons and their relationship with you.

For example, you will probably use different language and tone when talking to a 7-year-old customer than you would use when talking to your manager. When talking to a 7-year-old, you probably want to use more simple words so that they can understand you. You might also use a nice, happy tone to make the child feel comfortable. When talking to your manager, you can use more advanced words, and you'll want your tone to be more professional.



5. Responding Appropriately

An important part of communication is listening to someone speak and then responding to what the person says. Responding appropriately requires that you think before you speak. When you respond automatically, you risk saying something you don't mean and possibly offending the other person.

In the workplace, you will have some difficult conversations. For example, your manager might give you some negative feedback, or criticism about your work. It's especially important to think about your response in conversations like this. Your emotions are probably

telling you to respond defensively, or angrily. But, if you stop and think about your response before you say it, you can respond in a more professional manner.

Situation: An employee (Chad) overhears his coworker (Mike) getting criticized by a customer and responding appropriately to the criticism.

Customer: I thought I told you I wanted the soup, not salad! Weren't you listening?

Mike: Oh, I'm so sorry! I must have looked at the wrong ticket. I'll bring your soup out right away. (Walks away from the table)

Chad: You handled that well. Doesn't it make you upset when customers talk to you that way?

Mike: Yeah, sort of. But I've learned that it's best to just stay calm in situations like this. Getting worked up and telling the customer how you really feel won't help the situation.

Chad: Yeah, I suppose. What's your secret for staying so calm?

Mike: I just take a moment to collect myself before I say anything so that I don't say something I might regret.

Chad: Sounds like a good strategy. I'll have to try that next time.

Chapter 3: *Nonverbal Communication*

Now, Stop Talking

Although verbal communication is important, spoken words make up only a small part of communication. The majority of communication is nonverbal, or communicating without words. In fact, some research has shown that 93% of communication is nonverbal! The amount of communication that is nonverbal shows why it is so important to pay close attention to people's actions as well as their words.

So what is nonverbal communication? Nonverbal communication is made up of facial expressions, or the look on your face, and body language, or movements. Understanding these nonverbal cues will help you to fully understand what the speaker is trying to tell you. It will also help you to be a better communicator as you get a better understanding of the nonverbal cues you are sending.

The following nonverbal communication skills will help you to be a better communicator in the workplace:

- 1 *Reading Nonverbal Cues*
- 2 *Sending nonverbal cues.*
- 3 *Considering personality differences*
- 4 *Considering the situation*
- 5 *Observing people*

1. Reading Nonverbal Cues

Nonverbal communication makes up a large part of what people are saying to you. If you don't understand nonverbal communication, you will miss out on part of the message. Nonverbal cues can tell you how people feel, if they are telling the truth, and whether or not they are paying attention.

So what are nonverbal cues and how to you learn to read them? Here is a list of common nonverbal cues that can tell you a lot about what a person is saying.

- Eye contact
- Pace or speed of speech
- Crossed arms or legs
- Posture, or body position
- Facial expressions

Now that you know some nonverbal cues to watch for, you can start looking at what they might mean. When reading nonverbal communication, pay attention to differences between what the people are saying and what they are doing.

See if you can identify the person's emotion based on facial expression.



2. Sending nonverbal cues

Just as you try to read nonverbal cues given by other people, people are trying to read the nonverbal cues you send. When your words don't match up with your facial expressions, body language and posture, people will notice. They might not actually think, "This person's nonverbal communication doesn't match their words," but they will instead notice feelings of mistrust, uncertainty and confusion when talking to you.

Situation: A manager (Becky) is talking to an employee (Audrey) who is failing to make eye contact. When the employee leaves, she expresses his feelings of mistrust to a second employee (Maria).

Becky: What do you think, will you have the report finished by Friday?

Audrey: (failing to make eye contact) Yeah, I think I can have it wrapped up by then.

Becky: Okay, great! I'll let you get to it.

(Audrey leaves)

Becky: There's something about her that I just don't trust. I can't put my finger on it though. She's never done anything to lose my trust, so I'm not sure why I feel this way.

Maria: Well I noticed she wasn't looking you in the eye when he answered you. I always think it's hard to trust someone who doesn't make eye contact.

Becky: Yeah, maybe that's it.

Maria: And who knows, maybe she's just nervous, but you can't help but feel a little uneasy when talking to her.

Becky: Definitely. Well, I'll give her some time. Maybe as she starts to feel more comfortable working here her nonverbal communication will improve.

It's hard to control your nonverbal cues. That's because we do them without really thinking. While we can think about our words and control what we say, nonverbal communication happens automatically.

One way to avoid sending confusing or uncomfortable nonverbal cues is to always tell the truth. When you're telling the truth, your nonverbal cues will naturally match up with your words. When you tell the truth, you actually believe the words you're saying, so your

actions don't show some other emotion or feeling.

Situation: A chef (Matt) asking his coworker (Elle) her opinion about a new dish, and he can tell before she even answers what the answer will be.

Matt: What did you think about last night's dinner special?

Elle: *(shaking her head no)* To be honest, it wasn't my favorite. I thought the sauce was a little too overpowering.

Matt: I knew you were going to tell it to me straight. I could tell by the look on your face as soon as I mentioned the special that you must not have been crazy about it.

Elle: Sorry, I didn't mean to criticize, I just thought I should have been honest with you.

Matt: That's okay, I appreciate your honesty. Anyway, I can usually tell when someone's not being honest with me by their nonverbal cues. I'd rather you gave it to me straight than try to hide it from me.

3. Considering personality differences

Unfortunately, the rules of nonverbal communication are not always black and white. This means there are no set rules that tell you what each nonverbal cue means. Everyone is different, and these personality differences should be considered when trying to understand nonverbal cues.

For example, people who have a more serious personality may not smile or laugh to show that they are happy. That doesn't mean they're angry or sad, it's just the way their personality affects their communication.

4. Considering the situation

Just as different personalities can affect nonverbal communication, different situations can also affect the nonverbal cues people send. For example, a stressful situation might cause someone to speak faster. In a normal situation, this might be a sign that a person feels nervous or is trying to hide something. However, given the stressful situation, the person might just be talking faster because of stress.

Situation: A manager (Chris) is talking to his employee (Paul) in his office. He has a big stack of paperwork and is trying to meet an important deadline so he's under a lot of stress.

Chris: Have you had a chance to look over that file I sent you earlier?

Paul: (Looking stressed, talking fast and failing to make eye contact) Just briefly. I've had a lot of stuff on my plate right now so how about I take another look at it and get back to you tomorrow morning.

Chris: Sure that's fine. Is something wrong? You look anxious about something.

Paul: Well, yeah actually i'm a little stressed out about this project i'm working. I got to have the first draft done by the end of the day and I got a ton of work to do on it still.

Chris: Alright, I'll get out of your way then. Just let me know if there's anything I can do to help.

Always think about the situation before making any conclusions about a person's nonverbal message. Think about things that could be causing a person to feel and act a certain way and take that into account when reading nonverbal cues.

5. Observing people

Reading nonverbal communication is a skill that takes time to learn. You can improve your ability to read nonverbal communication by observing or paying attention to people as

they talk. Start by simply watching for nonverbal cues without trying to read into them, or draw conclusions.

As you get more comfortable spotting these cues you can start to think about what the person is trying to tell you without actually saying it.

Chapter 4: *Emotional Awareness*

Do You *Really* Understand Me?

Feelings play a big role in communication. Emotional awareness, or understanding feelings, will help you succeed when communicating with other people. If you are emotionally aware, you will communicate better. You will notice the emotions of other people, and how the way they are feeling influences the way they communicate. You will also better understand what others are communicating to you and why. Sometimes, understanding how a person is communicating with you is more important than what is actually being said.

Have you ever tried to hide your feelings? It's pretty hard for most of us to do. That's because emotions don't lie. Instead of trying to hide or ignore your feelings, focus on becoming aware of your feelings and the feelings of those around you in order to be a better communicator.

You can improve your emotional awareness by focusing on these five skills:

- 1 *Consider Other People's Feelings*
- 2 *Consider Your Own Feelings*
- 3 *Have Empathy*
- 4 *Operate on Trust*
- 5 *Recognize Misunderstandings*

1. Consider Other People's' Feelings

Have you ever finished a conversation with someone and found yourself wondering, "Why

did she tell me that?” or, “I wonder why he talked to me like that?”

For example, a coworker might tell you something personal that doesn't seem important for you to know. Or a supervisor might seem angry with you for no reason. Finding out why can tell you a lot about what a person is trying to tell you.

To figure out why, think about what the other person is feeling. Consider any situations that may be affecting their emotions and how that might in turn affect what they say to you.

Situation: A manager (Ron) snaps at his employee (Jim). A coworker (Christian) sees it and talks to the employee about it.

Ron: Not now, Jim! I don't have time!

(Ron walks away)

Christian: (to Jim) Wow, what was that about?

Jim: I don't know. I just went to ask him a question about the new software and he snapped at me.

Christian: That's weird. You didn't do anything wrong.

Jim: Yeah, I know he's been under a lot of pressure lately, maybe all of the stress just got the better of him.

Christian: I bet you're right. I'd probably be on edge too if I were in his shoes.

2. Consider Your Own Feelings

Just as other people's' feelings can affect the message they're trying to send, your own feelings can get in the way of your communication as well. When you feel a strong emotion or feeling, pay attention to that emotion and try not to let it get in the way of your message. Both positive emotions, like happiness, and negative emotions, like anger, can get in the way of communication.

For example, if you're really happy about something, you might agree to do things that you shouldn't or wouldn't normally agree to do. On the other hand, if you're angry, you might say something mean to someone who has nothing to do with your being angry. When you have a good understanding of your own feelings, you will notice these emotions and try not to let them get in the way of your communication.

Situation: An employee (Tony) telling his coworker (Zack) how he took on a project that he shouldn't have because he was in a good mood when his manager asked him about it.

Tony: I think I'm in trouble.

Zack: Why? What happened?

Tony: I told Jessica that I would finish taking inventory for her department but I still haven't even started inventory for my own department. I'll never get it all done by the end of the month.

Zack: Oh, yeah you might be in a bit over your head. Why did you agree to do her work?

Tony: When she asked me I had just finished a big project and thought I would be able to handle it. She caught me in a good mood so I guess I let my emotions get in the way of reality.

Zack: Sounds like it. Well let me know if there's anything I can do to help.

3. Have Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and relate to the feelings of someone else. Once you've learned to recognize another person's feelings, you can go one step further and actually relate to those feelings.

For example, if you notice that a co-worker seems stressed, you should try to find out why. If she tells you she is stressed out because she doesn't have a lot of time to finish a big project, you can empathize with her by putting yourself in her shoes. That means, you can imagine yourself in this situation and you can understand what that person must be feeling.

Situation: An employee (Noah) is explaining what it means to have empathy to his coworker (Katie).

Katie: I can't believe Pete is cutting our break times! It's so unfair!

Noah: Well, you saw last month's letter from corporate, didn't you? They're really pressuring the branches to increase production, so Pete must think this is the best way to do it.

Katie: I always thought Pete was such a nice boss, but this move has me questioning whether or not he really cares about us.

Noah: I don't know about that. Just try to empathize with him.

Katie: What do you mean?

Noah: He's the one who has to answer to corporate if we fail to meet our goal. Try to put yourself in his shoes.

Katie: Yeah, I guess you're right. If I had that much pressure to improve performance I would probably try anything to get the job done.

Noah: Right! And I'm sure there are much worse things he could have done.

When you have empathy for a person, you can think about how you would want to be talked to or what you would like other people to say or do if you were in that situation. Going back to the example with your coworker, you could offer to help your coworker with the

project or offer some words of encouragement.

Situation: *The employee (Noah) from the previous section is showing empathy by reassuring his manager (Pete) about his decision to cut break times.*

Noah: Hi Pete. I noticed you look a little stressed lately. Do you want to talk about what's going on?

Pete: Thanks, I appreciate your concern. I'm in a tough situation with corporate pressuring us to increase productivity. I cut break times thinking that would help, but my employees seem to be upset with me over the change. I just wish i could find a way to make everyone happy.

Noah: Well you never win by trying to please everyone. I think it was a good idea to cut break times and I'm sure it wasn't easy but it needed to be done.

Pete: That's what I was thinking. Thanks for putting yourself in my shoes. I just wish I could get other staff to see it that way too.

Noah: Well, I'm sure eventually everyone will come around to your way of thinking.

4. Operate on Trust

Good communication requires you to build trust between yourself and the person with whom you're communicating. You can earn the trust of others by sending nonverbal cues that match your words.

For example, shaking your head no while you're saying yes will send a confusing message. The difference between your verbal and nonverbal communication could cause the other person to question whether or not you're telling the truth. Make sure that you always tell the truth, and you can avoid these confusing situations.

Situation: A customer (Tom) tells an auto mechanic (Jerry) how much he trusts him.

Jerry: Well, Tom, it looks like it's time for new brakes. You could probably get by for another month or so but I wouldn't leave it any longer than that.

Tom: I was afraid of that. Did anything else come up in your inspection?

Jerry: The cost of replacing your brakes are more than you budgeted for. There are a few small maintenance repairs that I would recommend but you can probably wait another 5,000 miles or so.

Tom: Okay. Thanks for the heads up and for your honesty. That's what keeps me coming back to your shop. I know you guys to give me a fair assessment and you won't try to sell me a bunch of stuff I don't need.

Jerry: *(Shaking the customer's hand)* That's why we are here. Nice to know we have earned your trust.

It's also important to trust your instincts when it comes to reading people's' emotions and nonverbal cues. If your instincts tell you that something is strange about the way a person is communicating to you, push yourself to look into it. If you don't, you will find yourself questioning the person you're talking to, and you could develop feelings of mistrust for no reason.

5. Recognize Misunderstandings

A misunderstanding happens when two people think they are on the same page about something, but in reality they are thinking two different things. Misunderstandings happen all the time, but emotional awareness can help you to avoid misunderstandings. Misunderstandings are often caused by confusing emotions.

For example, if your coworker is upset about something, they might talk to you as if they are angry with you, even if they are not. It's tempting to walk away from this type of con-

versation feeling like your coworker is mad at you, but this would just result in a misunderstanding. Instead, recognize that your coworker is upset about something else and probably didn't mean to take their anger out on you

Chapter 5: *Written Communication*

Do the Write Thing

Writing is another form of communication, and it's one that is becoming more and more popular as people communicate through text messages, instant messages, and email. Just like verbal and nonverbal communication, written communication has its own set of rules. Whether you're writing a simple email or an important report, you should try to write professionally by using proper grammar and punctuation.

In some ways, written communication is easier than communicating face-to-face. For example there are no nonverbal cues to distract from the message. On the other hand this can lead to more challenges. It is very difficult to show and read emotions in writing. Written communication must be clear and concise to properly convey the message.

Follow these five tips for better written communication in the workplace:

- 1 *Writing for Your Audience*
- 2 *Use Correct Spelling and Grammar*
- 3 *Be Professional*
- 4 *Avoid Slang and Abbreviate Words*
- 5 *Consider Your Tone*

1. Write for Your Audience

Writing in the workplace can take on many different forms. The following are examples of the different types of written communication you will use at work:

- Reports
- Emails
- Memos
- Support Tickets or Requests
- Letters
- Instant Messages

What you're writing and to whom will determine how you write. For example, if you're writing a memo to your entire department, you might write in a more professional style than if you are writing a quick email to your coworker. It's important to think about who will be reading what you write and how you want the readers to react and respond.

2. Use Correct Spelling and Grammar

No matter who will be reading what you write, it's important to use correct spelling and grammar. Usually when you write in the workplace, you will be typing on a computer. Use the computer's spelling and grammar checking tools to check your work for any spelling or grammar errors.

It's also a good idea to read over your writing to check for errors that spell check and grammar check might not catch. For example, you might have used the wrong form of a word or repeated a word without meaning to. These are mistakes that only a human brain would notice, so it's not always safe to trust the computer. If what you are writing is very important, you might even consider having another person read it after you have finished checking for errors.



3. Be Professional

Professionalism in your writing is expected in the workplace. Not only should the quality of your writing be professional, but also the topic. This means avoid writing inappropriate jokes or words. Keep the topic of your writing focused on work and avoid bringing up personal issues that are unrelated to work.

Remember, once something is in writing, it is permanent. Avoid writing anything that you wouldn't want other people to read, not just the person to whom you are writing. For ex-

ample, if you're writing an email to your coworker, it should be professional enough that if your supervisor would happen to read it, you would not be worried about it.

4. Avoid Slang and Abbreviated Words

When we communicate with our friends in writing, it's common to use abbreviations, or shortened words, to save time. For example, when texting on your phone or sending an instant message, you might not take the time to spell out an entire word, but abbreviate, or shorten the word.

When writing in the professional settings, get into the habit of spelling out the whole word and avoid abbreviations. You should also avoid using slang, or the informal form of words. Not only are these practices more professional, but you can also avoid confusing situations and misunderstandings. When you use slang words and abbreviations, there's a risk that the reader will misunderstand what you wrote.

5. Consider Your Tone

Your tone, or the sound of your voice, says a lot about what you're trying to communicate in verbal communication. However, in written communication, tone can be difficult to read.

For example, sarcasm and humor are two tones that are hard to notice and read in written communication. Instead of coming across as funny, these two tones tend to either make you sound negative, angry or unintelligent. When you're writing in the workplace, avoid using humor and sarcasm to avoid misunderstanding

Chapter 6: *Communicating in Difficult Situations*

Dealing with Difficult Situations

You face difficult situations every day in the workplace. Whether you're working with a stubborn coworker, a pushy salesperson or an angry customer, it's important to handle these situations professionally.

Each situation is different and will require you to respond and communicate in a way that is appropriate for each situation. Although you can't always avoid difficult situations, good communication skills will help you to handle them better.

Here are five possible situations you might face in the workplace along with communication tips to help you handle each situation professionally:

- 1 *Giving criticism*
- 2 *Receiving criticism*
- 3 *Delivering bad news*
- 4 *Saying "no"*
- 5 *Questioning*

1. Giving Criticism

Nobody is perfect and everyone makes mistakes. Keep this in mind as you face difficult situations in the workplace. It will help you to give criticism in a helpful or positive way. Although criticism sounds like a negative thing, it is necessary in order for honesty and excellence to exist at work.

For example, let's say that your co-worker is filling orders in the wrong order. If you don't criticize, or tell them what they are doing wrong, your co-worker will continue to do the work poorly.

It's not always easy to give criticism. It feels uncomfortable to point out another person's mistake because you don't know how the person will react. The person you're criticizing could be offended or angry that you pointed out their mistake. Follow these tips for giving criticism in a helpful or positive way:

- 1 Talk to the person in a private location so you don't criticize them in front of others
- 2 Make eye contact
- 3 Make the criticism about the behavior, not the person
- 4 Offer advice on how to improve
- 5 End on a positive note or by giving a compliment

2. Receiving Criticism

Sometimes being criticized is even harder than giving criticism. Think of criticism as a positive thing and try to learn from it rather than taking it as a negative or an insult. Follow these tips for receiving criticism and responding to it in a positive way:

- 1 Listen to what the person is telling you
- 2 Consider their advice
- 3 Avoid responding defensively or angrily
- 4 Thank them for their advice
- 5 Try to follow their advice the next time you have the opportunity

Situation: A manager (Susan) is criticising an employee (Shannon) about a report she turned in.

Susan: Shannon, I just finished looking over your report. Everything looks good, but I need you to start tracking weekly growth rates, not just monthly.

Shannon: Okay, I can do that. I didn't realize we needed to show weekly growth in the report.

Susan: Yes, I'd like you to. Plus, it will make your job easier when it's time to put the final report together at the end of the year.

Shannon: Thanks for the advice. I'll be sure to include that in next month's report.

Not everyone you work with will be helpful or positive in the way they give criticism. You will likely experience people who criticize you in a way that seems offensive or insensitive. If this happens, remind yourself that they are probably just trying to help and accept their feedback.

It's important not to get upset and to respond in a respectful manner. If you find the offensive behavior continues, consider talking to the person or your supervisor about it.

Situation: An employee (Kristin) handles some harsh criticism from her coworker (Rachel) in a calm, professional manner.

Rachel: Oh my gosh, you ordered the wrong cups! These won't fit in the new dispenser. I can't believe you did that!

Kristin: Oh no! Sorry about that. I forgot we changed brands.

Rachel: You better figure out how to fix this!

(Rachel walks away)

Anna: *(talking to Kristin)* Geez, what's wrong with her?

Kristin: I don't know, she must be having a bad day.

Anna: Well, that's still no reason to talk to you like that. If it happens again I would say something, either to her or a manager if you don't feel comfortable confronting her.

Kristin: Yeah, you're right. I'm usually pretty good about handling criticism but that was uncalled for.

3. Delivering Bad News

Not many people enjoy delivering bad news. Although you never know exactly how the person will react, you do know that they won't be happy about what you have to say. However, the way you deliver the news might help the person respond better to what you have to say. Here are 5 tips to help you deliver bad news:

- 1 Speak in a calm, clear voice
- 2 Give background information and explain why this happened
- 3 Show empathy
- 4 Offer solutions to make the situation better
- 5 Focus on the positive and talk about what possible good could come of this situation

Situation: A manager (Eric) is telling his employee (Aaron) that he needs him to work over the weekend after he already made plans with his friends.

Eric: I'm afraid I have some bad news to tell you.

Aaron: Uh oh. What is it?

Eric: Well, I know we said we would give you the weekend off but we are going to need you to work.

Aaron: But I already had plans this weekend. I was going to go to the game with my friends.

Eric: I know, I'm very sorry. With Anthony quitting unexpectedly we are very short staffed.

Aaron: Yeah, Normally I wouldn't mind, but I already spent money on these tickets.

Eric: I know, and that's really unfortunate. I could try to help you sell the tickets if that's any help. That way you wouldn't be out of pocket.

Aaron: Yeah, I guess that would be a big help. Thank you.

4. Saying "No."

Have you ever been in a situation where you wanted to say "no" to someone, but instead you said "yes" simply because it was easier? Sometimes it's tempting to do this because you're afraid that saying "no" will disappoint the person. Other times, you say "yes" because the person you're talking to pushed you into saying "yes."

Learning to say "no" is a valuable skill in the workplace. It can help you stand up to a pushy salesperson or turn down a request to help with a project that you don't have time to do. No matter who you're saying "no" to, it's important that you say it with confidence. Speaking confidently will prevent people from questioning your response or thinking there's a chance they can get you to change your answer. If it helps you feel better about saying "no" you can justify your answer by explaining why you have to say "no."

Situation: An employee (Art) turns down a salesperson (Jordan) and his coworker (Dustin) takes note.

Jordan: This is a one-time offer that will save you a ton of money. Trust me, you don't want to miss out on this deal.

Art: No thank you. We already have an Internet provider that we like.

Jordan: Okay, well take my card and let me know if you ever change your mind.

Thank you for your time!

(Jordan leaves)

Dustin: *(talking to Art)* Wow, you made that look easy! Those pesky salespeople always get me to buy whatever they're selling.

Art: Yeah, I always feel bad saying no. But I really don't have time to listen to every salesperson that approaches me. The trick is to just be honest with the person and be confident in your response.

Dustin: Well it definitely worked on that guy. I'll have to work on saying "no" to people more often.

5. Questioning

In the workplace, people will have ideas that you don't agree with. Sometimes it might seem easier to just let it go and move on. However, if you never question ideas, you might miss out on a better way of doing something.

When you decide to question an idea, it is important to do it in a polite, respectful way. Speak in a kind, calm voice and choose your words carefully. Try not to offend the person you are questioning so they feel comfortable responding to your challenge.

For example, instead of asking, "Why did you do that?" say, "I'm not sure I understand why you did it that way. Could you please explain your process to me?" Asking the question this way does not point the finger of blame, it simply shows that you're trying to understand something.