

Communication Skills Training Course

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Website: PDLcourses.ie

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1 - Introduction

There cannot be many people in the world who have never had cause to say, 'What I meant to say was...'. We all put our foot in it at some time or other; some of us manage to insert the whole leg, with embarrassing, even disastrous, results. It is not just saying the wrong thing - in the words of a once popular song, 'It's not what you say, it's the way that you say it'. If saying the wrong thing is common enough, then the myriad of impressions and messages we give, in the many ways we communicate, can multiply the error factor a thousand times or more, and therefore affects results. As for the adage 'Silence is golden', it might well be transcribed 'Silence can be a golden opportunity lost'. Saying nothing can lead to as much regret as saying the wrong thing.

Research into how we communicate our thoughts and feelings face-to-face shows that we understand and believe others, not simply by the words they use, but by what we see and hear. Our tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, posture, etc., and the vital means by which we interpret the meanings behind the words. In fact, people do not always need a common language in order to understand each other.

At an early age, we become experts at interpreting other people's signals, although cultural differences can cause misunderstandings between people. While we take our ability to interpret the behaviour of others for granted, few of us have the opportunity of analysing our own behaviour in terms of our effect on others; we rarely acknowledge our own role in unsuccessful interpersonal situations. The 'other person' is you to everyone else, and we all know it's the other person's fault when things go wrong between people.

Good interpersonal skills help prevent situations going wrong in the first place, and can cut through the barriers we erect in response to bad communications. They can create and keep open channels of communication which help others to understand clearly what we mean without causing bad feelings. Perhaps most importantly, good interpersonal skills can give us all a sense of well-being and achievement.



2 - Different Types of Behaviour

AGGRESSIVE
PASSIVE
MANIPULATIVE
ASSERTIVE

Aggressive

Aggressive behaviour is loud and overbearing. This person belittles others to make himself/herself appear more superior. This appearance of superiority is very important to him/her. If he/she is ever threatened in any way he/she will react by flying off the handle and attack. People around this person lives in fear of his/her next outburst and resent him/her.

Aggressive behaviour will not win the longer term help and co-operation of others. One may "win the battle" but lose the war. People will react defensively to the aggressive person, withhold information from him/her, be aggressive in return and do everything they can to make life difficult for him/her.

Passive

This person is a doormat. He/she is the exact opposite to the aggressive type of person. Where the aggressive type of person will dive into a situation, the passive person will opt out. He/she finds it very difficult to make decisions for himself/herself, so others will have to make them for him/her. He/she thinks of himself/herself as a victim of life. No matter what happens in his/her life he/she will blame someone or something for it. He/she has a "woe is me" attitude to life, constantly putting himself/herself down and refusing compliments. People around him/her are frustrated at his/her negative outlook on life and his/her lack of willpower.



Manipulative

The manipulative person is a little like the aggressive person, except with the manipulative type of behaviour one is never quite sure what has happened. He/she will leave no trace. He/she is devious, cunning and two faced. People around him/her are uncomfortable because they never know where they stand with him/her or when he/she might stab them in the back.

Assertive

The assertive person respects himself and those around him. He/she accepts his/her good and bad points, therefore he/she is very accepting of others. He/she is responsible for decisions and choices in his/her life and doesn't leave it to others. He/she doesn't blame others for not recognising his/her unexpressed needs, as he/she can ask for what he/she needs and wants himself/herself directly and openly. If he/she is rejected, he/she won't be devastated by the rejection as he/she is not at the mercy of the approval of other people.

Some people often think that being assertive means being awkward. They confuse behaviour, such as shouting or screaming to get your way, or foot stamping or sulking with assertiveness. They are all behaviour options but none of them are assertive.

Being assertive gives you the best chance of resolving a situation satisfactorily. This is because if you're assertive it helps others to be the same, and that gives you all the best chance of reaching a satisfactory solution. Whenever you are in the company of others who want different things to you, you will need to be assertive to get a fair hearing for your views.



3 - Assertive Techniques

There are four basic Assertiveness Techniques

1. Stating your case Clearly and Directly
2. Fielding responses through Active Listening
3. Broken Record Technique
4. Workable Compromise



4 - Saying What We Mean

Your group is asked to put percentages against each aspect of communication in terms of the effect on the listener.

VERBAL	%
VOCAL	%
VISUAL	%
	<hr/>
	= 100%



5 - Stating Your Case

Being Specific

If you have ever listened to someone's long winded preamble you may have wondered impatiently when they were ever going to get to the point. This is the key to this technique. It means deciding what the point is and stating it without all the unnecessary padding that we tend to use when we are anxious, e.g.. 'oh, I'd have loved to say yes, but, you know with things as they are, and, you know, really, if you'd told me last week , I mean you haven't given me much notice, so this time my answer is no.

The padding often weakens your statement and confuses the listener. We must practice making a clear statement or request without the preamble.

It is only when you ask for what it is you want that you can say it with conviction. Ask for what you know you want and keep to the point.

Once you have decided on your request or statement the second hurdle is to be able to say clearly and directly what it is you want or feel. Remember that the best chance you have of getting exactly what you want is by asking for it directly and specifically. If you only hint or complain, you will probably hear yourself saying 'I've asked him so many times or I'm always telling her.'

Just check whether or not you have made a clear request or if you think the other person ought to know what you want and feel without having to spell it out for them. We cannot always rely on the telepathic abilities of others to know what it is we want or don't want.



6 - Field Responses Through Active Listening

You can show that you are attending to what a speaker is saying through:

- Appropriate body language
 - leaning forward slightly to show interest
 - keeping eye contact
 - nodding your head in agreement
- Non-verbal reaction such as 'Mm', 'Uh huh'.
- Verbal reinforcements such as:
 - 'I see'
 - 'Yes, go on'.
- Empathic statement like "I can understand how you felt" or "It sounds as though it's been difficult for you".
- Verbal techniques
- Asking questions to clarify or gain greater understanding.
- Summarising what has been said, with phrases like: 'Let just stop there', and summaries where we have got so far'... or 'It might help if I list the main points that you've made as a remainder of what has been covered.
- Paraphrasing what has been said with phrases like: 'so what you're saying is...'; 'If I've understood you correctly, what you want to do is...'; or 'would it be true to say that you think....?'
- Do not allow the other person to control your behaviour by reacting to their behaviour.



7 - Benefits of Active Listening

- It lets the speaker know that they are being attended to.
- It prevents the speaker making false assumptions about being understood.
- The speaker receives feedback on the impression being made.
- The listener stays involved, instead of waiting for the chance to have their own say.
- It enables the listener and the speaker get to the heart of the matter very quickly.
- It helps both parties to decide what needs to be done.
- It demonstrates that the listener values what the speaker is saying.



8 - Broken Record

This is where statements are made, and repeated, calmly and clearly. If the other person responds aggressively, or changes the subject, or refuses to listen, the statement is repeated. The tone of voice is calm and polite. This technique helps to concentrate the mind of both people on the issue, and will help prevent you from being manipulated into the other person's strategy, or of having your objection dismissed out of hand.

Workable Compromise

This is useful in deadlock situations. It can lead to discussion and negotiation and lay down foundations for agreement, where there is a logjam. You have to give something in order to get something, for example. 'I realise we're stuck in this; if you are prepared to reconsider the timings, I'll rethink my deadline'. Workable compromise can open tightly shut channels of communication, done calmly and genuinely.



9 - Your Right to be Assertive

Rights - things to which we are entitled - are central to the exercise of assertive behaviour. Fundamentally, we all have the right to be assertive.

To be assertive is to stand up for your own rights, but in such a way that you don't violate someone else's rights. If you are clear about your own rights and those of others, then you will find it easier to decide whether they are violating your rights, or you are violating theirs - whether to raise an issue, and if so how far to go.

Some rights are based on accepted standards or norms of behaviour - what people have come to expect in a given situation. Here is a suggested bill of "rights of assertiveness":

I have the right to state my own needs, regardless of what role in life I play.

Right to be treated with respect as an intelligent, capable and equal human being.

Right to express my feelings; THIS RIGHT HAS 3 ASPECTS

Recognising and identifying.

Accept rather than deny.

Choose to express them appropriately.

I have the right to express my opinions and values.

I have the right to say yes and no for myself.

I have the right to make mistakes.

I have the right to say 'I don't understand'.

I have the right to ask for what I want.

I have the right to decline responsibility for other people's problems.

I have the right to deal with other people without being dependent on approval.



10 - Criticism

A high proportion of feedback that people give is negative and critical. Whilst criticism can be helpful when it's given in the right circumstances, it is often given for the wrong reasons. For example, the criticism may come from some one who wants to:

- Feel superior
- Get their own back for some reason
- Vent their own negative feelings
- Blame another person rather than accept responsibility for a particular problem.

Too often it is offered at a time that suits the needs of the person giving it, rather than those of the recipient. If something has gone wrong, the recipient is likely to be aware of it. Their mind will be full of their own thoughts, fears, perceptions, etc. They are like a glass filled to the brim and overflowing. Before they can take in anything else, they need time to let some of the contents drain away.



Criticism is likely to be accepted when:	Criticism is unlikely to be accepted when:
It is directed at a situation rather than a person e.g. 'A client tells me that the team is a week overdue with the feasibility report.'	It blames the person or people concerned. e.g. 'You're slipping. Why the hell haven't you finished that feasibility report yet?'
It recognises that there may be problems that the recipient of the criticism has been struggling to deal with. e.g. 'Have you been having problems? Do you need any help in sorting things out?'	It assumes the recipient of the criticism is in the wrong, and deserves a verbal punishment. e.g. 'This is the third time this quarter that a report's been late. This is just not good enough. What do you think you're doing?'
It leads to a joint analysis of the problem and why it has arisen. e.g. 'Let's sit down and see what we need to do'.	It assumes that things should be better, but offers no indication of how this could be achieved.
It is spoken objectively and directly.	It is hinted at or delivered in a roundabout way.
It is given in private	It is given in public
It is not allowed to affect subsequent relations between giver and recipient of criticism.	It lingers on in the relationship between the giver and recipient of criticism.
The recipient has had a chance to deal with their own feelings about a situation, and is able to give their attention to someone else's views.	The recipient is still struggling to come to terms with their own feelings and can't create sufficient space in their mind for anyone else's.



11 - Receiving Negative and Positive Feedback Constructively

If the feedback is negative, the recipient should:

- try not to respond emotionally.
- ask questions to establish the precise nature of the feedback
- ask for suggestions about what the other person would like to be different

If the feedback is positive, a polite and gracious 'thank you' is usually enough.

If the praise was not specific, then the recipient might ask for more information by saying:

- 'Thank you. What in particular did you approve of?'
- 'What particular aspects of this do you think were better than last time?'

Receiving Feedback: Negative Ways

As well as the skills of giving appropriate feedback whether positive or negative, team members need to learn ways of receiving feedback, regardless of how it is given.

Negative ways of responding to feedback

When people don't like what they hear, they tend to:

- Become defensive and try to explain away the deficiencies
e.g. 'Things would have gone better if you'd...'; 'That wasn't my responsibility'
- Deny responsibility
e.g. 'I wasn't involved in that part of things' 'That wasn't my responsibility'.
- Attack back
e.g. 'You can talk, what about when you...?' 'If you hadn't fouled up earlier on, we'd be back on schedule by now'
- Block out the feedback on the ground so that the person couldn't possibly have anything useful to say anyway.



12 - Confrontational Skills

Guidelines

- Prepare
- Arrange time & place
- Start by taking responsibility for the situation e.g. *'I should have tried to sort this out before now'* **not** *'you are always messing up.'*
- State feelings honestly

Describe the behaviour, do not label the person

- Other rules on this essential point:
 - **Stick to statement of fact, not opinion**
 - **It should be specific not inferred or veiled**
 - **It should not be judgmental**
 - **It must be exact**
 - **It should be as brief as possible**
- Describe the effects of their behaviour e.g. output has dropped by 10%.
- Ask for specific change
- Listen actively to response
- Repeat requests or come to a workable compromise
- Outline consequences
- End on a positive note.

