



Introduction to Communication Basics

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Identify common communication problems that may be holding you back

Introduction to Communication Basics

One winning communication strategy is to always develop positive relationships with people. Most of us want to do well in life and work, and we want to look forward to our day, not get out of bed with a feeling dreadful or apprehensive.

If you add these ten tips to your toolkit, you will build stronger, positive relationships.

1. **Speak to people:** There is nothing as nice as a cheerful word of greeting.
2. **Smile at people:** It takes 72 muscles to frown, but only 14 to smile.
3. **Call people by name:** The sweetest music to anyone's ears is the sound of their own name used properly and positively.
4. **Be friendly and helpful:** To make a friend, you have to be a friend.
5. **Be cordial:** Speak and act as if everything you do is a genuine pleasure.
6. **Be genuinely interested in people:** You can find things to like in almost anybody if you try.
7. **Be generous with praise,** cautious with criticism.
8. **Be considerate** with the feelings of others. There are usually three sides to a controversy: yours, the other person's, and the truth.
9. **Be alert to give service:** What counts most in life is what we do for others.
10. **Practice your positive sense of humor:** The kind that is about telling funny stories about yourself, not other people.

None of these techniques are rocket science, but our ability to apply them sometimes slips away from us.

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your present ability to carry out these 10 strategies on a daily basis?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Words are the building blocks of good communication, but from them, we still have to build meaning. Throughout our lives, we can challenge ourselves with learning new and better ways and words with which to enhance our communication with others.

Words are very important in our efforts to communicate with others.

Self-Defeating Talk	Uplifting Talk

Growing Our Self-Awareness

Do You Question Your Competence?

Our confidence in our ability to express ourselves well and to keep our composure in difficult situations can be a crucial asset in the workplace. None of us wants to look foolish or spend a lot of time being anxious. If we are frequently anxious about making mistakes, or looking foolish, we limit our own strength.

Complete the following quiz to shed some light on your feelings.

	Yes	No
I'm concerned that I'm not effective enough when dealing with my supervisor or my co-workers.		
After I've had a conversation with someone, I sometimes worry if I've said anything that could be construed as offensive.		
I am frequently in a position of trying to counteract a bad impression I believe I've made.		
I rarely worry about being considered by others as misinformed or ignorant on things.		
When I'm in social situations, I'm not concerned about following rules of etiquette or being self-conscious.		
I tend to fret that others may think I don't know what I'm doing.		
I fear that others may not see me as adequately disciplined.		
I usually wonder whether my co-workers think that I'm not putting enough time and energy into my job.		
I avoid criticizing someone else's judgment for fear of appearing in the wrong.		
I tend to worry that others will laugh at my ideas.		

There are no right and wrong answers to this questionnaire. It is a tool to give you an idea about how you feel about your communication skills. Throughout the course, we will present techniques and tools to help you be a stronger communicator.

Developing Confidence

When it comes to communicating, we can be hampered by our own fears of failure or embarrassment not necessarily because we lack expertise in communication, but because we lack confidence in ourselves.

In order to get better at communicating, there are a few things that we can do to develop confidence.

Test Your Knowledge

Fake it until you make it.

Be well prepared.

Learn how to relax.

Be consistent.

Communication Basics

Defining a Skilled Communicator

You can have all of the qualifications in the world, but if you don't know how to communicate properly, you will struggle for success in the business world. It is no great secret that the best communicators are often those who are the most successful in the worlds of industry and commerce. Skilled communicator is the one who has the 'The ability to convey information to another effectively and efficiently'.

Test Your Knowledge

Think of a time when you are at your best as a communicator. What do you do? How do you act?

Think of a time when you are at your worst as a communicator. What do you do? How do you act?

Think of someone you know who is an excellent communicator. What makes that person stand out to you?

What things are they doing that we could learn from?

Do you see things in them that they could improve to become even better at communicating?

Asking Questions

Asking Good Questions

Two of the most basic elements of good communication are asking questions and listening to others. Some of us naturally ask a lot of questions, while for others this is a learned skill. We can plan questions prior to meetings or conversations as a way to ensure our questions have thought and depth to them. There are two kinds of questions: open and closed.

Closed questions are those that can be answered by either “yes” or “no,” or with a specific bit of data, such as your name, date of birth, or occupation. These questions restrict our responses and give us little opportunity to develop our thoughts before answering. As a result, these questions require very little effort on either person’s part. They can be used (intentionally or unintentionally) as a way to close down a conversation.

Closed questions tend to get over-used, in part because they are so easy to work with. They are easy to phrase and we get quick answers. This type of questioning can cause us to make assumptions as we create fuller answers in our minds, and assumptions can be big barriers to good communication.

Open questions, on the other hand, encourage people to talk. These questions are phrased so they cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Open questions often begin with a variation of the five W’s (who, what, when, where, why), or can ask how.

Open-ended questions can be used to:

- Get information
- Focus conversations
- Solicit opinions
- Gain consensus

The unintentional use of a closed question can often be overcome by simply following it with a short open question. For example:

- "Do you feel that was the right thing to do?"
- "Yes, I do."
- "Can you help me understand why you feel that way?"

Here is an example of a closed question:

- Do you like ice cream?

Replacing it with an open question provides us with more information:

- What’s your favorite flavor of ice cream?

The first question will only tell us whether the person likes ice cream or not. That's a closed situation. The second question will let us know a little bit about the person. It could also lead to follow up questions depending on their answer. Questions that are open ended will help us learn more about the people we speak with, establish things that we have in common, develop rapport, and make meaningful connections.

It is possible for you to ask someone an open question and for them to be evasive or try to shut the conversation down. Children are famous for this when a parent says, "What did you learn at school today?" and they reply, "Nothing." One of your team members may come see you after a meeting, and you say, "How'd the meeting go?" and they say, "Fine." If you want to engage them, you'll have to ask a follow up question. Some examples:

- What was the most interesting point raised in the meeting (or at school)?
- What were the challenges that we need to consider?
- What questions did the group ask?

There are several different types of open-ended questions. We can ask **leading questions** to influence how people think ("Don't you just love the way vanilla ice cream smells?"). **Rhetorical questions** are ones that we don't really want an answer to, such as "Do I look like I care?" Rhetorical questions can be used to engage your conversation partner and make them think about the obvious answer. (They may also be something that you blurt out because you are thinking out loud!) A rhetorical question can engage the listener in a persuasive manner as they process your ideas.

Probing questions can also help you to investigate in more detail.

Probing

Many people are better at presenting their own point of view than they are at drawing out information from others. Your role as a good communicator is to draw out information from the individual that will help you understand the issue. A good name for this skill of gathering information from others is probing.

When you probe, you:

- Get others involved and participating. Since probes are designed to produce a response, it's unlikely the other person will remain passive.
- Get important information on the table. People may not volunteer information, or the information they present may not be clear. Your probes help people open up and present or clarify their information.
- Force yourself to listen. Since probes are most effective in a sequence, you have to listen to a person's response.
- Help improve communication on both sides of the table.

There are five ways to probe.

One of the most common ways of probing is to ask an **open question**, such as:

- “Can you describe that more clearly?”
- “Would you give me a specific example of what you mean?”
- “What do you think we should do?”

The difficulty here is that if you ask too many of these probing questions, the other person begins to feel like they are being interrogated. Be thoughtful about what and how you ask. Consider how many probes you really need to offer.

A second, very effective way of probing is a **pause**. Stop talking. Let the other person fill the silence.

A third way is to ask a **reflective or mirroring question**. For example, let’s say the person has just said, “What I really want is more variety in my work.” You may respond by just reflecting back to them, “Variety?” The reflective question usually provides you with an expanded answer without you needing to ask more questions. Of course, it is best used in conjunction with a pause.

Reflective questions or statements focus on clarifying and summarizing without interrupting the flow of the conversation. They indicate your intent to understand the sender’s thoughts and feelings.

A fourth method that is particularly useful to make certain you understand what has just been said is **paraphrasing** in your own words.. An example: “So if I understand you correctly, you...”

You can use this response to show that you want to increase the accuracy of your understanding of what has just been said. You may also want to use it to ensure the sender hears what he has just said. Finally, paraphrasing reassures the sender that you are trying to understand what they are saying.

The last method, most often used as a conversation is winding down, is the **summary question**. Example: “You have tried ignoring the scent of your colleague’s cologne, you have talked with him about how it affects your allergies, and you have tried shutting your door to keep the scent from your workspace. None of these has worked and now you are asking me to intervene. Have I got it right?”