



4. Effective communication strategies



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Objectives

4.1 Effective communication strategies

2.The importance of listening for underlying interests

3.Identify constructive requests



Lesson 1

Communication Barriers and Strategies



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Barriers to listening

- **Focusing on a personal agenda. When we spend our listening time formulating our next response, we cannot be fully attentive to what the speaker is saying.**
- **Experiencing information overload. Too much stimulation or information can make it very difficult to listen with full attention. Try to focus on the relevant information and the central points that are being conveyed.**
- **Criticizing the speaker. Do not be distracted by critical evaluations of the speaker. Focus on what they are saying - the message - rather than the messenger.**
- **Getting distracted by emotional noise. We react emotionally to certain words, concepts and ideas, and to a myriad of other cues from speakers (appearance, non-verbal cues such as gestures, etc.). Make a conscious effort to quiet your own emotional reactions so that you can listen properly.**
- **Getting distracted by external “noise”. Audible noise may be extremely distracting. Some things can be minimized – e.g., turn down the ringer on your phone, and notifications on your phone or computer while meeting with someone. Other noises may be unavoidable – e.g., construction, other people. Also, there may be figurative “noise” from the external environment, such as distracting or inappropriate decor in a room, or environmental conditions such as the room being too hot or cold.**
- **Experiencing physical difficulty. Feeling physically unwell, or experiencing pain can make it very difficult to listen effectively. You may wish to communicate that this is not a good time, and reschedule the discussion.**



Strategies to listening

- **Stop. Focus on the other person, their thoughts and feelings. Consciously focus on quieting your own internal commentary, and step away from your own concerns to think about those of the speaker. Give your full attention to the speaker.**

- **Look. Pay attention to non-verbal messages, without letting yourself be distracted. Notice body language and non-verbal cues to allow for a richer understanding of the speaker's point. Remember that "active listeners need to communicate to the speaker that they are involved and giving the person unconditional attention".**

- **Listen. Listen for the essence of the speaker's thoughts: details, major ideas and their meanings. Seek an overall understanding of what the speaker is trying to communicate, rather than reacting to the individual words or terms that they use to express themselves.**

- **Be empathetic. Imagine how you would feel in their circumstances. Be empathetic to the feelings of the speaker, while maintaining a calm centre within yourself. You need not be drawn into all of their problems or issues, as long as you acknowledge what they are experiencing.**

- **Ask questions. Use questions to clarify your understanding, as well as to demonstrate an interest in what is being said.**

Paraphrase. If you don't have any specific questions to ask, you may choose to repeat back to the speaker, in your own words, what you have taken away, in order to allow the speaker to clarify any

Barriers to accurate perception

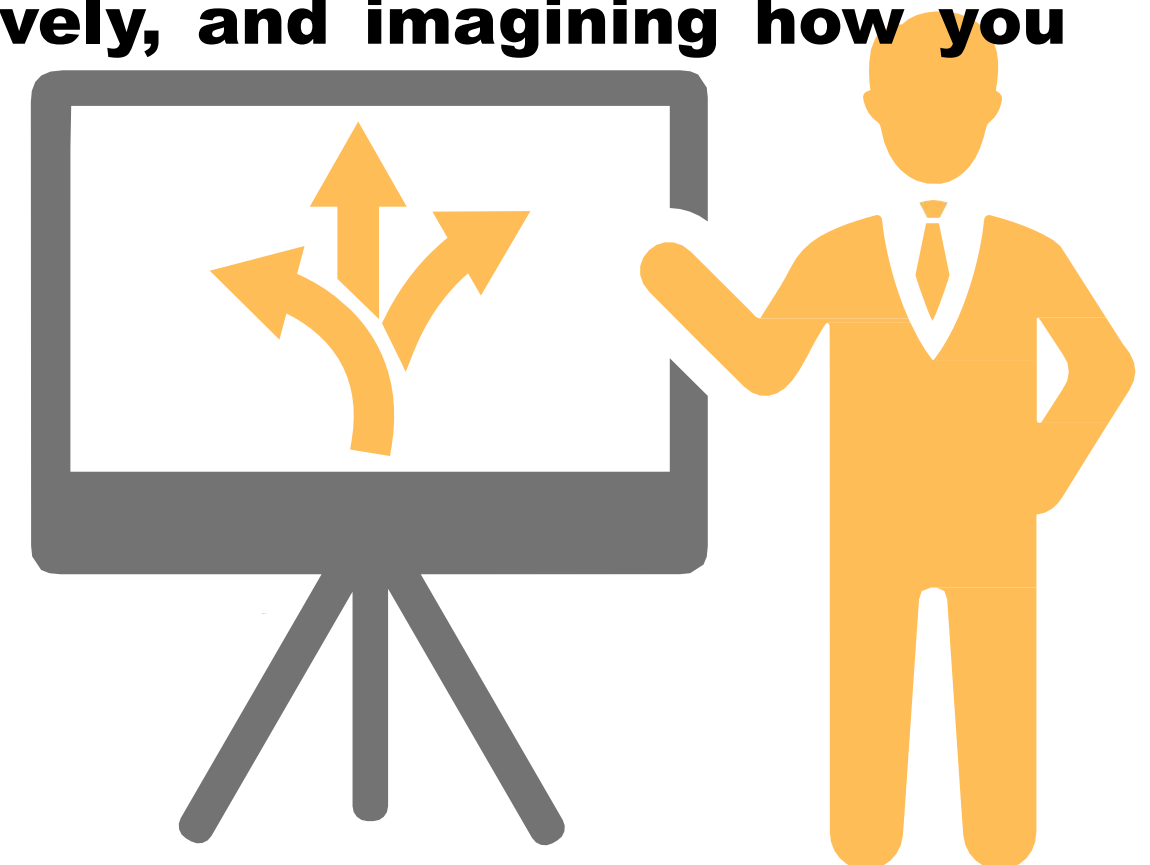


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- **Stereotyping and generalizing. Be careful not to hold on to preconceptions about people or things. We often have a tendency to see what we want to see, forming an impression from a small amount of information or one experience, and assuming that to be highly representative of the whole person or situation.**
- **Not investing time. Making assumptions and ignoring details or circumstances can lead to misconceptions. When we fail to look in-depth for causes or circumstances, we miss important details and do not allow for the complexity of the situation.**
- **Having a distorted focus. Focusing on the negative aspects of a conversation or a situation is a habit common to many people. Even though we may recognize the positive things, we often give more weight to the negative, allowing one negative comment to overshadow numerous positive ones.**
- **Assuming similar interpretations. Not everyone will draw the same conclusions from a given situation or set of information. Everybody interprets things differently. Make sure to check for other people's interpretations, and be explicit about your own.**
- **Experiencing incongruent cues. As speakers, and as listeners, we are constantly and simultaneously sending cues and receiving them from other people. Try to be consistent with your verbal cues and your body language. Do not say one thing and express something else through your body language. Be aware of how your non-verbal communication relates to your spoken words. If someone else seems to be sending a double message — by saying one thing and expressing something else in their body language — ask for clarification.**

Strategies to accurate perception

- **Analyze your own perceptions.** Question your perceptions, and think about how they are formed. Check-in with others around you regularly, and be aware of assumptions that you are making. Seek additional information and observations. You may just need to ask people if your perceptions are accurate.
- **Work on improving your perception.** Increase your awareness of barriers to perception, and which ones you tend towards. Check-in with yourself regularly. Seek honest, constructive feedback from others regarding their perceptions of you as a means of increasing your selfawareness.
- **Focus on others.** Develop your ability to focus on other people, and understand them better by trying to gather knowledge about them, listening to them actively, and imagining how you would feel in their situation.



Barriers to effective verbal communication



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- **Lacking clarity.** Avoid abstract, overly-formal language, **colloquialisms**, and **jargon**, which **obscure your message more than they serve to impress people.**
- **Using stereotypes and generalizations.** **Speakers who make unqualified generalizations undermine their own clarity and credibility. Be careful not to get stuck in the habit of using stereotypes, or making generalizations about complex systems or situations.** Another form of generalization is “polarization” or creating extremes. **Try to be sensitive to the complexities of situations, rather than viewing the world in black and white.**
- **Jumping to conclusions.** **Confusing facts with inferences is a common tendency.** Do not assume you know the reasons behind events, or that certain facts necessarily have certain implications. **Make sure you have all the information you can get, and then speak clearly about the facts versus the meanings or interpretations you attach to those.**
- **Dysfunctional responses.** Ignoring or not responding to a comment or question quickly undermines effective communication. **Likewise, responding with an irrelevant comment -- one that isn't connected to the topic at hand -- will quash genuine communication. Interrupting others while they are speaking also creates a poor environment for communication.**
- **Lacking confidence.** **Lacking confidence can be a major barrier to effective communication. Shyness, difficulty being assertive, or low self-worth can hinder your ability to make your needs and opinions known. Also, a lack of awareness of your own rights and opportunities in a given situation can prevent you from expressing your needs openly.**

Strategies to effective verbal communication



- **Focus on the issue, not the person. Try not to take everything personally, and similarly, express your own needs and opinions in terms of the job at hand. Solve problems rather than attempt to control others. For example, rather than ignoring a student who routinely answers questions in class with inappropriate tangents, speak with the student outside of class about how this might disrupt the class and distract other students.**
- **Be genuine rather than manipulative. Be yourself, honestly and openly. Be honest with yourself, focus on working well with the people around you, and act with integrity.**
- **Empathize rather than remain detached. Although professional relationships entail some boundaries when it comes to interaction with colleagues, it is important to demonstrate sensitivity and to really care about the people you work with. If you don't care about them, it will be difficult for them to care about you when it comes to working together.**
- **Be flexible towards others. Allow for other points of view, and be open to other ways of doing things. Diversity brings creativity and innovation.**
- **Value yourself and your own experiences. Be firm about your own rights and needs. Undervaluing yourself encourages others to undervalue you, too. Offer your ideas and expect to be treated well.**
- **Use affirming responses. Respond to others in ways that acknowledge their experiences. Thank them for their input. Affirm their right to their feelings, even if you disagree. Ask questions, express positive feelings; and provide positive feedback when you can.**



ONLINE QUIZZ

material

You know you have understood the materials when... you answer below!

As a summary try to answer these two questions, write down your answers.

How would you solve barriers to listening?

How can you improve your perception?

What main obstacles can you encounter that prohibit effective communication?



Lesson 2

Listening vs
Hearing

Constructive
feedback



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Hearing

is an accidental and automatic brain response to sound that requires no effort. We are surrounded by sounds most of the time.

For example, we are accustomed to the sounds of aeroplanes, lawn mowers, furnace blowers, the rattling of pots and pans, and so on. We hear those incidental sounds and, unless we have a reason to do otherwise, we train ourselves to ignore them.

We learn to filter out sounds that mean little to us, just as we choose to hear our ringing cell phones and other sounds that are more important to us.

Listening



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Listening, on the other hand, is purposeful and focused rather than accidental. As a result, it requires motivation and effort.

Listening, at its best, is active, focused, and concentrated attention for the purpose of understanding the meanings expressed by a speaker.

We do not always listen at our best, however, and later in this slide, we will examine some of the reasons why and some strategies for becoming more active critical listeners.

Listening



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Benefits of Listening

Listening should not be taken for granted. Before the invention of writing, people conveyed virtually all knowledge through some combination of showing and telling. Elders recited tribal histories to attentive audiences. Listeners received religious teachings enthusiastically.

Myths, legends, folktales, and stories for entertainment survived only because audiences were eager to listen.

Nowadays, however, you can gain information and entertainment through reading and electronic recordings rather than through real-time listening. If you become distracted and let your attention wander, you can go back and replay a recording.

Despite that fact, you can still gain at least four compelling benefits by becoming more active and competent at real-time listening.

Comparison

LISTENING

- **Accidental**
- **Involuntary**
- **Effortless**

HEARING

- **Focused**
- **Voluntary**
- **Deliberate**



What is Constructive Feedback?

Constructive feedback is supportive feedback given to individuals to help identify solutions to areas of weakness they may have.

Therefore, it comes with positive intentions and is used as a supportive communication tool to address specific issues or concerns.

The purpose of constructive feedback is to give feedback to an individual in a way that will lead to improvements or corrections. This is important, as it enhances personal and professional growth in individuals.

For example, constructive

- **feedback can: Improve**
- **morale**
- **Reduce confusion regarding expectations and current performance**
- **Provide a new perspective and give valuable insight to the person receiving feedback**
- **Positively impact an individual's behaviour**



Making Feedback Constructive

It is important to be able to differentiate between constructive feedback and destructive feedback.

Destructive feedback points at faults and is a direct attack on the individual. In destructive feedback, no practical advice or supportive feedback is given.

Examples of destructive feedback

- **include: “You’re wrong.”**
- **“That is not how you do things around here.”**
- **“You have no idea what you are doing.”**



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Making Feedback Constructive



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1. Focus on observation and not inference

Constructive feedback should relate to what you can see or hear about that person's behaviour rather than making assumptions and interpretations.

2. Focus on behaviour and not the individual

Constructive feedback should be about what the individual did rather than who the individual is.

3. Focus on things that can be changed

Constructive feedback should be about things that a person can change and improve on rather than on something that is out of his/her control.

4. Provide recommendations and solutions

Constructive feedback should include a specific solution or recommendation.

How to Give Constructive Feedback

1. State the purpose of your feedback

State what you will be talking about and why it is important.

2. Describe what you have observed and your reaction

Clearly identify the action or event and how it makes you or other members feel.

3. Give the individual an opportunity to respond

After you have stated the purpose, importance, observation, and your reaction, ask the person what they think about it.

4. Offer specific suggestions or solutions

After you hear the individual out, give input as to how the situation can be improved.

5. Summarize everything discussed

Summarize everything that was discussed to avoid any misunderstandings. Also, summarizing helps ensure that the constructive feedback was communicated efficiently.

ONLINE QUIZZ

material

You know you have understood the materials when... you answer below!

As a summary try to answer these two questions, write down your answers.

What is the importance of listening?

How would you provide constructive feedback?



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Lesson 3

Assertiveness



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Assertiveness

Being assertive is a core communication skill. Assertiveness can help you express yourself effectively and stand up for your point of view. It can also help you do this while respecting the rights and beliefs of others.

Being assertive can also help boost your self-esteem and earn others' respect. This can help with stress management. It may especially help you reduce stress if you tend to take on too many responsibilities because you have a hard time saying no.

Some people seem to be naturally assertive. But if you're not assertive, you can learn to be.

Why assertive communication makes sense



Because assertiveness is based on mutual respect, it's an effective and diplomatic communication style. Being assertive shows that you respect yourself because you're willing to stand up for your interests and express your thoughts and feelings. It also demonstrates that you're aware of others' rights and willing to work on resolving conflicts.

Of course, it's not just what you say — your message — but also how you say it that's important. Assertive communication is direct and respectful. Being assertive gives you the best chance of successfully delivering your message. If you communicate in a way that's too passive or too aggressive, your message may get lost because people are too busy reacting to your delivery.

The benefits of being assertive



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Being assertive is usually viewed as a healthier communication style. Assertiveness offers many benefits. It helps you keep people from taking advantage of you. It can also help you from acting like a bully to others.

Behaving assertively can help you:

- **Gain self-confidence and self-esteem**
- **Gain a sense of empowerment**
- **Understand and recognize your feelings**
- **Earn respect from others**
- **Improve**

Learning to be more assertive



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People develop different styles of communication-based on their life experiences. Your style may be so ingrained that you're not even aware of what it is. People tend to stick to the same communication style over time. But if you want to change your communication style, you can learn to communicate in healthier and more effective ways.

Here are some tips to help you become more assertive:

- **Assess your style. Do you voice your opinions or remain silent? Do you say yes to additional work even when your schedule is full? Are you quick to judge or blame? Do people seem to dread or fear talking to you? Understand your style before you begin making changes.**
- **Use 'I' statements.** Using I statements lets others know what you're thinking or feeling without sounding accusatory. For instance, say, "I disagree," rather than, "You're wrong." If you have a request, say, "I would like you to help with this" rather than, "You need to do this." Keep your requests simple, specific and clear.
- **Practice saying no. If you have a hard time turning down requests, try saying, "No, I can't do that now." Remember that no is a complete sentence and you don't need to explain why you choose to say no. Don't hesitate — be direct. If an explanation is**

Learning to be more assertive



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- **Rehearse what you want to say. If it's challenging to say what you want or think, practice general scenarios you encounter. Say what you want to say out loud. It may help to write it out first, too, so you can practice from a script. Consider role-playing with a friend or colleague and asking for clear feedback.**
- **Use body language. Communication isn't just verbal. Act confident even if you aren't feeling it. Keep an upright posture, but lean forward a bit. Make regular eye contact. Maintain a neutral or positive facial expression. Don't cross your arms or legs. Face the person. Practice assertive body language in front of a mirror or with a friend or colleague. In addition to what you say, your body language and facial expressions are also important.**
- **Keep emotions in check. Conflict is hard for most people. Maybe you get angry or frustrated, or maybe you feel like crying. Although these feelings are typical, they can get in the way of resolving conflict. If you feel too emotional going into a situation, wait a bit if possible. Then work on remaining calm. Breathe slowly. Keep your voice even and firm.**
- **Start small. At first, practice your new skills in situations that are low risk. For instance, try out your assertiveness on a partner or friend before tackling a difficult situation at work. Evaluate yourself afterwards and adjust your approach as needed.**

Resource Page



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