

Employee Enhancement Newsletter

Helpful Resources from your Employee Assistance Program

June 2015

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Public Employee Benefits Alliance

Effective Communication: Basic Skills



As speakers, we sometimes focus exclusively on the information that we want to relay. But your listener or reader may understand your message, understand only a portion of your message, or miss your point entirely—even though you transmitted the information accurately by your standard. It is not enough merely to deliver a message. The message must be received for communication to be successful. The steps involved in the send-receive model of communication are shown below.

- The sender sends a message.
- The receiver gets the message and personalizes it.
- The receiver, in turn, sends feedback and thus becomes a sender.
- The original sender now becomes a receiver and reacts to the feedback.
- Generally, a new communication sequence is then initiated.

In the send-receive model of communication, receiving or listening is as critical as sending the message because, without listening, it is impossible to personalize and respond to the message.

Listening Behaviors

When you focus only on yourself, you often forget to listen, and as a result, the chances for successful communication are poor. Listening is the basis of effective communication and entails much more than just hearing sound.

Think about the last time you noticed someone obviously not paying attention when you were trying to communicate. What specific behaviors did the person exhibit that led you to believe that he or she was not attending to you? What impact did the person's behavior have on you? Perhaps you felt alarm that your important message was not getting through properly, or frustrated that your audience was not getting it. You may have been offended by your listener's inattention or felt an urge to repeat your message.

Hearing Versus Listening

Hearing is the special sense by which noises and tones are received as stimuli. Hearing is a sensory experience that gathers sound waves indiscriminately. You can hear something without choosing to listen.

Listening is a voluntary activity. Listening includes more than just sound being received by the ear and transmitted to the brain. Listening includes interpreting or processing that sound. Active listening involves listening with empathy.

Online Seminar Reminder

Communication Skills for Collaboration

When:

June 16, 2015

Where:

www.deeroaks.com

Webinar Times (CST):

11:00 AM- 12:00 PM

AND

1:00 PM - 2:00 PM





Effective Communication: Basic Skills continued...



Active Listening

When you listen empathically, you don't just hear words. You hear thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. Empathic listening is highly active and requires hard work. Following the steps below will help you to improve your listening skills.

1. The first step is to decide to listen and concentrate on the speaker.
2. Then, use your imagination and enter the speaker's situation. Concentrate and try to imagine his or her frame of reference and point of view.
3. Observe the speaker's vocal inflection, enthusiasm or lack of it, and style of delivery. These are essential components of the message. If you are speaking face-to-face, pay attention to the speaker's facial expressions and other non-verbal cues for more insight into the message.
4. Listen without interruption. Note key phrases or use word associations to remember the speaker's content.
5. Use paraphrasing or clarifying questions to confirm that you received the intended message. Check your perceptions of how the speaker is feeling to put the text of the message in emotional context.
6. Finally, provide feedback to the speaker.

Practice Active Listening

Like other skills, listening skills improve with practice. Ask a trusted friend to rate you honestly on your listening skills; then, the next time someone comes to you with a problem, work on the listening skills that need improvement. Practice empathic listening by attending, paraphrasing, and asking questions.

Tips for Active Listening

- Make eye contact. Eye contact increases the chances of getting the message and demonstrates interest and attention. When listening to someone on the phone, try not to look at things that will take attention away from the speaker.
- Adjust your body posture. Posture—facing the speaker and slightly leaning in—suggests that you are paying attention and helps you to stay tuned in. When on the phone, position yourself so that you're comfortable but not so relaxed that you lose the ability to attend to the speaker.
- Give verbal or nonverbal acknowledgment. Acknowledging the speaker helps involve you in the communication process and shows you are paying attention.
- Clear your mind. Clear your mind of your own thoughts to avoid wandering mentally.
- Avoid distracting behaviors. Distracting behaviors such as playing with a pencil, drumming your fingers, grimacing, jingling change in your pocket, or others may take away from your ability to listen and may distract the speaker.

Source: www.deeroaks.com

Strong Ways to Build Good Health

If you want good health, a long life, and feel your best well into old age, the most important thing you can do is strength training, said Dr. Brett Osborn, author of *Get Serious, A Neurosurgeon’s Guide to Optimal Health and Fitness*.

“Our ability to fight off disease resides in our muscles,” Dr. Osborn said. “The greatest thing you can do for your body is to build muscle.”

He cites a large, long-term study in the *British Medical Journal* of nearly 9,000 men ages 20 to 80. After nearly 19 years, the men still living were those with the most muscular strength.

Muscle is all protein, and it’s “nothing but good for you,” he said.

Strength training has health benefits for everyone, no matter their size.

He recommends this back-to-basics routine as the pillar of a solid training regimen (trainers at your gym can show you how to do these exercises):

- The squat is a full-body exercise; it’s the basic movement around which all training should be centered. Heavy squats generate a robust hormonal response as numerous muscular structures are traumatized during the movement (even your biceps). Standing erect with a heavy load on your back and then repeatedly squatting down will stress your body—in a good way—forcing it to grow more muscle.
- The overhead press primarily activates the shoulders, arm extenders, and chest. Lower body musculature is also activated as it counters the downward force of the dumbbell. From the planted feet into the hands, force is transmitted through the skeletal system, stabilized by numerous muscular structures, most importantly the lower back.
- The deadlift centers on the hamstrings, buttocks, lumbar extensors, and quadriceps, essentially the large muscles of your backside and the front of your thighs. As power is transferred from the lower body into the bar through the upper body conduit, upper back muscles are also stressed, contrasting with the squat, which is supported by the hands. Deadlifts are considered by some to be the most complete training exercise.
- The bench press mostly targets the chest, shoulders, and triceps. It’s the most popular among weightlifters, and it’s very simple—while lying on a bench, push the barbell off the lower chest until the arms are straight. This motion stresses not only the entire upper body, but also the lower body, which serves a stabilizing function. This provides a big hormonal response and plenty of bang for your buck.
- The pull-up/chin-up stresses upper body musculature into the body. A pull-up is done when hands gripping over the bar; a chin-up is where hands are gripping under the bar. Nine out of 10 people cannot do this exercise because most simply haven’t put in the effort. It’s also been called a “man’s exercise, which is nonsense,” Dr. Osborn said. There are no gender-specific exercises.

Health-e headlines™

Create Value in Everything You Do

Don’t just cross things off a to-do list. If you have a job to do, do it well. Commit your best effort to all tasks, large and small. That might be challenging at times, but people notice.

Health-e headlines™

Don’t Forget Your Feet

Apply sunscreen all over your feet. Skin cancer can affect the feet, so if there are any suspicious or dark spots on your feet—on your skin or underneath the nails—see a doctor to get them checked out. If you have cracking or dry skin, lotions with urea or ammonium lactate in them can help.

Health-e headlines™

An EAP Reminder

Life Can Be Hectic. The EAP Can Help You Find Your Balance.

Deer Oaks, your EAP, is always available to you and your household members.

If you are struggling with children, finances, or just want some practical advice on health or the mind-body connection, contact Deer Oaks by calling the Helpline.

Counselors are available 24/7 to provide you with immediate care.






Clinician's Corner..

Monthly Advice from the Deer Oaks Clinical Team

Reflecting on your career, including your current job and jobs before it, you are likely to be able to recall co-workers with whom you have enjoyed working, as well as those that presented more of a challenge. Differences in personality and working habits can lead to communication blocks in the workplace, but there are a couple of small steps you can take to maximize your ability to be a team player and keep the lines of communication open.

1. *Be proactive.* The majority of time, we find ourselves becoming frustrated with the behavior of a co-worker, and struggling to convey concerns without becoming upset or frustrated. Instead of waiting until you are already upset, consider having open conversations with your teammates about your needs, and take time to hear theirs. Helping one another understand what optimizes your part in a team can help prevent conflicts and increase the likelihood of successful team efforts. Focus not only on what you need but be sure to gain an understanding of what compromises you can make to help your co-workers out, too.
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2. *Be a leader.* Regardless of your title and role with your company, you always have the choice between being a leader and a follower. It takes great amounts of effort to be a role model by portraying positivity, proactive communication, and a team mentality, but the efforts are well worth it. For many, the demands of a stressful job leave us feeling as we do not have enough energy to invest in setting a good example. But, by investing the time and effort it takes to improve your skills and communication at work, your co-workers are likely to follow suit. Waiting for your team members to take the lead does not guarantee results, nor does it lead to a sense of control or satisfaction in the workplace.
 3. *Confront appropriately.* No matter how proactive you are, communication barriers are bound to occur. When this happens take time to cool off, focus on the facts, avoid gossip, and be sure to allow your co-worker time to express his point of view. If you feel as if your efforts don't lead to a great outcome, consider following your chain of command for suggestions or interventions.
 4. *Put everything in perspective.* When looking at the big picture, many workplace conflicts are fleeting and mild in nature. If you find yourself becoming irritated or frustrated, ask yourself how big of an issue it really is, and if it will matter in one week. If you find that the issue is not as major as the feeling it evoked in you, make a choice to let it pass, and use your efforts instead to focus on your own self-care. Getting frustrated easily and not being able to communicate with co-workers can be a sign of your own stress.

Visit deeroaks.com for skillbuilders, tips, tools, and free webinars to learn more about workplace communications.

By:
Kira Rogers, Psy.D, HSP-P
Regional Clinical Manager
Deer Oaks EAP Services, LLC



Establish Personal Financial Priorities



When you are recovering from a personal setback, you'll likely find yourself having to establish financial priorities so that you'll know where to focus your effort and resources. Not all of your household debts will equally impact your family. Your first payment priorities should be all bills associated with your essential needs, including utilities, food, mortgage or rent, and insurance. While you can most likely find ways to save on all of these bills, by cutting back and negotiating lower rates, paying them is extremely important.

If you become unemployed, you may have the right to extend your medical coverage through the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA). Under COBRA, your insurance payments will likely be significantly higher than they were when you were employed, but they will be lower than similar coverage obtained on your own. Having appropriate health insurance coverage is essential because a medical emergency could devastate your finances.

The government also offers programs, such as Medicaid, for people with low incomes. Also, check with your local state government about health insurance programs.

The following is an example of how you might prioritize your financial obligations:

- First priority debts likely include your rent or mortgage, tax liabilities, insurance premiums, auto loans, and utilities.
- Second priority debts may include other secured loans through financial institutions, such as a car loan.
- Third priority lenders may include retailers, hospitals, doctors, credit card issuers and other unsecured creditors.

Remember, each person will have his or her own unique list of priorities. Realize that just because a category of debt is listed as a third priority, does not mean it isn't important. It simply means you need to contact and make payments to the higher priority creditors first.

After you decide what your priorities are, review your budget and determine which bills you are unable to fully pay. Then, contact your creditors to discuss your situation. Explain that you want to pay your bills but due to your setback, are unable to. In some situations, you may be able to get a new payment plan.

About Money Management International

Money Management International (MMI) is a nonprofit, full-service credit-counseling agency, providing confidential financial guidance, financial education, counseling and debt management assistance to consumers since 1958. MMI helps consumers trim their expenses, develop a spending plan and repay debts. Counseling is available by appointment in branch offices and 24/7 by telephone and Internet. Services are available in English or Spanish. To learn more, call 800.432.7310 or visit www.MoneyManagement.org.