



Effective Communication Skills

Effective business communication skills start with an understanding of what you value and what others value. We learn this through listening and feedback, self awareness and interpersonal skills. All those “soft skills” that are the hardest to learn or teach.

Following are our suggestions on how to use these effective communication videos. Depending on the point you’re teaching, these videos will illuminate and back up the key training points you’re making. Donald Van de Mark is the interviewer and host of many of these videos. He was a former anchor at CNN and PBS.



Discuss the benefits of listening:

Listening is as powerful as talking. We learn more. We spot opportunities or problems before they get too big to fix. As leaders, we need to make ourselves available to those who want to talk to us. It can make the difference in a company’s success or failure.

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Listening Skills for Innovation and Change:

Listening can seem like a passive skill. But, if you're really listening to the other person, you'll learn something new and *they feel valued*.

Stephen Covey, the author of the "Seven Habits of Highly Effective Leaders" calls this "empathic listening" or active listening. It builds trust because a person feels heard; that person could be an angry customer, a frustrated colleague, an enthusiastic employee with a great idea or your boss.

Listening is an essential skill for third parties and people who disagree as it enables the listener to receive and accurately interpret the speaker's message, and then provide an appropriate response in a negotiation or mediation. It significantly expands our circle of influence. Watch this video of Stephen Covey:



Intel founder Andy Grove faces a highly competitive environment for micro-processors worldwide. Intel has to make ever more powerful chips for increasingly creative uses in computers, PDA's, cameras. This makes it imperative that Grove is aware and listens for every good idea. Watch this video of Andy Grove:



During his tenure as CEO of Intel, Grove oversaw a 4,500% increase in Intel's market capitalization from \$18 billion to \$197 billion.

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Key benefits of empathic listening:

1. Builds trust and respect,
2. Releases emotions and reduces tensions,
3. New information or ideas surface
4. Creates a safe environment conducive to collaborative problem solving.

Questions to Ask

- Can you recall a story of when you were treated poorly by a company? What was wrong? Did the customer service representative listen to you? Did you tell your friends?
- What about being treated well? What do you think of that company or brand? Did you tell your friends?
- Can you recall a time when you actively listened and found out about a problem early enough to fix it or a great new opportunity? Have people share their experiences. (You might want to prepare an example from your own experience).

Steve Case, who founded AOL, says listening to customers and employees led him to “connect the dots” to see that the early days of computers were not about technology but communication. In the early 90’s, this was not an obvious or conventional way of thinking but Case saw the patterns and opportunities from listening.

Watch this video of Steve Case:



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Suggested 10 minute Activity

- Divide the group into two groups: “A’s” and “B’s”. Pair each “A” with a “B”.
- Tell the A’s to tell a story about their proudest moment and why. Give them 2 minutes.
- Tell the B’s to repeat the story back to A’s. Give them 2 minutes. Then, repeat the exercise with B’s talking and A’s listening.
- At the end of this exercise, ask these questions:
 - Did they feel the other party understood what they said?
 - Did the A’s listen more because they knew they were going to be asked to repeat back what they heard?
 - Who enjoyed talking more than listening?
 - What did they notice?

Different Communication Styles:

When listening or talking we need to be aware of how the other person hears; the filters through which they listen are based on how they operate in life. Some people operate by how they *feel*. These are the people who want to talk about their weekend before diving into a project. They’re very relationship focused. Others are *creative* and all about the ‘juice’ of an idea. Then, there are those who are *results-oriented*. They have little tolerance for small talk and want to dive into the project at hand.

We all have a mixture of these but if you first understand where a person is most comfortable, you’ll have the opportunity to approach that person on their turf and move a relationship forward with greater productivity. This is a powerful effective communication concept.

Watch this video of executive coach Stuart Gelles:



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Questions to Ask

- Ask participants which group they relate most to: Be-er, Dream-er or Do-er.
- Divide people into each group. Give them a few minutes to come up with how they define their traits (Example: do-ers are about getting it done, controlling the process and moving quickly, dreamers love coming up with ideas, be-ers are about the emotions around the project and people)
- Now, ask each group how they want to be treated when given a task. How do they want to be told? What do they want to know?
 - Do they want to dive right in and know the deadline?
 - Do they want to explore and brainstorm how to do it better?
 - Do they want to see who it affects and how they can help?

Are you aware of how you're communicating with others? Are you reactive? Do you snap back when you're stressed? Do you hold back out of fear of speaking? Can you control your responses? Sometimes it's good to understand how we learned these responses. Mathew Fox, the author of 28 books including *The Reinvention of Work* explains how if we're conscious of our reactions we can choose better responses.

Watch this video of Mathew Fox:



Questions to Ask

- What's your first response when stressed?
- What are some key strategies you can use to manage your reaction? (Remembering the relationship is more important than being right, being self-aware of your strengths so you can risk, asking a question versus making a statement to bring the issue to light in a non-threatening way)

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Managing Stress with Effective Communication:

Sometimes life feels like an endurance contest. So, there's no better way than to learn how to survive its challenges than from endurance athletes. Polar explorers Liv Arnesen and Ann Bancroft went through grueling physical and emotional pain as they trekked 1700 miles across Antarctica. They never reached the South Pole but they accomplished more than that by trying their best and staying positive.

They say they had to take personal responsibility to speak up if something was wrong. Watch this video:



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Questions to Ask

- How do you react when stressed? (Have participants write down their answers and then share)
- What ways have you found to relieve stress before it's harmful? (Have participants write down their answers and then share)
- How did these two women handle depression or negativity? (laughter, taking personal responsibility for speaking up, asking for help)
- What causes you to get stressed?
 - Lack of communication? (Can you ask for clarification?)
 - Time deadlines? (Can you delegate or ask your boss to prioritize?)
 - Too Many Tasks (Can you let some tasks go? Are you prioritizing based on what's important to you? What's urgent and unimportant versus what's urgent and important? Do you know?)
 - Have you set goals of what you want to achieve in one year, 5 years, end of your life?

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America's Cup Winner Dennis Conner knows all about winning. He's so good at it; he teaches executives leadership skills using sailing as a tool. Conner explains the communication skill every leader should avoid.

Watch this video of Dennis Conner:



Questions to Ask

- Explore the emotions people feel before an outburst: Is it that the goals aren't being met on time? Frustration over the volume of work?
- Explore what they've done in the past that has worked with their colleagues or new ways to communicate effectively. Ask participants to tell stories of when they or a role model have been under stress and how they communicated well.

Feedback and Honest Communication:

We can strengthen our communication skills through feedback. However, most people dread getting it because it's associated with past behavior and, quite frankly, beat up. Still, we need to know what our colleagues think of our behavior so we can fix it to succeed in the workplace.

Here's a step by step way to improve your skills and get feedback or as executive coach Marshall Goldsmith puts it, feed *forward*. It's a process you'll want to do over and over with your team.

Marshall Goldsmith was a pioneer in the use of customized 360-degree feedback (confidential feedback from direct reports, peers and managers) as a leadership development tool. His early efforts in providing feedback and then following-up with executives to measure changes in behavior were precursors to what eventually evolved as the field of executive coaching.

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Watch this video of Marshall Goldsmith:



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