

Using Effective Communication to Manage Conflict

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I. Introduction

Training Summary

Effective communication is an essential element of healthy and respectful relationships. While most individuals believe that they are good communicators, most of us run into communication difficulties from time to time. These difficulties can lead to disrespect and conflict when not handled appropriately.

This seminar will assist participants in reviewing effective communication strategies in order to foster respect in the lay/pro relationship.

II. Effective Communication

- Is an assumed skill.
- Enables you to lead others.
- Involves getting things accomplished through others
- Requires the trust of the lay leaders and professionals involved
- Includes speaking, listening and non-verbal communication

Communication Breakdown

- When parties involved are not listening.
- When someone tries to provide feedback before the sender has finished giving information.
- Result from defensiveness and trying to think of a "comeback".
- Can occur as a result of:
 - Poor eye contact
 - Distracting surrounding
 - Preoccupied thoughts

Nonverbal Cues

- Facial expressions
- Eye contact.
- Tapping of fingers or feet
- Arms crossed/ relaxed
- Shrugging shoulders
- Looking bored or distracted
- Clenched fists
- Lifting of brows or furrowed brows
- Posture
- Head nodding

Activity #1: Listening Inventory: Read each statement below and then check yourself honestly. Think generally about your everyday listening habits in the office, at home, in social situations, etc. There is no "right" answer. Do not think about a specific individual.

	Almost Always	Usually	Occasionally	Seldom	Almost Never
1. Listen even if the subject is dry and boring.					
2. I interrupt if the speaker is too slow or I know what they mean					
3. I watch for nonverbal messages					
4. I get distracted by things going on around me or other thoughts					
5. While listening, I pay attention to my eye contact, posture and facial expressions					
6. Mentally I find myself criticizing the speakers delivery, tone of voice, dress, physical features, etc.					
7. I ask questions to make certain I understand the speaker					
8. While listening, I am also thinking about what I will say when I have a chance.					
9. I know my ho buttons and try to keep hold of my emotions					
10. I tune out technical material.					

Score for Listening Inventory

Score all odd numbered items first.

For all odd numbered items score yourself in the following manner: Each Time you checked:

Almost Always	10 points
Usually	8 points
Occasionally	6 points
Seldom	4 points
Almost Never	2 points

For all even numbered items score yourself in the following manner: Each time you checked:

Almost Always	2 points
Usually	4 points
Occasionally	6 points
Seldom	8 points
Almost Never	10 points

Total Score _____

90-100 you are an amazing listener!

70-89 you are still above average but could use a little help.

0-69 Stay here! You need further training in this very important skill

III. Active Listening Skills

Open Ended Questions:

Direct Questions:	Seek more information and widen possibilities.
Factual Questions:	Request clarification on a specific point.
Provocative Questions:	Inquire about reasons provided for a particular point of view.
Redirected Questions:	Shows the sender that you understand what was said through reflection.

Paraphrase

- Literally used to express someone else's words in your own language.
- Verifies that the listener has heard the speaker correctly and that the speaker clearly sent his/her message; when successful, the next phase of communication, often problem solving, may begin.
- Deals with, interpretation, feeling and meaning.
- Benefits all communication participants.

"I" Statements and Feedback

- Avoid "You" statements: they automatically put the receiver on the defense.
- Be prepared to accept feedback in addition to providing it- communication is a two way street.
- Ensure that feedback is concrete and constructive.
- Avoid discussing personality traits when giving feedback. Focus behaviors/actions that a person can control
- Center on current behavior; do not reference hearsay or second hand information.
- When providing feedback, limit your perceptions to one issue. If more than one issue must be addressed, do not address them all at one time.
- Remember that feedback can be both positive and negative. Try to give positive feedback on every discussion.

IV. Examples of Effective Communication Skills

DESCRIBE the other person's behavior or the situation being reacted to specifically and objectively. When you... When this... When I...

EXPRESS your feeling reaction to the other person's behavior or the situation in a non--evaluative way. I feel...

EXPLAIN effects the person's behavior has on you. Because...

SPECIFY one or two behavior changes you would like the other person to make (ask for agreement). I would prefer...I want...I would like...

CLARIFY the consequences you are prepared to carry through if behavior does or does not change.

Positive Consequences: If you do....

Negative Consequences: If you don't...

Tips for Receiving Feedback

- a. Listen carefully, without comment, looking directly at the person; don't allow yourself to be distracted.
- b. Be aware that you may hear things you do not like. Try not to be defensive, rather, be objective.
- c. Ask open ended questions or paraphrase when you want clarification.
- d. Let the person know you understand what she/he is saying.
- e. Recognize the courage it took to provide the feedback and consider it a sincere gift intended to help you grow.
- f. Know that feedback can be tough to receive, even if we solicit it and are grateful for it.
- g. Write down as much of the feedback as you can remember, recording as many words used by the giver as possible.

V. Respectful Relationships

Respect is an ongoing behavior pattern that promotes increased awareness and acceptance of differences in individuals' beliefs, styles and backgrounds, as well as their physical, ancestral, geographic or socio-economic makeup

Elements of Respectful/Healthy Relationships

- Lay leaders and professionals cooperate well with change.
- Lay leaders enjoy and seek responsibility.
- Professionals provide help wherever help is needed.
- Problems and issues are discussed openly between lay leaders and professionals.
- People express their opinions freely.
- People are not afraid of disagreements.
- When something does not work, the focus is on identifying issues not on blaming people
- When mistakes are made, lay leaders and professionals work together to find a solution.
- Lay leaders and professionals feel empowered to do their job and to suggest changes for improvement.

VI. Conflict Defined

- Conflict is a normal part of life, providing numerous opportunities for growth through improved understanding and insight.
- Parties involved tend to perceive limited options and finite resources available in seeking solutions, rather than multiple possibilities that may exist 'outside the box' in problem solving.

The Nature of Conflict

- Conflict is natural: it is neither positive nor negative
- The results of conflict will differ dramatically depending on how it is handled
- Conflict is used by nature as its primary motivator for change.
- Conflict is not a contest: winning or losing are goals for games, not conflicts.
- Conflict is difficult to resolve when it is about who is "right". It is easier to resolve when it is about acknowledging and appreciating differences and about finding solutions.
- Wherever choices exist there is potential for disagreement.

Myths Inhibiting Conflict Management

1. The presence of conflict is a sign of a poor manager.
2. Conflict is a sign of low concern for the organization.
3. Anger is negative and destructive.
4. If left alone, conflict will take care of itself.
5. Every conflict is resolvable.

6. Conflict equates to winners vs. losers

When Conflict Is not Addressed

- Decreased concentration
- Diminished productivity
- Poor customer service
- Employee turnover
- Increase in absenteeism
- Decreased performance
- Lost business

Benefits of Conflict Management

- Conflict can help maintain identity and strength. Successful management of conflicts can increase the solidarity of a work group.
- Conflict with an external force can increase group cohesion. A work group becomes more unified when faced with some outside threat, force or condition.
- Conflict can provide a safety valve function. Appropriate conflict allows group members to let off steam in a constructive way.
- Conflict can trigger innovation and bring about much needed change in working conditions, improving the overall organizational climate.
- Conflict can improve relationships and foster improved communication.

VII. Conflict Resolution

- Adopt a win-win approach.
- Consider needs and solutions versus only considering solutions.
- Transform problems into creative opportunities.
- Use communication to build rapport and listening to clarify understanding.
- Apply strategies to attack the problem, not the person.
- Respond to resistance with open-ended questions.
- Communicate emotions appropriately.
- Problem-Solve collaboratively.
- Broaden Perspectives.
- Seek outside assistance.

Key Points to Remember

- Remember that communication is key to resolving any conflict situation.
- Allow a person to finish their thought and seek clarification when necessary, prior to responding.
- Recognize the value that all team members can contribute to a situation.
- Attempt to resolve conflict at the lowest level possible. Use available resources when this is not feasible.
- Do your part to uphold the qualities of a respectful workplace.
- Strive to communicate assertively whenever possible.