



Communication Skills

Communication skills allow you to understand and be understood by others. These can include but are not limited to communicating ideas to others clearly, a friendly and confident demeanour, respecting other points of view and speaking in a public setting. Developing your communication skills can do much to help you advance in the workplace. In this article, we explain what communication skills are and how you can improve your own.

What are communication skills?

You use communication skills when giving and receiving different kinds of information. This can be written, spoken, typed or even body language. You might need to communicate ideas, feelings or what's going on around you. Communication skills involve listening, speaking, observing and empathising. The skills are important whether you are speaking face-to-face, on a video call or through letters and emails.

Communication skills examples

There are many different types of communication skills that you can make use of professionally. Continued practise will make you an effective and confident communicator. A lot of these skills work in collaboration with each other. This means that it is necessary to practise different communication skills whenever you get the chance. This could be at work, at home or when speaking with a friend or colleague.

Here are some skills to keep in mind:

- Active listening
- Adapting your communication style to your audience
- Friendliness
- Confidence
- Offering and taking feedback

- Volume and clarity
- Empathy
- Respect
- Understanding body language
- Responsiveness

Active listening

An active listener pays close attention to whoever is speaking. People who are good active listeners often quickly earn the respect of co-workers as they appreciate the attention given when speaking. This can mean the active listener gets more attention back in return. While it seems simple, this is a skill that can be hard to develop and improve. You can be an active listener by focusing on the speaker and avoiding distractions. It is a good idea to offer questions, comments or ideas relevant to the conversation topic afterwards.

Adapting your communication style to your audience

Different styles of communication are required depending on the precise situation you are in. It is important to be able to learn where and when to use these skills. Be mindful of your audience and how best to communicate with them.

For example, if you are communicating with a potential employer, it may be best to email them, rather than arrive at their place of work unannounced. It may be that a letter sent in the post is the best way to communicate. In the workplace, you may find it's easier to communicate complex information in person or via a video conference than in a long, dense email.

Friendliness

In a friendship, it is important to be honest and trustworthy. It is the same for relationships in the workplace. When you're working with others, keep a positive and open attitude. Have an open mind and try to understand where colleagues are coming from, and why they have certain opinions. Small gestures such as asking someone how they are, smiling as they speak or offering praise for work well done can help you build positive relationships with both colleagues and managers.

Confidence

People are attracted to confidence. In the workplace, people are more likely to respond to ideas that are presented by a confident speaker. There are many ways to appear confident. For example, consider making eye contact when you're speaking to someone, or sitting up straight with your shoulders open when listening. Make sure you prepare ahead of time so your thoughts are polished and you can deal with any questions. This will help you avoid being flustered.

Offering and taking feedback

Strong communicators can accept and request critical feedback without feeling attacked. Feedback should always be about the task at hand, and should never be a comment on the person behind it. It is also important to provide constructive input to others, by focusing on the problems and all potential solutions.

Volume and clarity

Make sure you are clear and audible whenever talking. This doesn't necessarily mean shouting. By adjusting your speaking voice, you can be heard in a variety of settings. This is an important skill, and it's critical to effective communication. Speaking too loudly may be seen as being disrespectful or arrogant in some situations. Speak to quietly, and people will lose interest if they cannot hear what you have to say. If you're unsure, read the room to see how others are communicating.

Empathy

Having empathy means that you can understand and share the emotions of others. For example, if someone is expressing anger or frustration, empathy can help you acknowledge and diffuse their emotion. At the same time, being able to understand when someone is feeling positive and enthusiastic can help you get support for your ideas and projects.

Respect

A key aspect of respect is knowing when to take part in a discussion. In a team or group setting, allowing others to speak without interruption is seen as important and a mark of respect to them. Respectfully communicating also means using your time with someone else wisely—staying on topic, asking clear questions and responding fully to any questions you've been asked.

Understanding body language

A lot of communication happens through body language. Nonverbal cues such as this include facial expressions, eye contact and how someone is sitting. When you're listening to someone, you should be paying attention to what they're saying as well as their nonverbal language. Don't slouch, don't be fidgety and instead give them your full attention. By the same measure, you should be conscious of your own body language when you're communicating to ensure you're sending appropriate cues to others.

Responsiveness

Whether you're returning a phone call or sending a reply to an email, fast communicators are viewed as more effective than those who are slow to respond. A good idea is to consider how long an email response might take. If you can do it in a few minutes, why not do it straight away? If it might take a bit longer, put it to one

side but let your colleague know you will act upon it very soon. If you give a timescale on when you will respond, this is viewed positively too.

How to improve your communication skills

With experience and practise, you can learn and improve your communication skills. Start by identifying your strengths and then practise and develop those areas:

1. Ask someone you trust to evaluate your communication skills. Understanding your areas of improvement for communication can help you identify what to focus on.
2. Practise improving communication habits. Many communication skills are habits you have developed over time, so use them whenever you can.
3. Consider signing up for workshops to improve communication skills. These can be online or in groups at colleges and schools.
4. Find opportunities both on and off the job where you can practise communication skills.

Communication skills in the workplace

There are a few specific ways you can be an effective communicator at work:

- **Be clear and concise.** Making your message as easy to consume as possible reduces the chance of misunderstandings, speeds up projects and helps others quickly understand your goals. Offer further information only when necessary.
- **Practise empathy.** Understanding your colleague's feelings, ideas and goals can help you when communicating with them. It's a good way to develop trust.
- **Assert yourself.** At times, it is necessary to be assertive to reach your goals whether you are asking for a raise or resisting an idea you don't think will be beneficial.
- **Be calm and consistent.** When there is a disagreement or conflict, it can be easy to bring emotion into your communications. Be aware of your tone of voice and body language.
- **Use and read body language.** Body language is a key part of communications in the workplace. People may say one thing, but their body language may say another.

Effective job application communication skills

A well-written CV is itself a demonstration of strong communication skills. Ensure that your CV is structured appropriately and free of spelling and grammar errors. The same is true for any covering letters you may wish to submit. If you can, add some examples of when you have used communication skills for a positive outcome. This is especially important if the job description demands specific communication skills.

You will want to make your cover letter brief, well-written, free from typos and spelling errors and tailored to the position you're applying for.

Communication skills for the job interview

In an interview, be sure to listen actively to the person speaking to you. When you are speaking, sit straight and make eye contact with the interview panel. Speak confidently, and be positive. Make eye contact, smile and don't be afraid to speak enthusiastically.

Almost everything you do, both on the job and in life, can be seen as a form of communication. By identifying your strengths and weaknesses and regularly practising good habits, you can improve the way you connect and communicate with others.

Additional Resources –

The Coaching Feedback Model by Carol Wilson - [link](#) (Good example of Questioning Feedback.