

Communication on the Job for Employees

All employees need good communication skills in order to provide quality products or services, satisfy customer needs, and help make profits. Exchange of information, thoughts, and ideas among supervisors, coworkers, and customers is important for achieving company and personal objectives.

Individuals with good communication skills make valuable employees if they learn to work with others, fit into the company, and contribute to company objectives. Improving communication skills is easy with a little know-how and practice. This publication provides suggestions on how to develop the verbal and nonverbal communication skills necessary for workplace success.

What Is Good Verbal Communication?

Verbal communication involves sending and receiving messages. Good verbal communication occurs when the sender and the receiver give the same meaning to the message. Thus, the sender and receiver are important to the communication process. The sender chooses words, body movements, facial expressions, and voice tones depending on the message he or she wants to send to the receiver.

What Is Good Nonverbal Communication?

Nonverbal communication refers to the messages sent

through facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and body language. We send many more nonverbal messages than verbal messages. It is estimated that 50 to 90 percent of messages are nonverbal.

Nonverbal messages can say a lot more about you than words. Be aware of the

nonverbal messages you send at all times. Careless use of nonverbal messages can send the wrong message. When listening to someone, observe his or her nonverbal signals carefully and try to interpret them correctly.

Messages communicated by different types of nonverbal communication are listed below:

Gestures are movements of the body, hands, arms, head, shoulders, etc., that help to explain or describe a point. Often we make gestures without realizing it. If excessive, gestures distract from the message.

Gesture

head tilted forward
head tilted back
shoulders pulled back and up

Message

interest, concentration
confidence
readiness for action,
confidence

Posture is how you hold your body while walking, sitting, or standing.

Posture

standing tall
sagging shoulders
sitting up straight
slumping in chair

Message

confidence
timidity, tiredness, poor health
eagerness, alertness
boredom, tiredness

Facial expression is created by the way you hold your facial muscles. Facial expressions can tell others what you think and feel. Make sure your facial expression matches the message.

Facial Expression

smile

frown

raised eyebrows

Message

friendliness, agreement,
understanding
unhappiness, disagreement,
pain
surprise, doubt

Eye contact is looking directly at another person, giving him or her your attention. It is very important to show interest in what the other person is saying by looking into his or her eyes. Be careful not to stare—staring can make the other person uncomfortable.

Eye Contact or Non-Contact

looking at person

looking away from person

Message

interest, respect, honesty,
trustworthiness
disinterest, disrespect,
embarrassment,
untrustworthiness

Effective Verbal Communication in the Workplace

Verbal communication can be divided into two categories. An example of *formal communication* is meeting with a supervisor to discuss new company policies. An example of *informal communication* is talking about the work schedule with a coworker during lunch. According to O'Connor (1988), to be an effective speech communicator you must:

- Make others feel you are sincere in what you say
- Speak only when you know something about the topic
- Deliver a clear message with a definite purpose and supporting information
- Realize you can learn more from listening than from talking
- Not be afraid to share information and ideas with others
- Be aware of the nonverbal messages you send with body language, appearance, voice, and eyes
- Have a specific goal in mind before you communicate

Talking to Others

Talking is the most common form of communication. In every work setting people talk to each other individually and in groups. Both types of communication are necessary to work effectively and to create a comfortable social atmosphere.

Informal communication is casual conversation between two or more individuals. It is usually unplanned. Talking with your boss about how nice the cafeteria looks is an example of informal communication. Each person should have an opportunity to add to the conversation by sharing his or

her knowledge, ideas, and experiences. This helps each participant to learn about different topics. Informal communication promotes sharing of information and helps to build friendships.

Group communication involves three or more people. Information sharing, problem solving, and decision making are goals that bring people together in groups. An example of group communication is when the entire department meets to decide how to handle the overtime schedule. In group discussions everyone cooperates so that each person has a chance to share his or her ideas. Each participant has a responsibility to stay on the subject and help the group reach its goal.

Suggestions for Talking with Others

Below are specific ways to improve your ability to speak with others whether talking with an individual or in a group.

- Never dominate a conversation. Try to include everyone. Draw people into the conversation by asking questions or asking others for their opinions.
- Look at the speaker. Glancing away while someone is talking can make the speaker think you are not interested. Paying attention shows that you respect the speaker.
- Wait until the speaker is finished before talking. Interrupting someone who is speaking is rude. Be patient, even if you disagree with the message.
- Be careful not to embarrass yourself or the people around you by speaking or laughing too loudly. These actions can draw attention to yourself and show a lack of consideration for others.

Other Ways To Become a Good Communicator

Have you ever known someone who seemed to be able to talk with anyone about almost anything? Although few people are born with this ability, determination can make it possible for everyone to communicate better. Here are additional suggestions.

- Conversations with a wide range of people help to increase your knowledge. Develop an interest in talking with people of different ages, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and nationalities.
- Increase your knowledge by reading books and newspapers so you will have plenty to discuss. It is also helpful to listen to the news and participate in activities related to your interests.
- Do your part to keep the conversation going but do not take over. Speak, then allow someone else to speak.
- To encourage the conversation, give examples from your life experience. Think about what you know, things you have done, and people you have met.
- Speak clearly. Be careful to pronounce words correctly and to use correct grammar.
- Use the language of the workplace. Learn and use the correct names for forms, materials, equipment, and other items. Use words the listener understands. Do not use slang words that you may use with your friends and family.

- Listen for ideas and statements with which you can agree. Let the speaker know that you agree by smiling or nodding your head. Say “yes” or “I see” to encourage the speaker in a positive way. Listen and be polite even if you disagree.
- Change the topic in a tactful manner when the conversation makes someone uncomfortable.

Use Your Voice Effectively

How you speak is as important as what you say. The way you use your voice can help people understand the message clearly and easily or cause them to ignore the message. A rough, raspy voice is hard on some listeners. A soft voice causes some listeners to tune out. A loud voice intimidates other listeners. The average person is used to the way his or her voice sounds but has no idea how it sounds to others. It is a good idea to ask several people in your community whom you respect for their honest opinions of your voice. A friend, family member, teacher, caseworker, or minister might be helpful. If the person is not already familiar with your voice, let him or her listen to you read a page in a book and describe the loudness or softness of your voice, how fast or how slowly you speak, and the highness or lowness of the pitch of your voice.

Ask if your voice sounds whiny, hoarse, or harsh. These are unpleasant sounds that should be avoided. Don't think of the feedback you receive as criticism, but as helpful hints to help you improve. Thank the evaluator for his or her help and begin to make changes right away. Follow these tips to use your voice effectively.

- Avoid loud talking or laughter in the office or work setting.
- Use high or low sounds, where appropriate, to give meaning to your words.
- If you speak fast, slow down so people can hear and understand.
- If you speak slowly, speed up to hold the listener's attention better.
- Speak in a pleasant voice that is not whiny, hoarse, or harsh.
- Maintain a calm, controlled voice, even when you are upset.

Becoming a good communicator takes effort, but is well worth it. By developing good communication skills you are more likely to feel good about yourself, develop healthy work relationships, and perform well on the job.

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HE-763

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UPS, 10M06, **New Aug 1998**, HE-763