

Communication Skills

Being able to communicate with others is one of the best life skills a person can develop. Someone who can effectively communicate thoughts, ideas, and feelings is better equipped for success both on the job and in personal relationships.

Effective communication is much more than being able to talk; it is also the ability to listen and understand others, to “read” and interpret body language and to know the best ways to get our points across.

To be a better speaker:

- **Be considerate.** Don't dominate the conversation by talking only about yourself. Use questions to probe the person's feelings or opinions on the topic of conversation.
- **Speak clearly.** Don't mumble or talk in the opposite direction of the listener. Also, use words that you know the listener might understand.
- **Stay focused on the conversation.** Doing something else while you are talking, such as typing or working on a car, sends a message to the listener that you don't think the conversation is worthy of your full attention, and it could inhibit the listener's responses to what you say.
- **Be brief.** Don't over talk a point. It may cause the other person to lose interest in the conversation.
- **Learn to “read” the listener.** If the other person seems inattentive or uncomfortable, it is probably not a good time to be carrying on a conversation. Recommend having the conversation at another time.

To be a better listener:

- **Eliminate distractions.** If you find it hard to concentrate because of your surroundings, move to another area or schedule another time to talk.
- **Make time to listen.** If you are in a hurry or don't have time, let the speaker know and schedule another time to talk. Better to delay the conversation than to risk having an important conversation cut short.
- **Practice reflective listening.** Repeat what you think the speaker said to ensure you heard the speaker correctly. This is called “reflective listening” and it is identified by statements as “If I understand you correctly...” reflective listening gives the speaker a chance to clarify a point and ensures that both the speaker and the listener are on the same page.
- **Listen for understanding.** If you don't understand what is being said, don't be shy or embarrassed to ask questions. It is better to ask for clarification than to risk a misunderstanding that could lead to problems later on.
- **Wait for the speaker to finish.** Don't interrupt, even when it's apparent the person speaking is gathering his/her thoughts.
- **Pay attention to what is being said.** When someone is speaking, don't spend that time preparing your remarks or working on a project – listen.

- **Keep eye contact.** Doing so shows that you are interested in what is being said, which may encourage the speaker to express him/herself more freely.

The fine points of arguing fairly:

Everyone gets into arguments, but good communicators know how to argue fairly. Here are some guidelines to keep your arguments from going too far south.

- **Don't resort to name calling.** Never, ever call a partner a hurtful name. Try the five-second rule (below) to choose words that are appropriate and relevant to the disagreement.
- **Try the five-second rule.** Because we sometimes say things without thinking of the consequences, wait five seconds before you comment on what is just been said. Use this time to exercise control and think about what you should say.
- **Stick to the issue at hand.** Talk only about the present point of disagreement. Bringing up or engaging in discussions about past problems adds the proverbial fuel to the fire. It also shifts the focus from the present problem, which means it probably won't get resolved and will cause trouble again.
- **Manage your anger.** Anger is a natural emotion, especially when you are having a disagreement. But don't allow your anger to turn violent. If you feel your anger reaching that point, leave the scene immediately and do something safe to calm yourself down – counting to 20, taking a brisk walk or exercising. Don't resort to drugs or alcohol or drive your car away on all cylinders.
- **Speak and act with regard for the other person.** Remember with whom you are arguing. It may be a marriage partner or someone whom you love and care about deeply. Although that is probably the last thing on your mind when you are having a disagreement, it should be the first.

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