

By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Recognize examples of positive workplace communication
- Recognize strategies for accepting instruction from supervisor
- Recognize strategies for explaining a problem to supervisor
- Recognize strategies for asking for help from supervisor or co-worker
- Recognize strategies for receiving and giving constructive criticism

What is Communication?

Take a moment to think about the different ways we communicate with one another. We communicate using our words, bodies, and facial expressions. Communication plays an especially important role in the workplace.



Positive communication is important in the workplace because:

- It fosters strong business relationships and customer service, thereby increasing business.
- It creates a professional, mutually respectful atmosphere between employees and superiors.
- It increases confidence and morale.

➤ **Response:**

- Have you ever worked in an environment where there was open, positive workplace communication?
- What people/policies/factors influenced positive communication?
- Did such communication have a positive effect on your productivity or attitude? Why or why not?
- Have you ever worked in an environment where there was poor workplace communication?
- What people/policies/factors influenced poor communication?
- Did such communication have a negative effect on your productivity or attitude? Why or why not?

Positive Workplace Communication

Because we communicate with others in and outside the workplace on a daily basis, it's easy to cite examples of positive workplace communication.

➤ Put a checkmark next to examples of positive workplace communication.

- Speaking in a pleasant, conversational tone.
- Talking too loudly.
- Dressing inappropriately.
- Maintaining self-control at all times.
- Using profanity.
- Using proper posture.
- Telling inappropriate jokes.
- Demonstrating a calm presence.
- Using sarcasm.
- Demonstrating a respectful and courteous attitude.
- Spreading gossip.
- Smiling when appropriate.
- Ignoring others.
- Demonstrating patience.
- Whining about company policies or other co-workers.
- Mumbling complaints.
- Doing your job to the best of your ability.
- Frowning much of the time.
- Doing a poor job.
- Using the "you" attitude, showing an interest in other's needs.
- Criticizing others.
- Sharing responsibilities equally when working in teams.
- Dressing professionally.
- Using slang.
- Demonstrating poor posture.
- Respecting confidentiality policies.

Workplace Communication Isn't Always Easy

While it may be easy to recognize positive workplace communication, it's not always easy to demonstrate it day-to-day.

Workplace communication can be difficult when:

- Accepting instruction from your supervisor
 - Explaining a problem to your supervisor
 - Asking for help from a co-worker
 - Accepting and giving constructive criticism
- ✓ In the workplace, your conduct should demonstrate maturity and professionalism.

Communicating With Your Supervisor

The way in which supervisors communicate with their employees has as much to do with their unique personality as their managerial style. For example, you may have a supervisor who is stern and direct, telling you what to do and how to do it - clearly communicating expectations. Or, you may have a "hands-off" supervisor who will give you an idea of what to do with no clear distinction on how to go about doing it.

You may work best with a certain type of supervisor, but learning to communicate effectively with your supervisor is crucial to your workplace success - whatever their managerial style happens to be.

➤ **Accepting Instruction from Your Supervisor**

A supervisor's primary function is to **direct** and **instruct** their employees.

When accepting instruction from your supervisor:

- Keep a positive attitude. Remember, it's their job to tell you what to do.
- Take notes if necessary.
- Ask probing questions when they are through with their explanation.
- Ask for resources such as manuals, other people, and web sites. They might know of such resources but neglect to mention them.
- If your questions are met with unclear answers and explanations, don't panic. Your researching skills will help you get the job done. If appropriate, use your coworkers as resources. Expect a little trial and error with each new job and task.

➤ **Explaining a problem to your supervisor**

It can be difficult to explain a problem to your supervisor without displaying angry, confrontational, whiny, or desperate behavior. Displaying such behavior will only undermine your supervisor's willingness to listen to your problem.

When explaining a problem to your supervisor:

- Ask your supervisor (when they are alone or via email) if they have some time to talk. Don't specify what it's in regards to. Estimate the amount of time you'll need.
- State the problem calmly and clearly.
- Make a request.
- Get feedback.
- Consider the next step.
- Follow up.

Asking for Help From a Co-worker

Let's say you're working on a particular project and your supervisor has mentioned a co-worker who may be able to help you. Or, you're having some trouble with a project and know of a co-worker who has some expertise in that area.

When asking for help from a co-worker:

- Assume that they are busy people with their own tasks.
- Ask them if they have time to talk about something you're working on.
- Don't ask for much time - 15 minutes maximum.
- Mention what you're working on and any problems or questions you might have.
- Be specific in your request for help. Don't ask for too much.
- Don't expect them to do your job for you.
- If they resist, be courteous and thank them for their help.
- If they are helpful, try to return the favour. For example, offer your expertise on a project, bring them a small gift such as an office plant, treat them to coffee, etc.
- Thank them again at a later time when they don't expect it.

✓ Positive communication fosters strong workplace friendships and mentoring relationships.

Accepting Constructive Feedback

In the workplace, it's likely that you or your work will be criticized. **Criticism** focuses on how your work fails to meet expectations or standards. While it's natural to bristle when receiving unfair criticism, learn how to accept critical feedback without becoming angry or defensive. After all, if we were constantly praised for everything we do, how would we improve our work?

Ideally, your supervisor and co-workers will criticize your work **constructively** and not resort to nagging and negativity. Constructive criticism seeks to measure, analyze, and evaluate your work against an acceptable standard.

In order to be a constructive critic, your supervisor should not simply point out that your work fails to meet standards. Saying, for example, "This makes no sense." Instead, they should illustrate how your work fails to meet standards. For example, "The problems with this work are..."

The helpful critic offers feedback, advice, insight, and suggestions that can improve your work.

It's very important to recognize and accept that constructive critics are trying to help you improve your work, NOT ATTACK YOU PERSONALLY.



When accepting constructive feedback:

- Relax.
- Listen attentively.
- Take notes or try to remember the issues that need correction[s].
- Answer any questions superiors may have honestly.
- Let them finish talking before asking your questions.
- Offer explanation[s] if necessary.
- With the help of their suggestions, seek ways to improve your work.

✓ At some point, you may be given the opportunity to criticize a co-worker's work. **Be sensitive and careful not to attack the person.** Focus on how their **WORK** could be improved in order to meet acceptable standards.