



September 16, 2023

Dear Job Seekers,

Attached is the last at home training packet being offered by Vantage. After October 1, 2023 any individual without a training site will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence.

Attached is the assignment for September 16 - September 29. At the end of the pay period, you will need to send the completed Summary Questions sheet and training timesheet with the actual hours you worked on the packet (up to 20 per week), either by fax to 330-535-2253 or by email to payroll@vantageaging.org

This timesheet and summary questions are due by Monday, October 1st at 5:00 pm.

If you have any questions please call Dustin Henthorne 330-253-4597 ext. 352

Training – Weeks 9/16/23 to 9/29/23

Make Yourself Heard

Sincerely,

VANTAGE AGING SCSEP TEAM

SOFT SKILLS SOLUTIONS

Second Edition

Make Yourself Heard!

Professional Communication Skills

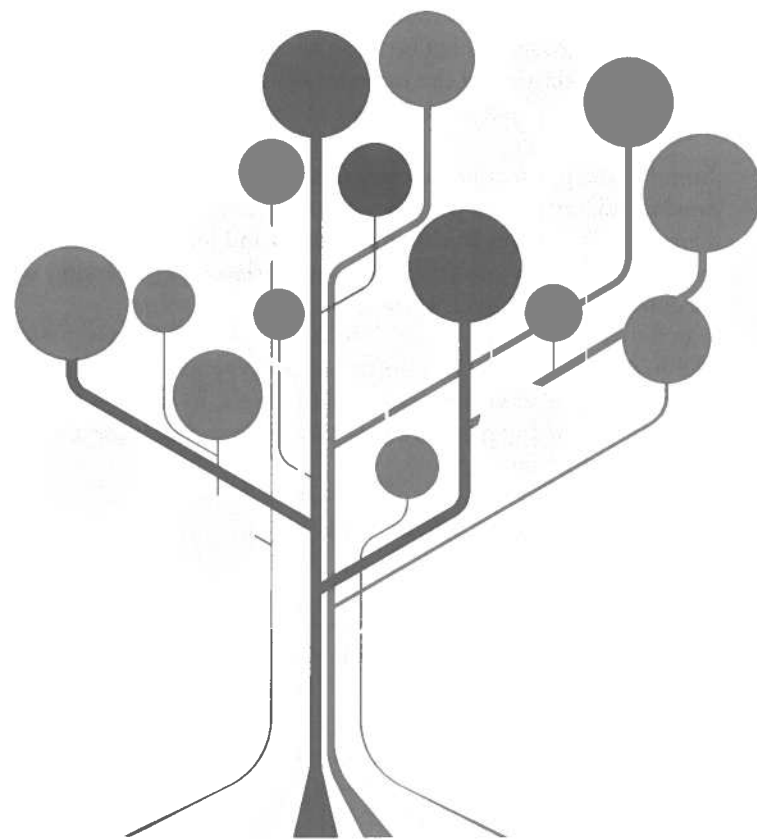


Ann Cross &
Martha Lanaghan

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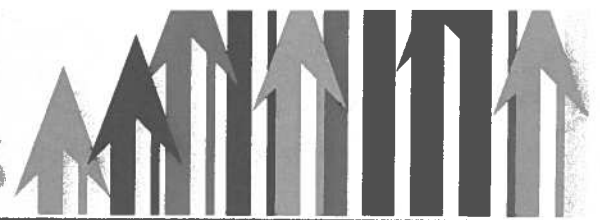
Make Yourself Heard!

Professional
Communication Skills



Ann Cross & Martha Lanaghan

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Care has been taken to verify the accuracy of information presented in this book. However, the authors, editors, and publisher cannot accept responsibility for web, email, newsgroup, or chat room subject matter or content, or for consequences from the application of the information in this book, and make no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to its content.

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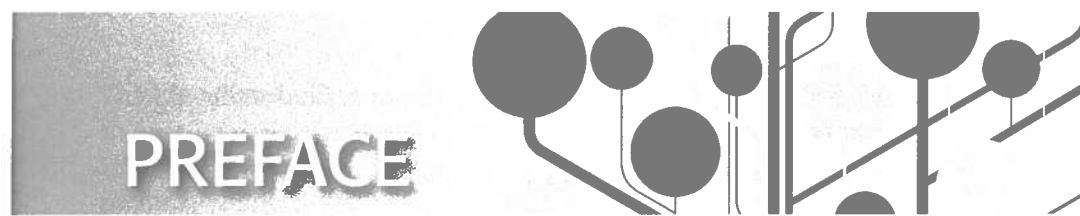
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Today’s job seekers face tougher challenges than ever before. Only the most skilled job seeker can keep up with the ever-changing workplace. Technology is transforming how we work in dramatic ways, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic forced companies large and small to quickly adapt to new ways of doing business. This change contributes to what some people are calling the “fourth industrial revolution.”¹ Just as each of the past three industrial revolutions (the steam engine, mass production, and digitization) required workers to adapt their skills to keep up, this technological revolution is forcing us to rethink what we do and how we do it.

Having the newest computer skills or knowing how to provide remote customer service is only part of what new technology demands of workers. Employers today want more than someone with the necessary job-related skills. They are interested in your ability to do the things computers cannot do—in your uniquely human, interpersonal, “soft” skills. **Soft skills** are the personal attributes that enable you to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. Simply put, they are the skills an employee needs to get along and work well with others.

A recent survey found that dependability and reliability are the soft skills employers desire most. These skills were noted by 97 percent of respondents, and professionalism was overwhelmingly listed in the top 10 skills employees need to succeed.² Professionalism encompasses multiple soft skills, including (but not limited to) communication, time management, self-management, leadership, problem-solving, and teamwork skills. It is also essential to professional success to be able to excel in a diverse workplace, where people look, think, experience, and interact with the world in a wide variety of ways.

The *Soft Skills Solutions*, Second Edition program will help you learn about and practice soft skills that will set you apart from others in your field.

1. Klaus Schwab, “The Fourth Industrial Revolution: What It Means and How to Respond,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 12, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-12-12/fourth-industrial-revolution>.

2. Society for Human Resource Management, “SHRM/Mercer Survey Findings: Entry-Level Applicant Job Skills,” 2016, <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/research-and-surveys/PublishingImages/Pages/Entry-Level-Applicant-Job-Skills-Survey-/Entry-Level%20Applicant%20Job%20Skills%20Survey.pdf>.

The *Soft Skills Solutions* Second Edition program includes the following books:

1. *Stepping Stones to Success! Goals & Attitude*
2. *Navigate Workplace Challenges! Emotional Intelligence & Critical Thinking*
3. *Wake Up & Work! Keys to Self-Management*
4. *Make Yourself Heard! Professional Communication Skills*
5. *How You Act & Dress Matters! Professional Etiquette & Image*
6. *Set the Tone! Equity, Diversity & Inclusion*
7. *Demonstrate Your Value through Collaboration! Teamwork & Motivation*
8. *Play Nice & Stay Employed! Workplace Relationships & Conflict Negotiations*
9. *Lead with Integrity! Leadership & Ethics*
10. *Step Up Your Game! Innovation & Creative Problem-Solving*

Each title concentrates on specific soft skills to help you reach skill mastery. Whether you are a new job seeker, a person reentering the work world, a recent college graduate, or a longtime employee, completing these exercises to master these important soft skills will help you now and for the rest of your life. Even the most seasoned professionals will benefit from refreshing their soft skills from time to time.

Try to complete one book from the *Soft Skills Solutions*, Second Edition program per week. Although it may be helpful to begin with *Stepping Stones to Success! Goals & Attitude* followed by the other titles in the program, these books are stand-alone pieces and can be used in any sequence.

Program Features

Each *Soft Skills Solutions*, Second Edition book introduces skills necessary for success in the workplace and explains their roles in employment success. The program provides self-assessment activities to identify and address your individual needs, and application activities to challenge you and allow you to practice your skills. The text also includes margin tips and informative sidebars to point out key information.

You will encounter these interactive features:

- Thinking Breaks
- Self-Assessment activities

Thinking Breaks Part of learning a new skill is being able to apply it to your own experiences. These thought-provoking questions require reflection and honesty. Answering them will help you identify your personal opinions and beliefs relating to a specific aspect of employment success.



Self-Assessment activities The self-assessment activities help you assess your current soft skill levels and provide brief snapshots of your strengths and weaknesses. The more honest your answers, the more accurately you will be able to identify areas for improvement.

If the assessment section indicates that your skill level is high, you should still practice the workout, and challenge yourself to attain skill mastery by mentoring or teaching that skill to another person. Attempting to teach others how to successfully master a skill is the ultimate test of your knowledge.

The self-assessment tool is for your own personal use. After you have identified areas in which you would like to improve, practice these exercises and continue to seek out ways to strengthen your competencies in your daily life.



Apply the Skills activities After skills are introduced and explained, Apply the Skills activities challenge you to use these skills. Complete these exercises daily until you've achieved mastery of the professionalism skill you are studying. Some of the activities require working with a partner or mentor. For others, working with a partner or mentor is simply recommended.

When choosing a study partner, seek out a supportive person who wants to see you succeed. Above all, your partner should be honest with you about your current skill level. Your ability to do the same for your partner is essential to your partner's success as well. You will share equally in your progress and take an active role in each other's individual success, so choose wisely.

Having a mentor is ideal. Your mentor should be a professional in a position of authority with whom you have a positive relationship. For example, you might seek out a teacher, boss, friend who is a manager or executive at a company, career services advisor, student advisor, human resources manager, current employer, or parent.

Employment success largely depends on your ability to identify and address areas in which you need to improve. To accomplish this, be willing to receive feedback from others. If you are not able to receive this kind of feedback easily—and if you get upset, angry, or defensive—then seek the help of a trusted expert who can help you learn to give and receive constructive feedback before beginning the

OBJECTIVES

Completing this book will allow you to

- Understand the role communication plays in achieving a high level of success in the workplace (Section 4.1)
- Learn and practice the six steps of communication (Section 4.2)
- Understand and practice active listening (Section 4.2)
- Learn how to reflect back what you are hearing (Section 4.2)
- Understand barriers that inhibit effective communication (Section 4.3)
- Learn the skills necessary for powerful communication (Section 4.4)

On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the best), how good do you feel you are at communicating?

_____ **out of 10**

During your career, you will inevitably encounter difficult situations and hard-to-please coworkers, customers or clients, and bosses. But communicating is more than just possessing “the gift of gab” or an expansive vocabulary. In fact, it can be quite the opposite, especially when dealing with difficult professional encounters. You will need to use effective communication skills to arrive at a positive outcome.

4.1 Assessing Your Communication Skills

Communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals. There are three types of communication:

- **Verbal:** Spoken words (what you say and hear)
- **Nonverbal:** Body language, facial expressions, hand gestures, and so on (how you deliver or receive messages)

- **Written:** Email, text, workplace chat such as Microsoft Teams or Slack, letters, and so on (the words you write)

Why are communication skills so important? Good communication skills have many benefits:

- They can balance a lack of technical or clinical skills when you are starting a new job or position.
- They can improve results, save time, and increase productivity.
- They can improve cooperation, making for a stronger team.
- They can reduce stress and increase job satisfaction.

In addition to these benefits, taking care to communicate well will prove to your coworkers and employers that you care about their feedback. It also will prove that you are willing to listen to others and work to understand workplace conflicts. Good communicators often emerge as leaders within an organization. Poor communication, in contrast, will lead to mistakes, loss of productivity, and even damaged professional relationships.

Communication can make all the difference. This book walks you through everything you need to know about professional communication and how to become an effective communicator. Using the information and activities provided, you will develop communication skills that are necessary for your career success. First, let's see how well you currently communicate.



Self-Assessment—Communication Mistakes

For each question below, check the box in the column that best describes you. Answer questions as you actually are (rather than how you think you should be).

Have You Ever . . .	Yes	No
1. Thought about what you wanted to say next while others were talking?		
2. Attacked people and not problems when you spoke?		
3. Overused absolutes such as <i>always</i> or <i>never</i> ?		
4. Rolled your eyes when someone said something you disagreed with?		
5. Blamed others when conversations took a wrong turn?		

continues...

Have You Ever . . .

Yes

No

6. Repeated instructions or concepts over and over?

7. Assumed you knew what the speaker was going to say?

If you answered “Yes” to any of the preceding questions, congratulations! You are human!

You may be guilty of at least a few of these actions, which is why practicing professional communication should be a lifelong exercise.

In the space below, identify the types of communication mistakes you are most guilty of making.

Earlier you answered on a scale of 1 to 10 how good are you at communicating. Herein lies part of the problem: the most challenging part of developing strong communication skills is that most people feel they are already quite good at communicating. Often, the people you would describe as the most adept communicators are simply good speakers. But communication is much more than the ability to eloquently state a case or make a point. Good communication requires the ability to be quiet and *listen!*

Listening should be *active*. Active listening helps to minimize misunderstandings and miscommunication. Misunderstandings are a part of life, but your ability to recognize and correct these misunderstandings will elevate you from a good communicator to a superior communicator.



Self-Assessment—Communication “Pro” or “Doh!”

For each statement, check the box in the column that best describes you. Answer questions as you actually are (rather than how you think you should be).

Statement	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
1. I try to anticipate and deal with problems and confusion when communicating with others.			
2. If I do not understand something, I ask for clarification, even if I think others might view my question as “stupid.”			
3. I regularly find that people understand what I tell them.			
4. When engaging in a conversation, I give the speaker my full attention.			
5. I consider how my words will be perceived by others and sometimes change the way I say something so that it is better received.			
6. I give careful consideration to the feeling of others when speaking, and I sometimes don’t speak my mind.			
7. When people tell me something I don’t agree with, I try to first see it from their perspective before responding with how I feel.			
8. I avoid using email to communicate complex issues with people.			
9. When I finish writing a report, memo, or email, I review it thoroughly for misspellings and missed words before I send it.			

continues...

Statement	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
10. When talking to people, I pay attention to their body language.			
11. I use diagrams and charts to help express my ideas.			
12. Before I send a message, I think about the best way to communicate it (in person, over the phone, in an email or memo, and so on).			
13. I slow my rate of speech when providing or verifying information.			
14. I consider cultural barriers when planning my communications.			
15. Before I communicate, I think about what the person needs to know and how best to convey that information.			

Use the following scale to add up the points for each of your answers and record your total in the box that follows.

Tally Your Score	
Always = 5 points	
Sometimes = 3 points	
Rarely = 1 point	Total Score:
50 to 75 points: Excellent! You understand your role as a communicator, both when you send messages and when you receive them. You anticipate problems, and you choose the most effective ways of communicating.	
31 to 49 points: You should keep working to improve your communication skills. You may not be expressing yourself clearly, and you may not be receiving messages correctly. By paying attention to communication, you can be much more effective at work and enjoy much better working relationships.	
30 or fewer points: You have poor communication skills, and you should work quickly and diligently to improve these skills.	

You'll know you've misunderstood a person's meaning when that person becomes emotional or upset or says things like, "That's not what I meant!" or "Why are you getting so defensive?" Knowing as much as possible about how the person thinks and feels may affect the words you choose when communicating with different audiences.

Facts versus opinions When you are engaged in active listening, listen for whether people state an opinion as a fact. Stating an opinion as a fact is misleading. This is why it is important to include facts (and their sources) whenever possible when you shift from the listener role to the speaking role. Don't state your opinion as fact because the listener may ask you to provide proof that this information is correct. The listener may also have opinions or knowledge that are in conflict with the information you've provided and use those perceptions to decide that you are lying. This step is crucial in achieving effective outcomes from any conversation in which you engage because facts are required to support opinions and decisions.

You can address and manage these obstacles effectively, but first you must identify your own views on listening and how your views apply to effective communication.



Self-Assessment—Listening Quiz

Take the following quiz to determine your own ideas about listening. When you are finished, read through the answers and explanations of each item that follows.

Statement	True	False
1. Hearing and listening are the same.		
2. There is only one true meaning for a word.		
3. To be a good listener, you need to know why you are listening.		
4. Letting people know you've heard them is part of listening.		

1. Hearing and listening are the same. False. Hearing and listening are different because they literally require the use of two different mechanisms in your brain:

- **Hearing:** To perceive sound.
- **Listening:** To pay attention to the sound or words with thoughtful intention.

Ideally, you need to both hear and listen to fully understand what is being said. When you hear, you are absorbing the speaker's pitch and tone, which can help you learn about the speaker's emotional state. When you listen, you have the intention to understand the speaker. Doing so requires you to interpret what the speaker is saying and provide feedback to the speaker based on how you interpret the message.

2. There is only one true meaning for a word. False. The meaning of the word is not actually in the word itself, but in the context of the statement. Consider, for example, the word *cool*. The listener will interpret the meaning of the word *cool* depending on several factors, such as the context in which it is used, the speaker's tone, the recipient's own filters, and even geographical location. No two people perceive a message in the same way, even though the same words are being used.

3. To be a good listener, you need to know why you are listening. True. Regardless of the situation, it is important to know the reason for listening. For example, let's say you enter into a conversation in which the speaker hopes you will both have fun, but you believe that you are about to be reprimanded. In that case, every statement the speaker makes is subject to serious misinterpretation. If the speaker starts to tease you about a mistake and you believe it to be serious—well, you can see how things can turn ugly quickly.

4. Letting people know you've heard them is part of listening. True. Letting the speaker know you've understood the message by providing feedback is an important part of effective listening. It will keep the conversation moving and let the speaker know that you have, in fact, fully understood the message. Providing feedback is even more important when you're talking on the phone because it is impossible for the speaker to pick up on your nonverbal cues.

Reduce Background Noise

Whether working from home or in an office, some people work better with background noise. However, most are distracted by any sort of background noise. Background noise can be particularly troublesome when on a virtual meeting like Zoom; finding a

quiet space is critical to conducting a productive meeting. If you are in an open office without doors, try to find a quiet space to have important conversations. Whenever possible, close your door and eliminate as many background noises as possible.

Six Actions for Effective Communication

To be an effective listener, you can take some simple actions that will let the speaker know that you are engaged, receptive, and interested—all without ever saying a word! These behaviors are particularly important in a job interview, during a difficult conversation, or in a team meeting.

There is more to active listening than just hearing and listening with intent. You have to become an active participant in the communication process to ensure that the message you're hearing is the one the speaker intends to send. Being an active participant may require that you ask questions to further your understanding of the situation. Perhaps most important, you need to reflect back to the sender what you heard in your own words. Only then should you respond with a solution to the problem presented or with your own feelings about the situation.

1. Pay Attention Give the speaker your undivided attention by looking the person directly in the eye. Focus on what the person is saying without thinking how you might respond. As you listen, acknowledge the speaker's message. Acknowledging the message can be as simple as nodding your head or saying “uh-huh” or “yes.” If appropriate, taking notes is a nonverbal way of acknowledging the speaker.

Minimize Distractions

Maintaining eye contact is crucial in communication. Try to minimize distractions during in-person and virtual meetings:

- Turn off electronics and, when meeting in person, turn away from your computer screen.
- Manage your apps and notifications to reduce distractions.

- Listen with an open mind. We tend to start forming our response when we hear something we disagree with. Focus on keeping your attention on the speaker, not your reply.
- Move to a quiet area if possible.

2. Consider Your Posture Maintain a relaxed and open posture. If possible, squarely face the speaker. Avoid slouching because this pose may indicate that you're bored or uninterested. Instead, lean toward the speaker, which is a nonverbal indicator that you are interested in what the speaker has to say. Having an open and relaxed posture will

not only help the speaker remain calm, but also show that you are open to the speaker's message.



Apply the Skills—Practice Active Listening: Part I

Complete the following activities to apply what you have learned about active listening. This exercise has five parts. One part will help you notice how often you want to interrupt or let your mind drift. Another will help you listen with real intent on understanding the speaker's message. The third part will help you reflect back to the speaker what you heard. The fourth examines whether you are responding with empathy. And the fifth part focuses on providing feedback to the speaker.

First, find a partner or study buddy. Your study buddy should be anyone with whom you have a positive relationship. This person also should be interested in improving listening skills. Most important, this person should be someone from whom you receive feedback without getting upset or defensive.

Second, determine who will be the speaker first. Ideally, you will use your cell phone or a watch to time the sections of this exercise.

Workout 1

Speaker Talk about a problem you have or have had in the past. It can be something unimportant, such as how to pick the right line at the grocery store, or something more important, such as what car to purchase. The aim is to talk about a real challenge you have faced or are facing.

Listener *Just listen.* Do not talk, ask questions, or problem solve. However, each time that you want to say something, make a check mark ✓ in the box below or on a separate piece of paper.

At the end of the exercise, count up the number of check marks the listener had and then switch roles. Practice this workout at least once a day until you receive fewer than 10 check marks. When you are under 10, this indicates that you were truly focused on what the speaker was telling you and not on what you wanted to say.

Workout 1 can be done with or without a partner. If you do not have a partner, simply complete the listener's part of the exercise when you listen to your friends and family during your everyday interactions.



Apply the Skills—Practice Active Listening: Part III

Complete the following activity to apply what you have learned about active listening. This part (Part III) will help you reflect back to the speaker what you heard.

Workout 5

Speaker Share a real or made-up problem you are experiencing at work, home, or school. As you describe what is happening, allow the listener to ask you questions and reflect back to you what the listener understands you to be saying. If the listener misunderstands, redirect and restate in other terms what you are saying.

Listener Take notes, ask questions, and reflect back to the speaker to ensure that you fully understand. After each reflection, move forward or ask for more clarity if you are “off base.”

At the end of this exercise, switch roles. Then discuss with one another the following questions and record your observations in the space provided:

1. How well did I reflect back what you were saying?

2. Did I restate in my own words what I understood or just repeat what you said?

continues...

3. How did this help move the conversation forward?

4. How did this process of reflection make you feel?

Repeat this exercise often.

Frustrations

In some instances, the speaker may become frustrated by the reflection process because that person is failing to effectively communicate feelings, needs, or the situation. This is a common experience because you (the speaker) often aren't entirely clear in expressing what you are trying to say. This is an excellent chance

to avoid going down a path that may ultimately lead to problems and mistakes! It is the speaker's responsibility to be clear about a problem or a need. Until the speaker is able to clearly communicate a desire, solutions or progress cannot really be made.

5. Show Empathy **Empathy** is understanding and sharing another person's experiences and emotions or having the ability to imagine someone else's feelings. People are recognized as powerful communicators by the empathy they show, not by how they agree with everyone all the time. Rather, they empathize with the feelings of others. This ability to make people feel understood (and calm) allows powerful communicators to redirect others toward more positive feelings or to refocus interactions on finding solutions rather than finger-pointing or blame.



Apply the Skills—Practice Active Listening: Part IV

Complete the following activity to apply what you have learned about active listening. This part (Part IV) will help you consider how you can respond with empathy.

Workout 6

Think of a recent conversation in which you could have empathized with a person even though you didn't agree. Record the scenario below. Then identify how you could have phrased your empathetic statement so that the person with whom you were communicating would be more receptive to your opinion or solution.

Handwriting practice lines for recording a scenario and an empathetic statement.

Continue recording scenarios that could have benefited from a more empathetic response for one week. After each conversation, take time to reflect how you used (or failed to use) empathy to create receptiveness to your ideas.

6. Give Feedback Only after you're certain you understand the real problem should you offer feedback (solutions). In the earlier example of the person who was upset because he was constantly being told different ways to do the same job, you might say, "I can see why you feel frustrated by the lack of communication. Have you considered what you can personally do to improve the situation? Let's discuss ways that you can become part of a solution to fix this problem."

This approach will allow the speaker to feel heard and understood. At the same time, it will also refocus attention on a more positive and proactive approach to the situation.

Providing Feedback

If you've gone through the communication process effectively, by listening and asking questions, the speaker will arrive at a conclusion. Therefore, when you provide feedback, it is more often in the form of positive reinforcement of the conclusion or solution the speaker has arrived at over the course of your conversation.

This kind of "exploring" and "guiding" the conversation takes many years of conscious practice and work. After you've developed and improved the communication basics discussed, you may want to continue practicing and learning more about communication.



Apply the Skills—Practice Active Listening: Part V

Complete the following activity to apply what you have learned about active listening. This part (Part V) will help you reflect on how a listener can provide feedback to a speaker.

Workout 7

Speaker Imagine that you and your partner are coworkers. You are constantly complaining about how you never get asked to participate in all the "important" work and "big decisions" that are being made every day in the department. You tell your coworker that you believe the boss has a personal grudge against you. The reason is that you once showed her up in a meeting by sharing a brilliant idea that made her look bad for not thinking of such an obvious solution herself.

Listener Your coworker is complaining about never getting invited to help in problem solving within the department. You know your coworker isn't asked to participate because the person dominates every conversation and has an attitude of "it's my way or the highway." You want to help your coworker come to realize that this habit is standing in the way of success. Before you begin, write down some questions you might ask to lead your coworker to the conclusion that the problem isn't with the boss, but lies in the coworker's own behavior. Then, as you listen to the speaker, ask clarifying questions to make sure you fully understand the problem. Empathize with your coworker and provide feedback by rephrasing what the speaker said. Finally, after you feel you fully understand the problem, help the speaker come to a solution by either giving some suggestions or working to solve the problem together.

At the end of the exercise, discuss the following questions and record your observations in the space provided:

1. What did the listener do that helped you better understand the situation?

2. What did the listener do that made you feel that you had clearly communicated your problem?

3. What did the listener do that helped you most?

4. What could the listener have done that would have helped you come to a solution on your own more quickly?

4.3 Communication Barriers

Communication fails for many reasons. In most failed communication, the message was not received exactly the way the sender intended. This is why it is important that the person speaking continually seek feedback to check that the message is clearly understood. When you are the listener, acknowledging what you've heard to ensure you fully understand what is said is equally important.

The skills of *active listening*, *clarification*, and *feedback* help, but skilled communicators also need to be aware of any existing communication barriers to be truly successful.

Common communication barriers include the following:

- **Poor organization:** Workplaces can create communication barriers when they lack clear communication channels or when the roles and responsibilities of each employee are not defined.
- **Negative attitudes:** Negativity is a barrier because it is easily communicated with both verbal and nonverbal cues (such as folding one's arms or rolling one's eyes).
- **Lack of attention, interest, and respect:** If a listener is not actively engaged in a conversation (for whatever reason), then that person often misses important details.
- **Prejudices and stereotypes:** Personal opinions and prejudices often lead to false assumptions about what is being communicated.
- **Preconceived notions:** Assumptions based on what one *expects* to hear prevent a person from listening actively.
- **Jargon or overly complicated terms:** Not everyone will understand jargon or industry-specific words and phrases.
- **Differing viewpoints:** Some people choose not to listen to different perspectives or viewpoints.
- **Cultural barriers:** Cultures may differ in their communication styles, including acceptable speaking volume, eye contact, and topics of conversation.
- **Language:** Non-native speakers and native speakers may have difficulty understanding one another.
- **Accessibility:** Communication methods may need to be altered to accommodate people with hearing and/or vision loss.
- **Emotional responses:** Emotions such as frustration, anger, joy, and sadness can affect how a person communicates.
- **Ambiguous tone:** Tone and tenor (how you sound and the volume used) is often a barrier in verbal communications, but is

Brainstorm instances when a communication barrier caused a problem in your life. Write a brief summary of what happened in the space below. Then identify steps you could take to avoid making (or encountering) this communication error in the future.

4.4 Keys to Effective Communication: Active Speaking

You have just identified how to be an active *listener* and how to avoid obstacles of listening by asking clarifying questions and reflecting back what you've heard. The next skill that you should learn is how to be an active *speaker*. Recall that there are three types of communication: verbal, nonverbal, and written. The following sections address different principles of effective message delivery (as the sender/speaker). Each principle that follows applies to all three communication types (verbal, nonverbal, and written).

Embrace Criticism

Criticism, whether warranted or not, is a part of life. Your ability to control how you react and respond appropriately can affect the direction a conversation takes in many positive ways.

It is best, and most productive, to assume that all criticism is meant to be constructive (regardless of the delivery) and respond accordingly. It's best to respond with appreciation and thanks.

TIP Some people might criticize you specifically because they *want* you to react in a negative fashion and to look bad in front of others. By learning how to accept and respond to criticism, you'll be able to avoid this type of exchange.

Or, if you disagree, you should respond with thanks for opening up the discussion around the topic followed with facts about why you disagree.

1. *Think about a time when a parent, teacher, supervisor, or friend criticized you. Describe the situation and the criticism.*

2. *How did the criticism make you feel? How did you respond?*

3. *Are you proud of the way you handled the criticism? What might you do differently if something like this happens in the future?*

4. *Did this experience change the way you offer feedback to others? If so, how?*

Be Tactful

Tact or **tactfulness** is having sensitivity to what is proper and appropriate in dealing with others, including the ability to speak or act without offending others. Use tact in all situations. If you ask yourself, “I wonder whether I should say/write that?” then the automatic answer is “NO!” If you have any doubt about how a message might be received, don’t say/write it.



Apply the Skills—Respond with Tact

Imagine that a coworker has written a long email to the entire department to express her unhappiness with the way people use “reply all” when responding to emails. She feels that using “reply all” to say “thank you” or “good job” is inappropriate. She has brought up this issue at team meetings in the past, but because of the culture of the office, everyone else decided that using “reply all” was acceptable.

Think about the most tactful way to address the sender of the email. Ask yourself: Should I send an email to respond? Why or why not?

continues...

What is the most tactful way to address this situation? What should you say or write?

Be Honest

Answer questions with honesty (but also remember to use tact). This means that you should not be “brutally honest” with people; just be sincere. For example, if the person responsible for designing a website asks what you think of it, be honest. But *also* consider that the question is one of personal taste/opinion, and it’s more important to protect your working relationship than to criticize a design you may not appreciate. You might say, “I like the new interactive feature and the images you chose! The color scheme isn’t what I prefer, but that is really just a matter of personal preference.” Don’t elaborate on or embellish criticism. If really interested in your feedback, the person will question you further about the features you do not appreciate.

1. *Have you ever given or heard given “brutally honest” feedback? If so, what happened and how might the feedback have been restated in a more tactful way?*

continues...

2. *Has anyone ever given you unhelpful or overly critical feedback? If so, how did you respond?*



Apply the Skills—Give Honest Feedback

A new coworker wants to organize a “Secret Santa” exchange for your department. This issue has come up before, and the team decided that the exchange wasn’t a good fit for the culture of your small department. You don’t want to make this coworker feel that their ideas aren’t appreciated, but you want to be honest that it’s not going to happen. What could you say? Write your response in the area below.

Be Positive

Be cheerful and smile whenever dealing with others. This includes emails. Start off your email with a brief “I hope you are well” or other warm greeting. This simple statement will go a long way in opening the door for the recipient’s willingness to listen to the message you are about to deliver.

For example, if you saw a coworker stay late to allow another person to leave in time to see his children’s holiday show, jot down this information. Then, the next time you send that coworker an email, you can start off the email by noting what you observed and how much you appreciate having that person on the team.



Apply the Skills—Keep a Positivity Journal

Practice, practice, practice! Being positive takes daily practice. Keep a “positivity journal” by your computer, workstation, or nightstand at home. Jot down things you experienced for which you felt appreciation as you go about your day. Refer back to this list whenever you need to be reminded of reasons to be positive throughout the day.

Respect Confidentiality

Assume that all conversations are to be kept confidential unless you know for certain that the topic is public knowledge. Even topics that seem insignificant to you may be considered highly personal or private to another person. Keeping this information private will establish you as a trustworthy person.



Apply the Skills—Avoid Workplace Gossips

Establishing yourself as a trustworthy person is important, and one way to do this is to refuse to further engage the discussion when someone appears to betray a confidence. One idea is to simply state that you would prefer not to hear information that you were not meant to hear.

Imagine that your coworker, with whom you have a friendship outside work, begins to tell you something that was shared with him in confidence. Using tact and honesty, write out what you could say to your friend to let him know that confidentiality is critical to relationships and therefore shouldn’t be betrayed.

continues...

Be Patient

The ability to remain calm is especially important when dealing with a personality type that is different from your own or when dealing with someone who is angry or upset. People who are upset typically want to know that they are allowed to express themselves. Shortcutting that process or interrupting speakers almost always makes them more upset. Take time to hear them out, and you'll often find that they are able to calm themselves down by expressing their frustration.

1. *What situations make you the most impatient?*

2. *How do you act or behave when you are impatient?*

3. *When was the last time you saw someone lose their temper? What happened? Would more patience have helped in the situation?*

Additional Information

For more information about communicating with angry or difficult personalities effectively, check out the *Soft Skills Solutions* text *Play Nice & Stay Employed! Workplace Relationships & Conflict Negotiations*.

Use a "We" Mentality

Use "I" or "we" statements rather than "you" statements to avoid insulting the person with whom you're communicating. Using "you" statements places blame on others and implies that they are at fault or don't understand. For example, say you work with a person who likes to get straight to the point and you prefer detailed explanations. Instead of saying, "You talk really fast, and I am afraid it's going to cause me to make a mistake," you could say, "I am concerned that I may make a mistake if I don't get more details about what you are sharing with me. Could you please explain it again, slowly, so I can better understand what you need me to do?" Asking thoughtful questions can help you clarify and understand the group or person's perspective and learn more about their motivations, experiences, and understanding of the topic. Using "I" or "we" statements can help you ask clarifying questions that don't feel like personal attacks.



Apply the Skills—Identify the Words You Use

For the next week, before sending an email, go back and reread the email and replace every use of the word *I* with *we* or *our* whenever possible. You'll begin to notice how often you use *I* when you could easily use *we*. In addition, take a look at some of the emails you receive. How many of these use inclusive wording? Record your observations in the space below.



Apply the Skills— Analyze How Well You Speak and Listen

Brainstorm five interactions in which you experienced some problems and another five interactions in which you helped another person solve a problem or feel better about a situation. Identify the situation or exchange that was the most important or significant and record it in the space below.

Now answer the questions listed below in relation to the exchange you identified and analyze how you might work on improving your strengths and minimizing your weaknesses.

1. Did I immediately eliminate all distractions so that I could give the speaker my full attention? If so, how did this affect my ability to focus? If not, why not? What will I do differently next time? How did this negatively affect the exchange?

continues...

2. Did I ask enough questions to ensure I understood the situation? If so, what additional information did I learn that helped me? Or, did I jump to the conclusion that I already understood the problem and immediately go into problem solving? If so, what happened as a result, and what will I do differently next time?

3. When I reflected back to the speaker what I understood the message to be, how often did I find out that I misunderstood the message, and how did this affect the outcome of the conversation?

4. How did I show empathy, either verbally or nonverbally, for the speaker? In what way did this improve the communication?

continues...

5. Was I able to avoid “you” statements and ask clarifying questions with tact? If so, how did this help? Or, did I use accusatory language in my questions or when discussing the situation? How did this affect the conversation?

6. How tactful was I (honestly) when giving feedback or discussing a difficult situation? How can I improve?

7. Did I articulate my opinion effectively and honestly? If so, how so? If not, why not? What can I do to improve?

8. Overall, what five things did I do right during this exchange?

9. Overall, what five things can I improve on next time, and how will I do so?

continues...

AT-HOME TRAINING
SUMMARY QUESTIONS:
September 16 -
September 29

NAME _____

COUNTY _____

Question #1 - From my experience, I consider these to be the 3 most important takeaways:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Question #2 - I plan to implement the following changes immediately:

Question #3 – I feel I still need to work on the following area(s).

Question #4 – I plan to keep improving by doing the following:

This sheet and your timesheet are due by Monday, October 1, 2023 at 5:00pm. Fax to 330-535-2253 or scan and email to payroll@vantageaging.org.

