**Communication Skills**

Communication skills allow you to understand and be understood by others. These can include but are not limited to effectively communicating ideas to others, actively listening in conversations, giving and receiving critical feedback and public speaking.

**What are communication skills?**

Communication skills are abilities you use when giving and receiving different kinds of information. Some examples include communicating ideas, feelings or what’s happening around you. Communication skills involve listening, speaking, observing and empathizing. It is also helpful to understand the differences in how to communicate through face-to-face interactions, phone conversations and digital communications, like email and social media.

**Communication skills examples**

There are different types of communication skills you can learn and practice to help you become an effective communicator. Many of these skills work together, making it important to practice communication skills in different contexts whenever possible.

**Active listening**

Active listening means paying close attention to the person who is speaking to you. People who are active listeners are well-regarded by their coworkers because of the attention and respect they offer others. While it seems simple, this is a skill that can be hard to develop and improve. You can be an active listener by focusing on the speaker, avoiding distractions like cell phones, laptops or other projects, and by preparing questions, comments or ideas to thoughtfully respond.

**Adapting your communication style to your audience**

Different styles of communication are appropriate in different situations. To make the best use of your communication skills, it’s important to consider your audience and the most effective format to communicate with them in.

For example, if you are communicating with a potential employer, it’s better to send a formal email or call them on the phone. Depending on the situation, you may even need to send a formal, typed letter over other forms of communication. In the workplace, you may find it’s easier to communicate complex information in person or via a video conference than in a long, dense email.

**Friendliness**

In friendships, characteristics such as honesty and kindness often foster trust and understanding. The same characteristics are important in workplace relationships. When you’re working with others, approach your interactions with a positive attitude, keep an open mind and ask questions to help you understand where they’re coming from. Small gestures such as asking someone how they’re doing, smiling as they speak or offering praise for work well done can help you foster productive relationships with both colleagues and managers.

**Confidence**

In the workplace, people are more likely to respond to ideas that are presented with confidence. There are many ways to appear confident, including by making eye contact when you’re addressing someone, sitting up straight with your shoulders open and preparing ahead of time so your thoughts are polished. You’ll find confident communication comes in handy not just on the job but during the job interview process as well.

**Giving and receiving feedback**

Strong communicators are able to accept critical feedback and provide constructive input to others. Feedback should answer questions, provide solutions or help strengthen the project or topic at hand.

**Volume and clarity**

When you’re speaking, it’s important to be clear and audible. Adjusting your speaking voice so you can be heard in a variety of settings is a skill, and it’s critical to communicating effectively. Speaking too loudly may by disrespectful or awkward in certain settings. If you’re unsure, read the room to see how others are communicating.

**Empathy**

Having empathy means that you can understand and share the emotions of others. This communication skill is important in both team and one-on-one settings. In both cases, you will need to understand other people’s emotions and select an appropriate response. For example, if someone is expressing anger or frustration, empathy can help you acknowledge and diffuse their emotion. At the same time, being able to understand when someone is feeling positive and enthusiastic can help you get support for your ideas and projects.

**Respect**

A key aspect of respect is knowing when to initiate communication and respond. In a team or group setting, allowing others to speak without interruption is seen as a necessary communication skill tied to respectfulness. Respectfully communicating also means using your time with someone else wisely—staying on topic, asking clear questions and responding fully to any questions you’ve been asked.

**Understanding nonverbal cues**

A great deal of communication happens through nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expressions and eye contact. When you’re listening to someone, you should be paying attention to what they’re saying as well as their nonverbal language. By the same measure, you should be conscious of your own body language when you’re communicating to ensure you’re sending appropriate cues to others.

**Responsiveness**

Whether you’re returning a phone call or sending a reply to an email, fast communicators are viewed as more effective than those who are slow to respond. One method is to consider how long your response will take: is this a request or question you can answer in the next five minutes? If so, it may be a good idea to address it as soon as you see it. If it’s a more complex request or question, you can still acknowledge that you’ve received the message and let the other person know you will respond in full later.

**How to improve your communication skills**

With experience and practice, you can learn and improve on communication skills. Start by identifying your strengths and then practice and develop those areas.

* **Ask a close friend or colleague for constructive criticism.** It can be hard to know how you are perceived as a communicator. To get an objective opinion, ask a trusted friend for their honest feedback. Understanding your areas of improvement for communication can help you identify what to focus on.
* **Practice improving communication habits.** Many communication skills are habits you have developed over time. You can improve those skills by practicing new habits that make you a better communicator. That might include being more responsive to communications when they are sent, reminding yourself to give eye contact, practicing giving positive feedback and asking questions in conversations.
* **Attend communication skills workshops or classes.** There are several online and offline seminars, workshops and classes that can help you be a better communicator. These classes may include instruction, roleplay, written assignments and open discussions.
* **Seek opportunities to communicate.** Seek out opportunities both on and off the job that require you to use communication skills. This will help you keep good skills fresh while also allowing you the opportunity to practice new skills.

**Communicating effectively in the workplace**

While there are several communication skills you will use in different scenarios, there are a few ways you can be an effective communicator at work:

* **Be clear and concise.** Making your message as easy to consume as possible reduces the chance of misunderstandings, speeds up projects and helps others quickly understand your goals. Instead of speaking in long, detailed sentences, practice reducing your message down to its core meaning. While providing context is helpful, it is best to give the most necessary information when trying to communicate your idea, instruction or message.
* **Practice empathy.** Understanding your colleague’s feelings, ideas and goals can help you when communicating with them. For example, you might need help from other departments to get a project started. If they are not willing to help or have concerns, practicing empathy can help you position your message in a way that addresses their apprehension.
* **Assert yourself.** At times, it is necessary to be assertive to reach your goals whether you are asking for a raise, seeking project opportunities or resisting an idea you don’t think will be beneficial. While presenting with confidence is an important part of the workplace, you should always be respectful in conversation. Keeping an even tone and providing sound reasons for your assertions will help others be receptive to your thoughts.
* **Be calm and consistent.** When there is a disagreement or conflict, it can be easy to bring emotion into your communications. It is important to remain calm when communicating with others in the workplace. Be aware of your body language by not crossing your arms or rolling your eyes. Maintaining consistent body language and keeping an even tone of voice can help you reach a conclusion peacefully and productively.
* **Use and read body language.** Body language is a key part of communications in the workplace. Pay close attention to the messages people are sending with their facial expressions and movements. You should also pay close attention the way you might be communicating (intentionally or not) with your own body language.