

SUPERVISOR COMMUNICATION SKILLS



INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

1-DAY COURSE

HRDQ[®]

SUPERVISOR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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Instructional design and learning philosophy

We are committed to providing the best core-skills content possible for Instructor-Led Training (ILT). The following principles are applied in the development of programs:

Sound Instructional Design

All course content is developed using a variety of research techniques. These include:

- Brainstorming sessions with target audience
- Library research
- Online research
- Customer research (focus groups, surveys, etc.)
- Subject Matter Experts (SME)
- Interviews with trainers

Expert instructional designers create imaginative and innovative solutions for your training needs through the development of powerful instructional elements. These include:

- Learning objectives — effective tools for managing, monitoring, and evaluating training
- Meaningfulness — connects the topic to the students' past, present, and future
- Appropriate organization of essential ideas — helps students focus on what they need to know in order to learn
- Modeling techniques — demonstrate to students how to act and solve problems
- Active application — the cornerstone to learning — helps students immediately apply what they have learned to a real-life situation
- Consistency — creates consistent instructions and design to help students learn and retain new information
- Accelerated learning techniques — create interactive, hands-on involvement to accommodate different learning styles

Application of Adult Learning Styles

Adults learn best by incorporating their personal experiences with training and by applying what they learn to real-life situations. Our experienced instructional designers incorporate a variety of accelerated learning techniques, role-plays, simulations, discussions, and lectures within each course. This ensures that the learning will appeal to all learning styles and will be retained.

Course timing

Chapter One: Principles of Effective Communication

Type of Activity	Segment	Time
	Introduction	10
	Have a direction	15
	Listen carefully	20
	Develop emotional awareness	15
	Commit to a solution	10

Chapter Two: Principles of Assertive Communication

Type of Activity	Segment	Time
	Self-assessment: How assertive are you?	10
	Self-assessments: passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive	15
	Definition of assertiveness	10



Reading



Written Exercise



Facilitation



Group Activity

Course timing (cont.)

Chapter Two: Principles of Assertive Communication (cont.)

Type of Activity	Segment	Time
	Styles of assertive communication	25
	Blocks to assertiveness	15

Chapter Three: Putting Assertiveness to Work

Type of Activity	Segment	Time
	Establish credibility and trust	5
	Use positive language	10
	The confrontation model	15
	Anticipate typical responses to confrontation	15
	Avoid provoking language	10
	Understanding the escalation process	10



Reading



Written Exercise



Facilitation



Group Activity

Course timing (cont.)

Chapter Three: Putting Assertiveness to Work (cont.)

Type of Activity	Segment	Time
	Giving feedback	15

	Handling criticism	10
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Reading

Chapter Four: Handling Specific “Difficult” Personality Types

Type of Activity	Segment	Time
	Introduction	10

	“Get-it-right” people	15
---	-----------------------	----



Written Exercise

	“Get-it-right” case studies	15
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Facilitation

	“Get-it-done” people	15
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Group Activity

	“Get-it-done” case studies	15
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	“Get appreciated” people	15
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Course timing (cont.)

Chapter Four: Handling Specific "Difficult" Personality Types (cont.)

Segment	Segment	Segment
	 "Get appreciated" case studies	15
	 "Get along" people	15
	 "Get along" case studies	15



Reading



Written Exercise



Facilitation



Group Activity

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Course objectives

Successful completion of this course will increase your knowledge and ability to:

- Identify the characteristics of assertive behavior and include them in your interactions.
- Ask directly for what you need without being aggressive.
- Confront problem behaviors successfully.
- Create equitable compromises with employees and peers.
- Hold others accountable.
- Manage conflicts to achieve productive outcomes.
- Deal with difficult people effectively.



Chapter One



PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Ice breaker: Use your favorite ice-breaker activity, or we listed a couple suggestions below:

Two truths and a lie: Each participant writes down three pieces of information about themselves; two are true and one is a lie. The group guesses which one is the lie.

Adjective alphabet: Each participant thinks of an adjective that describes them that begins with the same letter as their first name, e.g., Pianist Pat, Detail Dan.

Activity: Have participants spend a few minutes answering the questions on this page. As they share their obstacles record them on a flip chart and revisit them throughout the day to make certain they are getting solutions to their obstacles as much as possible.

Introduction

Write down what your day would be like if all your communications were smooth and productive.

Write down the obstacles that prevent you from experiencing the day you just described.

Have a direction

Know what you want

- To inform
- To persuade
- To ask a question
- To learn

Practice

Instructions: Think of a conversation you need to have with one of your employees. Ask yourself these questions to help you decide what direction you want to take:

What reaction do you want from the other person?

What do you want them to remember?

What do you want them to do as a result of your conversation?



Preparing yourself before communicating will make your message much more effective. Know in advance what you want to accomplish, what you want to say, and make sure that everyone who needs to know the information is involved. The meaning in your conversation can be miscommunicated if your intentions are unclear.

Communication is a complex set of behaviors and interactions that involves both giving and receiving all kinds of information. In general, there are four basic purposes of communication: To inform, to persuade, to ask a question, or to learn.

In many cases, you may start the communication process with one goal in mind and end up adjusting the goal during the process. For example, you may be informing a colleague about the risks involved in making changes to a current system. When the colleague continues to act as if it's no big deal, you may shift your communication to persuading because you want the colleague to take (or avoid taking) a particular course of action.

It's as important to know what you **don't** want as it is to know what you do want.

In order to reduce possible misunderstandings, begin important conversations by inviting the other person to join you in the specific kind of conversation you want to have. Share your direction with the other person

"I'd like to ..."

- tell you about my feelings/experiences."
- hear what's happening with you."
- explore some possibilities concerning ...
- make a request."
- resolve a conflict."
- work with you to reach a decision about ...

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"I'd like to ..."

- persuade or motivate you to ..."
- offer an apology for ..."
- offer an evaluation of ..."
- offer advice about ..."
- offer an interpretation of ..."
- end this conversation so I can ..."

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The more the conversation is going to mean to you, the more important it is for the other person to understand the big picture. If you need to have a long, complex, or emotion-laden conversation with someone it will make a big difference if you get their buy-in by briefly explaining your intention.

Why explain? When people agree to talk to us, they will be more invested in the conversation and more willing to meet our needs or thoughtfully explain why not (and perhaps offer an alternative we hadn't thought of).

If the other person says, "No, I can't talk now," then schedule another time to talk. Don't just let it go.

Explain what you want

"Hi, Steve. I need to ask for your help on my project. Got a minute to talk about it?"

"Wendy, can you sit down for a minute and let me tell you what happened?"

"Hello there, Mr. Sanchez. Say, uh...I'm not completely comfortable about this job. Can we talk about it for a few minutes?"

Benefits of getting buy-in from the other person

Show respect for the other person's time and schedule, etc.; generate goodwill.

Engage the other person more fully in the conversation and its outcome; empathy is more genuine and agreements are more reliable.

Share the big picture and overall goal.

Prepare the other person for what is coming, especially if topic is emotionally charged.

Help the other person understand what role we want them to play: listener, problem solver, implementer of instructions, etc.

Practice

Instructions: In the situation you identified on the previous page, write an "invitation" to engage the other person in your conversation.

Listen carefully

Inquiry: Asking open questions that provide information and meaning.

Open-ended questions often start with “what” or “how.”

Examples: “What did you notice?” or “How do you feel about the outcome?” or “What conclusions did you draw?”

Limit “why” and “who” questions.

Examples: “Why didn’t you wait for me before starting the meeting?” or “Who forgot to order the supplies?”

Paraphrasing: Asking questions that check your understanding against what the other person meant

Example: "When you said this, did you mean..."

Acknowledgment: Recognizing another person’s emotions such as frustration, or being upset or angry.

Examples: “I can see how angry you feel” or “If I were in your shoes, I would probably feel just as frustrated”; honor the other person’s reality even if you don’t agree with their perspective.

Practice

Instructions: In the situation you have identified, list open-ended questions you can ask to gain a better understanding of the other person’s perspective.

The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said.
— Peter F. Drucker

The next principle of effective communication is to listen carefully.



One of the basic human desires is to be listened to and understood. Listening to others helps them listen to you, thereby transforming the conversation. In emotionally charged conversations where opinions vary and the stakes are high, listening with empathy is critical. There are three core listening skills to master: inquiry, paraphrasing, and acknowledgment.

Inquiry: It’s important to find out what the other person knows or doesn’t know about the situation you’re discussing. A good way to do this is to ask open-ended questions to uncover hidden assumptions.

Acknowledgment is an under-used but powerful tool for defusing negative emotions. What makes some conversations difficult is that people have strong feelings that can block open communication. Acknowledgment honors the other person’s perspective, even if you don’t agree with it.

Briefly review the differences between poor listeners and skillful listeners.



Poor listeners	Skillful listeners
Glance at watch, tap foot, drum fingers	Make eye contact, use occasional nodding, say words of encouragement
Finish people's sentences, make assumptions	Paraphrase speaker's words, clarify, summarize
Interrupt to disagree, rush in to correct the speaker	Are patient and calmly state views when appropriate
Focus on delivery or mannerisms	Focus on content
In a group, shut down participation	In a group, encourage participation in the conversation
React emotionally	Remain nondefensive
Ignore nonverbal cues	Pay attention to nonverbals
Get caught up with emotions	Take time out when needed
Dramatize reactions or feelings	Maintain open posture
Control others' feelings	Respect others' feelings
Talk more than they listen	Listen more than they talk

Specific words and phrases for difficult or confrontational conversation

Statement to use

- “I can see why you’re discouraged.”
- “I’m sorry things went that way.”
- “I can tell this has been tough.”
- “I can tell this has been difficult.”
- “I wasn’t aware of this.”
- “I can see that you’re disappointed.”

Statement NOT to use

- “That’s not true.”
- “You’re wrong.”
- “You’re confused.”
- “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”
- “Stop interrupting me.”
- “Hold on a minute.”
- “Leave it.”
- “Give it up.”
- “Get over it.”

Listening practice activity

One of your managers comes in to complain that her area is being “cut off at the knees” by the poor secretarial service they receive. She feels that her area is given too little time by the secretarial staff that you all share. She says that the secretarial staff works at least 80 percent of the time for other people in your area. You don’t agree with her; you believe the secretarial staff’s activities are much more balanced.

Sometimes it is helpful for participants to have actual words and phrases to use as listeners in conversations, especially difficult ones. This page provides a list of effective statements to use, and ones to avoid.

Listening practice: Have participants work in pairs. One person will role play the manager making the complaint, and the other person will role play the boss (essentially themselves). Circulate around the room and listen to the conversations. If necessary, remind the “bosses” that this is a listening practice, and they shouldn’t be trying to convince the other person that they are wrong. Debrief by talking about the experience and what words and body language worked well and what didn’t.

The third principle of effective communication is to develop emotional awareness. When emotions are running high, it's difficult to have important conversations. At work, the most common emotions in difficult situations are probably frustration and anger.

Most people know when they're angry—what they need to develop emotional awareness about is why they are angry.

Anger is a natural human emotion and as such is neither good nor bad. Problems arise, however, around the appropriate or inappropriate expression of anger. The ideal is to aim at assertive behavior and to avoid passive or aggressive expression of anger. Assertive behavior is the most likely to get needs met.

Angry people tend to jump to—and act on—conclusions and some of those conclusions can be very inaccurate.

Don't say the first thing that pops into your head; think carefully about what you want to say.

Opinions are not facts; they are only what people think.

Don't take it personally: Nothing others do or say is because of you. What others do and say is a projection of their own reality onto you. When you avoid being drawn in to the opinions, projections, and behaviors of others, you will not be a victim of needless suffering any longer!

Develop emotional awareness

Five sources of anger

Safety and well-being — fear for your own or someone else's safety, either real or imagined

Power — loss or threat to your power and control

Perfection and pride — when someone or something implies you or your work are not good enough

Self-sufficiency and autonomy — when someone or something implies you don't have the ability to do things on your own

Self-esteem, feeling important, status — when someone or something puts you down and makes you feel unimportant

Rules of anger management

1. Stop, think, and look at the bigger picture.

Create time to think about what you want to say, to think about the consequences of the “event” and your reaction to it.

Realize it's OK to have a different opinion; you may simply agree to disagree on this issue.

2. Use the OLLIE approach.

Observe: The other person's body language

Listen: To the other person's words

Learn: Put the pieces together

Inform: Respectfully share your point of view

Empathize: Put yourself in the other person's shoes

3. Don't take anything personally.

Calming strategies

In the heat of the moment	Outside of the moment
Breathe deeply; inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth	Go for a walk, ideally in a park or open space
Remind yourself to keep your cool	Do yoga, meditation, swimming, or another de-stressing activity
Count backwards from 20 to 1	Take up a relaxing hobby, e.g., gardening
Visualize a calm tranquil place, e.g., a sea or mountains	Use your support network
Let go of any expectations you might have	Listen to or dance to music
Remove yourself from the situation physically	Relax in a bath or read a book

A support network is a group of people you can call on when you are angry who will give you an honest appraisal of the situation.

Review the information about communicating feelings. Emphasize that awareness is the first step to controlling and communicating feelings. Without awareness, you have no chance of being proactive in managing your emotions.

Activity: Expressing emotions. Working in small groups, have participants complete the chart. Many answers will work as long as they are candid about the emotion felt. A helpful tool is to remind participants that if they can substitute "I think" or "I feel as though" or "I feel that," then they haven't really expressed an emotion. For example, "I feel you hurt my integrity" can be substituted with "I think you hurt my integrity" or "I feel as though you hurt my integrity." A true feeling statement is "I am hurt because what you said damaged my integrity."

Communicate feelings appropriately

One way to gain emotional control is to figure out what triggers intense emotions. Awareness of these triggers can help you maintain a detached engagement: the ability to separate issues and personalities in a conflict.

Ask yourself ...	Ask others ...
When do I get frustrated or complain, or become obsessed or mentally exhausted?	When have you seen me upset?
When have I avoided dealing with a person or situation?	What situations seem to upset me the most?
When have I talked about people behind their backs?	What behaviors tell you that I am mad, sad, glad, or afraid?
What is guaranteed to put me in a bad mood?	When am I difficult to get along with?

Use language to express feelings

Express, don't dramatize.

Four basic feelings: mad, sad, glad, afraid

Emotion	Less effective	More effective
Mad	Screaming, swearing, throwing things	
Sad	Crying	
Glad	Not expressing any emotion	
Afraid	Denial, looking scared	

Help others communicate their feelings

Let them vent.

Don't attempt to reason.

Don't say, "Calm down."

Don't interrupt, pretend to understand, give advice. or respond with a cliché.

Show empathy.

Address the content, not the consequences of emotions.

Examples of consequences include:

Physical response: facial expression, voice tone

Physically acting out: slamming, kicking, loud sighing, crying, etc.

Exaggerations

Passive-aggressive behavior: gossip, sarcasm, back-handed compliments, chronic lateness, sabotaging a project

Encourage a cooling-off period. "I can see this is important to you. It's important to me too. We should talk about it, but not this way."

You want to create an environment that allows the other person to express his feelings without losing face. It's important to help him maintain his dignity in any situation.

Maintain a consistent tone of voice that is firm but not hostile—and especially not condescending.

Note: Addressing the content does include recognizing emotions. "I can tell you are frustrated." "I can see this discussion is making you upset."

Don't attempt to reason—remember that intense emotions override logic.

If you need a cooling-off period, commit to continuing the conversation later. Schedule a specific time to meet.

A commitment is a choice. Choose to follow through on your commitment to find a solution.

Dig deep: When a workplace problem surfaces, conduct a deep-down analysis to uncover root causes.

Specifically, if you find yourself face-to-face with a problem, resist the urge to jump to an easy solution. Get busy with your colleagues and start peeling back the layers to understand why the situation is occurring. Keep peeling: ask why, why, why. Only when you know the underlying cause can you have an intelligent conversation on how to respond.

Commit to a solution

Verbalize your vision

Verbalize your plans for the future—the benefits of reaching a solution. Lay out an agenda, and commit yourself to keeping it.

Lets the other person know what you expect.

Reinforces to yourself your desire to find a solution.

Focus on the end result while realizing the process to get there may be messy/awkward/complicated/difficult.

Share your doubts, but don't let them stop you from working hard to reach a solution.

Dig deep

Examine the situation thoroughly to uncover root causes.

Keep asking why, why, why.

Pay attention to the pattern

When dealing with a difficult situation, be aware of the direction your interaction is taking. If you get off track, refocus your efforts by taking a break for a few minutes, thinking it through, and then getting back on track toward a solution.

Be flexible

If what you're doing isn't working, try something different. Flexibility is a sign of health and the essence of effectiveness. It involves getting feedback and having more than one choice in a given situation.