

Communicating At Work



Unless you are working alone on a deserted island, much of your day is spent communicating with coworkers, customers, colleagues and the general public. Communication is two way... you are trying to convey your message to another person and you hope that the other person understands what it is that you are saying. Communication can take many forms: it can be verbal, non-verbal, written or electronic. To be an effective employee you must be able to communicate clearly and concisely in all of these forms. This Guide offers some strategies to help you communicate better in the workplace.

The process of effective communication

In simple terms, communication occurs when one person tries to convey his or her thoughts to one or more other people. It is not easy, however, to convey thoughts in such a way that the other person or persons completely understands what has been communicated. There are a number of barriers that can block effective communication:

1. The person initiating the communication has not thought through what it is that he or she wants to say. If you cannot put into words what it is that you want to say, it is impossible to expect the listener to understand.
2. If you and the listener do not speak the same language, then communication becomes difficult. Sometimes you may be speaking the same language, but you are using jargon, slang or acronyms that are not understood by the listener.
3. The listener does not give you feedback that they understood what you just communicated. We all look for acknowledgment from the listener that they heard and understood the message. Feedback usually comes in the form of non-verbal clues like a smile, head shake or a look of puzzlement.
4. The setting or context of the conversation can affect our ability to hear what is being said. Communication can be difficult in a noisy environment, such as on a factory floor. Not being able to clearly hear what is being said can lead to mis-communication and misunderstanding.



The following are suggestions for ways that you can overcome these communication barriers while at work.

Clearly and concisely

At work, you will need to communicate accurately and efficiently. This may be different from the way you are used to communicating at home, in school or with friends. Communicating at work is more formal and less emotional.

- If you are excited or upset, **calm down** before you communicate with your boss, co-workers or customers. It is very difficult to express thoughts and ideas when you are emotional, especially when you are angry.
- Time is valuable. **Get to the point** quickly. It is easy for the message to get lost in long-winded stories.
- Communicate to **solve problems**. Although it is appropriate to provide information on a problem, it is important that you communicate a solution to the problem.
- **Praise co-workers** and others often and sincerely.
 - **Don't gossip**. Not only is gossip unproductive, it usually ends up hurting someone.
 - **Ask for feedback**. Because evaluations are usually stressful, it is important that you confirm with your supervisor what he or she says to you. If possible, take notes so that you can accurately reflect back on the conversation.
- **Keep confidences secret**.



How you say it

Perhaps you have heard the expression, "It is not what you say; it is how you say it." In order to get feedback we focus on the listener's voice, mannerisms and body language. Here are a few hints for communicating at work.

- **Slow down** – People will think you are nervous or unsure of yourself if you talk rapidly.
- **Liven up** – Avoid speaking in a monotone voice. Your voice should convey emotion and be expressive.
- **Enunciate your words** – Speak clearly. Don't mumble.
- **Use appropriate volume** – Lower your speaking volume when you are physically close to the person with whom you are speaking
- **Pronounce words correctly** – Mispronounced words lead to mis-communication and misunderstanding.
- **Use the right words** – Learn the key words and phrases of your workplace and industry. This will help you communicate with coworkers who share the same jargon, phrases and acronyms.
- **Make eye contact** – Do not look away or down when speaking.
- **Body language** – Your body language should match your message.
- **Customer conversations** – Keep a friendly and helpful attitude when talking to customers.



Communicating at Work



Written communications

Many people are intimidated by writing. Your job may, however, require you to write memos, letters, reports or other formal communications. Here are some basic tips when writing:

- Avoid the use of slang words.
 - Try to avoid the use of abbreviations or acronyms unless you know the recipient of the memo or letter is familiar with the abbreviation.
 - Take special care in spelling the names of people and companies. Double check when possible.
 - Numbers should be expressed as words when the number is less than 10. The number 10 and any number above 10 should be expressed as a figure.
- Keep your sentences short.

Because written communication is permanent, it is critical that the writer be mindful of grammar, spelling, punctuation, writing style and wording. Use a computer word processing program whenever possible. These programs can check for spelling and grammar; however, they are not 100% accurate. Many computer programs have trouble when there is more than one correct spelling (like the words, *too*, *to* and *two*) and will not indicate that the word is misspelled. It is always prudent to have your memos, reports and letters proofread by a coworker. Even the most successful people have their writings proofread.

Electronic communications

If you work in an office setting you will be required to use e-mail to communicate with your co-workers and possibly with customers. Here are some rules to remember when you are conducting electronic communication:

- Always use spell check and proper grammar.
- Indicate in the e-mail message if you are including an attachment.
- Do not send or receive personal e-mails at work.
- Be aware that no e-mails are permanently deleted.
- Do not forward jokes, videos, chain letters, or private documents.
- Respond to all e-mails within one day.
- Preview your messages before sending.
- Be friendly but professional – no smiley faces or graphics.
- Always include a subject line.
- Do not send an e-mail if you are angry.



What did you say? – Listening skills

You can think faster than others can speak. That's one reason your mind may tend to wander when people are talking to you. Here are some suggestions to help you keep your mind focused on what is being said to you.

- Treat listening as a **challenging mental task**. Active listening requires you to stay focused on the person who is talking. One suggestion to help you stay focused is to pretend that you will be required to repeat the conversation to someone else. Keep telling yourself, *What was just said? How will I accurately repeat it?*
 - **Focus on the idea** being expressed, not on the delivery of it. Try to block out the speaker's accent or the tone of voice.
 - **Control your emotional involvement**. This is one of the reasons why conflicts develop and arguments occur. If you feel your emotions are on edge during a conversation, take a five minute walk or distract yourself. Sometimes getting your mind off the subject is enough to calm you down.
- **Listen to what the person is saying** and try not to be thinking about what you want to say next. Once you start thinking about your response, you will stop listening to what the person is saying.
 - **Try to remain objective** and open-minded. Try to understand not only what the person is saying, but why they are saying it. Is there an emotion behind the words?
 - If you cannot understand the person due to a noisy background or other distractions, ask to **move to another location**.

Internet resources



www.wikihow.com/be-a-good-listener -- Good listening is a skill; learn more about how you can master this art.

www.emailreplies.com -- Learn why e-mail etiquette is important and how you can communicate more effectively.

www.mindtools.com/page8.html -- A variety of articles and resources on how to be a better communicator at work.

What Employers Expect from Employees



Employers value employees who can do the job well, who are committed to the work and the mission of the organization, who have a positive attitude toward the job, toward their co-workers and the company.

Employers want employees:

- Who want to do the work.
- Who can do the job.
- Who are willing to do the job.
- Whose services they can reasonably afford.

Employers are looking for employees who have a positive attitude.

When there are many experienced applicants for a job, employers are more likely to offer the job to the person who has an outstanding attitude. The applicant's attitude isn't measured objectively by the employer. Rather, it is revealed during the job interview, and the employer weighs it intuitively.

An employee with a positive attitude is expected to:

- Have a pleasant demeanor.
- Be courteous.
- Have good posture and excellent hygiene and know how to dress appropriately.
- Have an optimistic outlook. They see tasks as potential opportunities, rather than insurmountable problems.
- Show enthusiasm for the job. Even without being hired, they are already engaged in problem-solving tasks related to the job. They listen actively and ask insightful, pertinent questions.
- Be willing to work hard.
- Be reliable, dependable and trustworthy. Employers may check references to confirm the impressions they form from the interview.
- Be a team player who enjoys collaborative efforts and gets along with people.
- Fit in with the organization.



Employers want employees who can do the job.

Employers look for *evidence* that an employee can do the job. They assess the employee's past experience, knowledge and skills by:

- Reviewing the employee's *job application*.
- Reading the *résumé*.
- Asking *interview* questions.
- Calling *references*.

How employers find out if you can do the job:

- They ask questions about your work history.
- They ask you to list your skills. For instance, they may ask whether you're familiar with certain computer programs or whether you have experience using specific kinds of machinery.
- They expect employees to have either *transferable* skills or *specific* skills that match the job description.
- They may give potential employees a written test to see whether they have the skills and knowledge to do the job. For instance, some jobs require a literacy test.
- They may contact the previous employers that you listed on your application and/or résumé as references.

Employers sometimes hire employees with entry-level skills, if they have a positive attitude and show enthusiasm for the job.

Employers want employees who are willing to do the job.

Employers use the application, résumé and interview to gauge how willing you are to do the job. They look for evidence that:

- Your values are aligned with the values of the organization.
- You are committed to the work involved. For instance, a professional carpenter who is committed to the industry's mission of providing homes may do voluntary work and donate his/her time to Habitat for Humanity.
- You have demonstrated a good work ethic by showing up for work each day and giving the employer 100% effort while at work.



Employers want employees who want to do the job.

During the job interview, employers gauge your enthusiasm for the job by observing your attitude. They look for obvious and subtle signs that you want the job.

What is your body language saying? Do you look as if you are excited to be there? Are you leaning forward at the edge of your seat or are you slumped down as if you wish you were somewhere else?

Is the job something that you want to do? Surprisingly, employers find that some job seekers apply for any type of job, even jobs that hold little or no interest to the job seeker. So be prepared to indicate why the job appeals to you and to demonstrate a clear understanding of the job duties and responsibilities.

What Employers Expect

To hire or not to hire?

When making a hiring decision, what is the one quality in the employee that employers consider to be **THE MOST IMPORTANT**?

Assuming that job applicants have the basic skills needed to do the job, the one quality that most employers value is the *willingness to work hard* and do whatever it takes to get the job done. *Nearly 60 percent of employers surveyed said that they expected employees to have a good work ethic.* Qualities that employers value are:

Work ethic	59 percent
Intelligence	23 percent
Enthusiasm	12 percent
Education	4 percent
Other qualities	2 percent



Employers want employees whose services they can reasonably afford.

Employers want to keep labor costs low. On the other hand, salaries have to be high enough to attract enthusiastic and competent workers. Employers usually solve the dilemma by investigating the labor market before they negotiate salaries with potential employees.

Employers expect to pay salaries at competitive market rates. They set limits based on:

- The general demand for your skills. For instance, if there is a shortage of skilled employees, salary offers are likely to be higher.
- How badly the company needs someone like you and how long they've been looking.
- The budget of the department or company that is hiring you.
- Your productivity. The amount of money you can generate for the company is often used as a yardstick. For instance, a highly productive sales representative who brings above average revenues into the company is worth more than a sales representative who produces less revenue.

Negotiating your starting salary

Find out what you can do to negotiate a higher starting salary. Carry out market research. For more help, review the **JobSearch Guides**:

- *Identifying Salary Needs*
- *Negotiating Salaries*

Employers expect employees to get along with co-workers.



Employers know that:

- Employees who can collaborate with their co-workers are likely to boost the productivity of the company.
- Employees working together as a team are more effective at meeting goals.
- Successful team efforts lead to high morale and a happy workplace.
- Less time is lost mediating conflicts between employees.

Employers expect employees to fit into the work environment.

Employer's viewpoint:

Generally, employers assume that a person applying for a specific job is familiar with the typical working environment.

- If an applicant accepts a job offer, they also accept the environment that goes with the job.
 - Certain conditions are negotiable, but they vary greatly from one job to another.
 - It is typically the employee's responsibility to propose any changes to the work environment before they are hired.
- Review the **JobSearch Guides: *Interviewing for Information and Temporary Employment, A Viable Option*** to learn about ways to learn more about an organization.

Aspects of the work environment are sometimes negotiable. For instance, an employer may accommodate your request for flexible work hours or a desk or office of your own. You are more likely to get what you want if you are valuable to the company.



If you live beyond commuting distance, employers will probably expect you to relocate. Review the **JobSearch Guide *Relocating***.

Job Seekers responsibility

Many job hunters believe that they cannot pick and choose their co-workers. The truth is the job seeker can choose the type of people with whom they want to work *before they accept the job offer*. This requires finding out as much as you can about the company and the people who work for the company. To assist you, review the **JobSearch Guides: *Interviewing for Information and Temporary Employment, A Viable Option*** as a way to learn more about an organization.



Internet resources



www.payscale.com -- Get salary ranges for specific occupations for a selected city/town.

<http://hubpages.com/hub/fired> -- Top 10 reasons people get fired.

<http://online.onetcenter.org> -- Department of Labor website that lets you match skills to occupations.