



Effective Communication and Conflict Resolution in the Workplace

Overview

Communication means more than just talking. It means knowing how to listen, resolve conflicts, and negotiate.

In this training we will discuss:

- **The ‘who’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ of successful communication through active listening skills**
- **Approaches to conflict resolution and effective communication**
- **Effective negotiation skills**

Once you’ve learned these skills, you will have a strong foundation in effective communication. The secret to effective communication is quite simple:

“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

What is communication?



The **exchange** of thoughts and messages, or the like, by speech, signals, or writing, creating a **shared** meaning.

Can you hear me now?

LALALA LALALA LALALA



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 Volunteers of America®
NORTH LOUISIANA

The 'Who' of Communication

Name three groups of people with whom you communicate on a day-to-day basis:

1. customers
2. coworkers
3. community

Hint – They all begin with 'C'.

Customers

Customers can also include:

- Family members
- Friends
- Doctors
- Funding sources
- Licensing sources

Customers

There are two reasons that we need to successfully communicate with customers.

1. Customer service is a reflection of what we believe:

“I will conduct myself at all times with openness, forthrightness, and honesty in dealing with people and organizations, both internally and externally...I will treat everyone with dignity, worth, respect, concern, courtesy and fairness.” -VOANLA Code of Ethics

2. “A happy customer tells a friend. An unhappy customer tells the world.”

Community

Our customers are our top priority, but we must also have strong communication skills to present ourselves in a professional way to the community.

Think of all the places we see new and familiar faces in the community:

- Banks
- Restaurants
- Stores
- Parks

We are the face of Volunteers of America North Louisiana, and it's our job to share and represent the organization's mission, values, and high standards of service.

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Co-Workers

Now we know why we need strong communications skills that create positive relationships with the community outside of Volunteers of America. However, we also need to use these skills to create strong relationships with the community inside Volunteers of America.

The people in this community include

- **Co-workers**
- **Supervisors**
- **Volunteers**

It is important to successfully communicate with co-workers, supervisors and volunteers because it helps make our jobs rewarding and because it helps us better help the people we support.

Listening Is a Super Power!

Think again about **'seeking to understand'** and **'seeking to be understood'**. The ordinary words for these concepts are **listening** and **talking**. **Active listening is important because it allows you to...**

- **Fully understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings**
- **Notice and remember details**
- **See the whole picture**

Once you're able to do these, you will have a **'superpower'** to make smarter decisions that successfully solve problems.



Active Listening

Smarter decision-making is not the only ‘super power’ you get from active listening. Active listening also sends the message that the speaker matters to you, creating a sense of goodwill.

Active listening creates goodwill by making the speaker

- **Feel valued**
- **Trust you**
- **Feel relaxed and cooperative**
- **Open up**

What to Avoid

Now that you know the 'super powers' you get from active listening, let's learn 'how' to become an active listener. You can become an active listener by practicing habits of 'seeking first to understand'.

When actively listening, be sure NOT to...

- **Interrupt**
- **Judge**
- **Cut off the speaker to give recommendations**
- **Cut off the speaker to describe a similar situation you faced**
- **Steer the conversation by asking leading questions**
- **Start your response on a disagreeable note by using the words *no, but, or however.***

Interrupting

It is natural to want to share our thoughts and experiences with the speaker. However, sometimes we respond when we should be just listening.

“I got a flat tire this morning...” ----- “I know what you mean. Last week I ran over a nail and had to pay \$65 for a new tire...”

“I went to Florida last week...” ----- “Yeah, we went to Florida last month. Disney was great but it was so hot. You shouldn’t go in August...”

“Sharon wants to join a gym...” ----- “I supported Rachel when she joined a gym. I had to go with her all the time, and it drove me crazy. Believe me, it is not worth it...”

Body Language

There are four ways to tell the speaker that you are listening carefully. The first is body language.

1. **Nodding**
2. **Gesturing** (*putting your hand over your mouth to show surprise*)
3. ***Leaning toward the speaker***
4. ***Tilting your head to show that you are thinking about what the speaker is saying***

Thoughtful Questions

Clarify the speaker's meaning by restating key points

- Say: *"Because you felt angry, you decided to walk home?"*
- Not: *"What a bad Idea! Didn't you know you'd get lost?"*

Use 'I' language to avoid making assumptions about the speaker

- Say: *"What I am hearing is that John's lateness frustrated you – is this right?"*
- Not: *"You hate tardiness, so you were frustrated with John."*

Reflect back the speaker's feelings by describing, not judging.

- Say: *"When Larry said it was okay, you felt that John was treated special?"*
- Not: *"No one should get special treatment like John did, huh?"*

More Thoughtful Questions

Separate the speaker's behaviors from the speaker's personality and avoid judgmental statements.

Say: *"So you chose to leave because you were angry?"*

Not: *"You left because you're impatient!"*

Focus on the present.

Say: *"You seem to be saying that you still feel sad."*

Not: *"Get over it. That happened a week ago."*

Require more than a one-word answer.

Say: *"What made you want to leave?"*

Not: *"You felt bad about your decision to leave, didn't you?"*

Mirroring

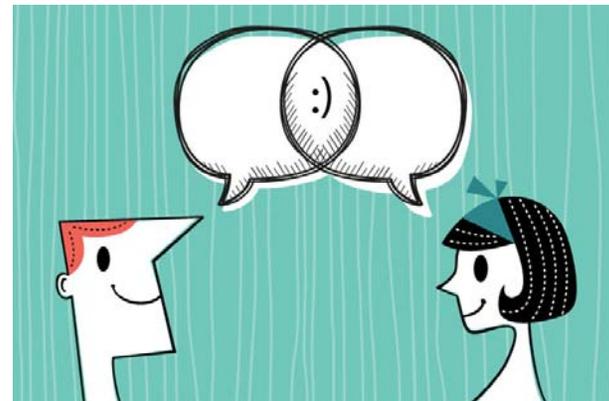
Repeating the speaker's most important thoughts and feelings in your own words is the easiest and most valuable show that we are listening carefully.

- **This makes the speaker feel respected.**

When we understand speakers enough to explain their thoughts and feelings as well as they can, they feel genuinely valued and understood.

- **This prevents miscommunication.**

When we repeat the speaker's key points in our own words, both the message sender and the message receiver can check if the message has been clearly communicated.



Verbal Communication

Is this exchange of information using words, both the spoken and written word. The most important aspects of verbal communication are:

- Language
- Pacing
- Intonation
- Clarity and brevity
- Timing and relevance

Non-Verbal Communication

Information is exchanged through non-verbal communication in various ways. It is often referred to as body language.

- Gestures
- Facial expressions
- Sign language
- Posture
- Body space and proximity
- Touch
- Eye contact
- Tone
- Silence

1. Minimize Distractions:

- Choose an appropriate setting for the discussion.
- Take a break from electronic devices.

2. Focus on the Speaker:

- Maintain eye contact.
- Ensure your body language communicates that you are listening.
- Be present.
- Help when necessary.

3. Paraphrase the Message:

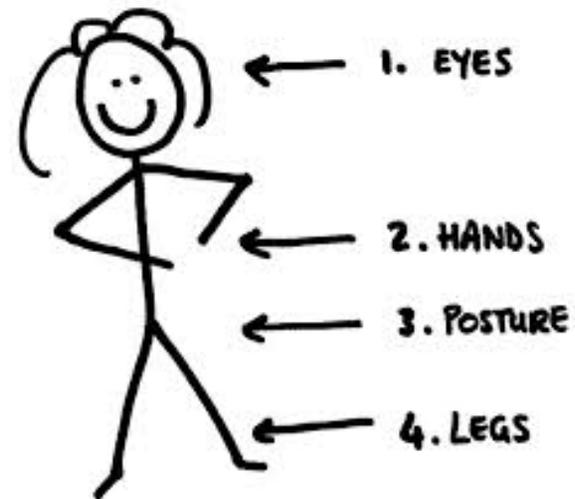
- Reflect the message to insure understanding.
- Clarify content and meaning.
 - “To summarize what I’ve heard...”
 - “Based on what you’ve told me, my understanding is...”

4. Assist the Speaker and Help Them Stay Focused:

- Ask questions
- Use affirmations, verbal nods, involved silence
- Control your emotional responses

5. Hear Feelings as well as Words (Non-Verbal):

- Listen with your eyes and ears. What is being communicated through expressions, posture and tone?
- Acknowledge strong emotions but don't react.



What are barriers to communication?



Ineffective communication can lead to potential conflicts.

Challenging Communication

Communication may be especially challenging when the...

- **Speaker or the listener has an emotional or mental filter**
- **Speaker and listener strongly disagree**

With the right attitude and effective communication, you can overcome these challenges.

Constructive Expression

Everyone has a different response to negative feelings.

There are some basic guidelines for communicating with people who are upset.

- **Support them to address their feelings**
- **Encourage them not to ignore their feelings**
- **Encourage them to name the feeling**
- **Accept feelings even when you cannot accept their actions**

Next, let's focus on what makes people upset beginning with emotional and mental filters.

Emotional and Mental Filters

Filters occur when something you hear triggers a powerful association. Emotional filters trigger **feelings** and mental filters trigger **thoughts**.

If someone becomes angry or tense because of an emotional or mental filter, here are some tips on how you can make the communication calm again:

- Apologize for bringing up the issue.
- Admit there are issues that you are especially sensitive about, too.
- Indicate that you did not mean to make the listener uncomfortable.
- Switch topics of conversation.
- Suggest a calming break.

Disagreements

Disagreements can be a good thing as they provide opportunities to learn from each other's unique viewpoints.

- **Win-Lose outcomes**, disagreements that damage relationships

*If we 'lose' an argument, we walk away feeling hurt and resentful
If we 'win' an argument, we have made someone walk away with a grudge against us, and this means we 'lose' what we really want – a supportive, caring relationship.*

- **Win-Win outcomes**, disagreements that strengthen relationships

If we look at disagreements as opportunities to show that we care enough about the person to find a win-win solution, both people walk away with more trust in the relationship.

Examples of Win-Win Outcomes

Win/Lose

- ❑ “When are you going to learn to pick up after yourself? You may not want to do the laundry, but you have to. That’s that.”

- ❑ “Whether or not you want to get in the car, it’s my job to take you to the doctor, so you’ll have to do it sooner or later.”

Win/Win

- “There are two reason to do the laundry that’s on the floor. It makes us more independent, and it makes our living spaces more comfortable. Let’s do it now, so we can go to the park afterward.”

- “Going to the doctor isn’t fun, but if we hurry and get in the car to go we will have more time to paint when we get back.”

Tips for Win-Win Outcomes

Describe, don't blame.

Say: *"The milk spilled, so we need a sponge."*

Not: *"You spilled the milk. Get a sponge."*

Give information to build connections.

Say: *"Milk goes sour when it's left out. Let's put it in the fridge."*

Not: *"Put the milk away."*

Use one-word prompts to build connections.

Say: *"What do we need to remember to do after eating? Dishes..."*

Not: *"Did you forget again? Let's do the dishes."*

Use notes or pictures to encourage independence.

Say: *"It's hard to remember to iron before work. Let's use a picture of an iron as a reminder."*

Not: *"Don't forget to iron your clothes before you go to work."*

Conflict Resolution

- Workplace conflict naturally emerges from incompatible or opposing needs, external demands or lacking expectations.
- Co-worker conflicts can be one of the most difficult forms of workplace stress.
- Understanding the nature of conflicts and learning simple conflict resolution skills can reduce conflicts and their negative toll on communication and productivity.

Reduce Defensiveness

“I feel...”

Share how the events or behavior is affecting you.

“when you...”

State the facts without judgment, exaggeration or motives.

“because...”

Describe the connection between the facts and the feelings they provoked.

(Let the other person respond.)

“I would prefer...”

Describe the changes you’d like the other consider

“because...”

and how you think those changes will alleviate the conflict

“What do you think?”

Listen to the response. Be prepared to compromise to find a solution.

Confirm Understanding

- Reiterate what you heard and ask for confirmation.
- Summarize what you understand and ask if your assumptions or deductions are correct.

- Make notes from your verbal conversations and email to ensure everyone had the same understanding.
- Detail action steps and follow-up plan:
 - “Let’s review the timeline, just to be certain we’re on track.”
 - “Could you summarize your next steps, just so I know we’re both clear on where we’re going from here”

Effective Negotiation Skills

- **Preparation**

Decide on your goals and the issues you are willing to compromise on.

- **Discussion**

Begin on a calm note and practice active listening throughout the discussion in order to view the issue from every perspective.

- **Proposal and Counter-Proposal**

Make an offer and listen for a counter-offer; this may happen several times before you reach a compromise.

- **Agreement or Disagreement**

Emphasize that if you cannot agree you can return to the discussion phase.

Effective Negotiation Techniques

Separate people from problems

Say: *“Your sister thinks it is not the right time to get an apartment.”*

Not: *“Your sister says you are not responsible enough to get an apartment.”*

Understand their perspective

Say: *“This must be a big disappointment for you.”*

Not: *“Why are you acting so frustrated?”*

State the interest, not the motive

Say: *“I see – you want to live alone.”*

Not: *“I can’t see why you want to live alone. Aren’t you comfortable here?”*

List options

Say: *“Maybe we could request a single room here or more ‘privacy’ time.”*

Not: *“If you think you are going to live alone, that’s impossible.”*

Addressing your own Stress Level

It is okay to feel stress out by challenging communications. No one can be patient all the time, and it is unreasonable for us to expect this of ourselves.

Remember:

- **Avoid acting sarcastic or annoyed**
- **Be straightforward and calm**
- **If you need to, ask for a quiet moment to relax**

Electronic Communication

Another form of communication is electronic. Internally, our organization heavily relies on our employees' ability to effectively communicate via technology.

[“Email in Real Life”](#)



Three Considerations

1. Human contact still matters: Don't communicate electronically at the expense of personal two-way communication. There's a reason people often need to discuss things face-to-face, and there are times when no substitute will do – whether you're breaking up with your boyfriend or asking your boss for a raise.

2. Watch what you say, and how you say it: Whereas the computer brings people together, its impersonal nature can lead to remarks that people wouldn't think of saying in person. Do whatever it takes to stay courteous, even if that means taping a note to your computer reminding you to be decent and polite.

3. Be careful when clicking "Send": Whatever you say in cyberspace cannot be taken back. You have no control over where your message goes once you've hit "Send"; it can be saved and forwarded by any recipient who chooses to do so. Consequently, words have come back to hurt people, destroy friendships, and ruin careers.

Email



DOs

- Thoroughly READ the entire email (active listen)
- Respond within 24 hours
- Use VOA email signature
- VOA ALL email must be approved by senior management
- Enable away messages both internal and external
- Use read receipts if needed
- Fill in the subject line
- Use spell check

DON'Ts

- No yelling, please
- Reduce emoticons in business
- Make grammatical errors
- Send hastily
- Send VOA ALL email w/out approval
- Not follow-up or ignore request

Discussion

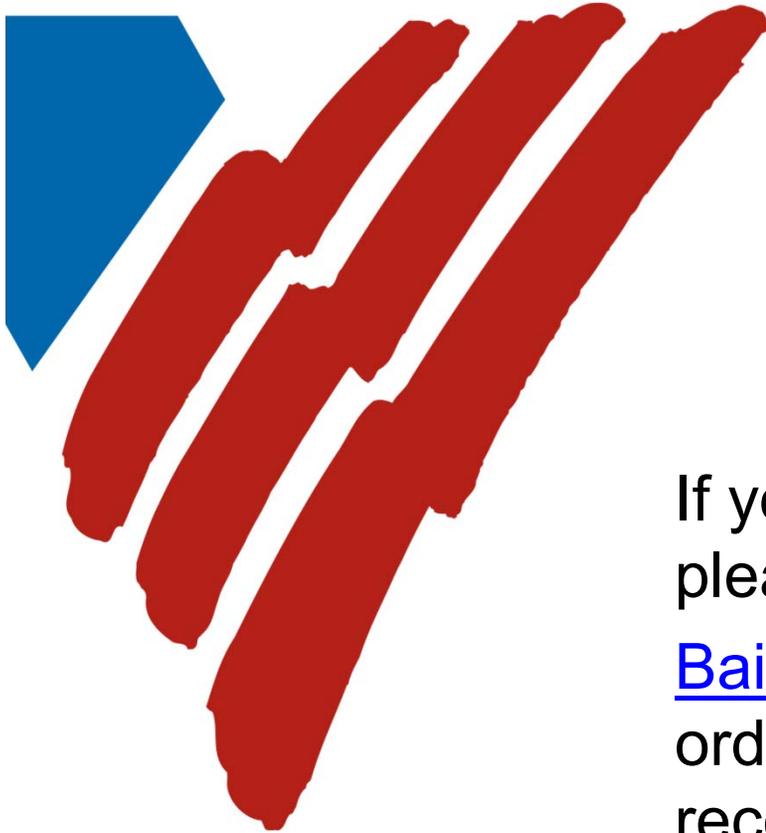
- Q + A
- What are some of your strengths in communication?
- One area you can improve your communication style?

Why does this matter?

Our daily communication can enable or hinder us from serving our clients with excellence.

Thank you!





Thank you!

If you have completed this training please notify:

Bailee.winterrowd@voanorthla.org in order for your participation to be recorded in your employee training file.