



Communication

Activities

Communication skills top the list of job candidates' "must-have" skills and qualities, according to a 2010 survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

Communication

Communication skills are important to everyone. They are how we give and receive information and convey our ideas and opinions to those around us. Communication comes in many forms:

- Verbal (sounds, language and tone of voice);
- Aural (listening and hearing);
- Nonverbal (facial expressions, body language and posture);
- Written (journals, emails, blogs and text messages); and
- Visual (signs, symbols and pictures).

It is important to develop a variety of skills for both communicating to others and learning how to interpret the information received from others. Knowing our audience and understanding how they need to receive information is equally important as knowing ourselves.

To an employer, good communication skills are essential. In fact, employers consistently rank good communication skills at the top of the list for potential employees.

During interviews, for example, employers are impressed by job candidates who answer questions with more than one-word answers (i.e., not just “Yeah,” “Nah” or “Dunno”), demonstrate that they are listening (by asking questions for clarification or follow-up) and share information and ideas. The interview can indicate to employers how the candidate or employee will interact with supervisors, coworkers and customers, or resolve conflicts when they arise. Remember, nonverbal communication is also critical during an interview. Employers expect good eye contact, good posture and “active” listening.

One of the challenges in the workplace is learning the specific communication styles of others and how and when to share your ideas or concerns. Some supervisors may specifically ask for your opinion, while others may assume that if there is something important they need to know or something you are unsure about, you will bring it to their attention or ask. It is important to know how to listen carefully and when to ask for help. The better an employee and supervisor learn to communicate (in whatever method that works), the greater the likelihood of job retention and promotion.

The activities in this section will not only help participants practice and recognize how they provide information to others, but will also help them consider how others may prefer to receive information. It is important to reinforce with participants that communication skills involve give and take, and can, indeed, be learned and strengthened over time.

Note to facilitators: *Communication skills are necessary for the development of self-advocacy and self-determination, important skills for lifelong success. To that end, the activities in this section offer many opportunities for youth to practice communicating their strengths and assets while learning*

how to minimize any perceived barriers to employment. Please take the opportunity to add to or tweak any of the activities to better focus on the needs of your particular group.

For example, if working with youth with disabilities, create opportunities to allow them to practice communicating how, when and to whom to disclose a disability on the job or in postsecondary education, or different ways to communicate a request for a reasonable accommodation. If you support youth involved in the juvenile justice system, enhance this section's extension activities to include practicing how to communicate the proactive changes they are making in their lives, what they have learned from previous experiences and how their past mistakes have helped them become more focused and dedicated young adults.

1. What's Your Point?

JUST THE FACTS: This activity helps participants understand the importance of being specific when offering and receiving communication. Often our meaning gets lost, twisted or misunderstood because we haven't been specific enough in our communication or we haven't asked clarifying questions. These role-plays are designed to demonstrate the value of being specific in communication—both to others and in what is received from others.



Time

20 minutes



Materials

- A few copies of Activity 1 (at least one copy per volunteer actor)
- Costumes and other props if possible



Directions

Ask for volunteers to act out a short role-play. Each skit requires two people: one employee and one client/supervisor.

In the first role-play, Jade has a job mowing lawns and receives some not-so-positive feedback from Mr. Z., a client.

In the second role-play, Will works at a dentist's office and has gotten into some trouble with his boss, Ms. T.

Note to facilitators: Encourage participants to ad-lib, or improvise, if they feel comfortable. Giving youth permission to ad-lib often makes activities more “real” and memorable. In addition, volunteers may wish to retry one or more of the skits and create their own characters.

After each skit is performed, ask the following questions:

- **Role-play #1:** How did Jade handle Mr. Z.'s comments? What did she do that was constructive? Was there anything she could have done differently? What about Mr. Z.? What could he have done differently?
- **Role-play #2:** How do you think Ms. T. handled the situation with Will's lateness? How did Will handle Ms. T.'s disapproval? What might he have done differently? What might Ms. T. have done differently?



Conclusion

In either of these role-play situations, the employee could have “copped an attitude” or gotten defensive with the adult. Reread one or both of the activities and act out the situation differently. What would it have looked and sounded like if Jade had not displayed such a

measured response? What would it have looked and sounded like if Will hadn't offered a suggestion for his situation?

Because each employee remained calm and asked additional questions to get clarity about the situation, they were able to communicate with the other person—and clearly identify the problem. Is this easy or difficult for you to do in most situations? If it's easy, what are some strategies you use that help you to “keep your cool”? If it's difficult, what might you try to do differently?



Journaling Activity

Participants, think about a time when a parent, teacher or friend criticized you. What happened? How did this make you feel? How did you handle it? Are you proud of the way you handled it? What might you do differently if something like this happens in the future? Did this experience change the way you offer feedback to others?



Extension Activity

Divide the group into smaller groups (no more than four people per group). If they are comfortable doing so, ask participants to share the situation they used for their journal entry. Use the situations to create and act out new role-play situations for the other groups. Three discussion questions should be written as well—and discussed as a group. Create three questions to be used with the larger group after the role-play is acted out.

Activity 1.

What's Your Point?

ROLE-PLAY #1

Scenario: Jade has her first job mowing lawns. She works for her best friend's brother who owns a landscaping company. She's had the job for about three weeks and really feels like she's getting into the groove. In fact, it's the perfect job for her: She loves being outside and appreciates the fact that she can work on her own and even listen to her headphones! Jade arrives early at Mr. Z.'s house, her first customer of the day, and gets ready to begin mowing.

Mr. Z.: You're finally here!

Jade: Hi, Mr. Z. Yes, I'm here to mow your lawn.

Mr. Z.: Well, you didn't do a very good job last week.

Jade: I wasn't the person who mowed your lawn, but I'd like to hear why you were unhappy with the job.

Mr. Z.: It was just a mess!

Jade: Can you please be more specific? What exactly didn't you like? In what way was it a mess?

Mr. Z.: Well, it looked just awful.

Jade: Mr. Z., I really want to make sure that whatever upset you last time doesn't happen again. If you will tell me exactly what you want done differently in the future, it will really help me to be sure your lawn is mowed just the way you like it.

Mr. Z.: Well, the cut grass was left on the lawn and the edges weren't straight.

Jade: Okay, let me be sure I understand. Besides mowing, you want us to be sure to rake up, remove the cut grass and be more careful to straighten the edging.

Mr. Z.: Yes, that is exactly what I expect!

Jade: Thanks, Mr. Z. I'll be sure to do those things today, and I will let the boss know that's what you'd like done from now on.

Mr. Z.: Thank you very much.

ROLE-PLAY #2

Scenario: Will works in a large dental office and winds up rushing to get to work every day after school. His job tasks include filing, making photocopies, stuffing envelopes and answering the telephone. Ms. T., the office manager, has asked to speak with Will about his time sheet.

Ms. T.: Hello, Will. I would like to talk with you.

Will: Yes, Ms. T.?

Ms. T.: Will, I've been watching your time this week, and I'm quite concerned.

Will: Ms. T., I see that you're not happy, but will you please be more specific?

Ms. T.: You're not getting here on time.

Will: I know I've been arriving to work late, and I am sorry.

Ms. T.: Well, look at your time today. You were supposed to be here at 3:15 this afternoon and it's now 3:30 and you just walked in. We need to be able to depend on you to be here at the time you're scheduled to work.

Will: I understand that you expect me to be here on time. I'm getting here as quickly as I can after school. Would it be possible to change my start time to 3:30? I can put in the extra 15 minutes at the end of the workday instead.

Ms. T.: Well, I suppose we can try that. Are you absolutely sure that you can make it here every day by 3:30?

Will: I'm sorry that I've been getting here late and upsetting you. I really do think that I can be here every day by 3:30, but if for some reason I can't make it here by that time, I will be sure to call to let you know.

Ms. T.: That would be very helpful. Thank you, Will.

2. Flipping the Switch

JUST THE FACTS: The purpose of this activity is to encourage youth to discuss the different types of communication they might use in different situations and environments. It introduces the idea that language/communication varies by context—and that what might be acceptable and expected in one setting may not be appropriate in another.



Time

30 minutes



Materials

- Activity 2
- Flip chart, markers (optional)



Directions

Ask participants to describe or demonstrate how they communicate with their friends. Then ask how they communicate with family members. Finally, ask how they are likely to communicate with an employer at a job interview.

Discuss the differences and similarities in the participants' responses. Ask the group:

- Why is each situation different?
- What are the expectations of each person?
- What would happen if you greeted your friends the same way you greeted an interviewer?
- What would happen if you greeted an interviewer the way you greet your friends?

Knowing how to communicate with people appropriately in any given situation is an important skill, as there are often unspoken rules and standards that are expected. For example, it's common practice in the professional world to shake hands with people when meeting, rather than offering a high five or a hug. We might use slang with our friends when talking about what happened at school or at a party, but we would usually use different words and mannerisms when telling our parents the same information.

Use Activity 2 to compare and contrast the ways we might share the same type of information to different groups.



Conclusion

Discuss the following ideas with participants, encouraging an honest dialogue:

- When the audience changes, does the message change? Why or why not?
- What are some examples of communication (both verbal and nonverbal) that you should always try to practice when communicating with an employer? How would your friends react to you if you communicated with them the same way you would with an employer?



Journaling Activity

We all communicate differently with different people in our lives. Does the way you communicate (or say things) affect how others perceive you? Explain.



Extension Activity

We build great relationships by learning to become great communicators. This is not always an easy task as we may sometimes experience barriers to communication—especially in the workplace. Take some time to explore the following eight barriers. Think about what they are and the ways in which they can be lessened or eliminated for successful communication.

Note to facilitators: *You may wish to emphasize the importance of nonverbal communication skills, as young people often overlook these skills.*

- Physical
- Perceptual
- Emotional
- Cultural
- Language
- Gender
- Interpersonal
- Generational

Activity 2.

Flipping the Switch

Consider the five situations below and the different ways one might talk with each of following groups. Create a list, discuss, draw a picture or encourage participants to act out each situation.

- Friends
- Family
- Professional (e.g., interviewer, employer, teacher, etc.)

Be sure to explore *both* verbal language—what we say and how we say it (i.e., tone of voice)—and nonverbal language (e.g., facial expressions, behavior, body language, etc.).

SITUATION #1: Saying hello or goodbye

Friends:

Family:

Professional:

SITUATION #2: Asking for help

Friends:

Family:

Professional:

SITUATION #3: Emailing or texting

Friends:

Family:

Professional:

SITUATION #4: Showing excitement

Friends:

Family:

Professional:

SITUATION #5: (Create your own)

Friends:

Family:

Professional:

3. Oh, Puh–leeeeze!

JUST THE FACTS: The purpose of this activity is to help youth gain a better understanding of how nonverbal communication (both intended and unintended) can be interpreted by others—and the impact and effect of this form of communication.



Time

20 minutes



Materials

Activity 3 (words and/or pictures cut out)



Directions

Ask participants if they have ever gotten caught rolling their eyes at a teacher, parent, coworker or supervisor. Ask for a show of hands. Whether you rolled your eyes intentionally or didn't even realize you did it, how do you think your action was interpreted? Answers will vary but might include: I'm bored / You are really annoying / Yeah, right / I'm sooooo not interested in what you are saying or doing.

There are many types of communication. Believe it or not, the type that uses no words is the kind that is the most important. When it comes to communication, what people see is often more memorable than what they read or hear. This nonverbal communication is often referred to as body language. Body language includes facial expressions, eye behavior, gestures, posture and more. Body language can express your emotions, feelings and attitudes. It can even contradict what you say verbally! People in different cultures may understand some global nonverbal expressions, while other expressions may be culture specific.

If the participants are from many different cultures, ask if they can give an example of nonverbal communication cues specific to their culture.

Cut out the words in Activity 3, fold each and place in a hat, bowl or bag. Ask each person in the group to take one piece of paper. Using body language and facial expressions only, ask each person to demonstrate this emotion, while others try to guess it. As an alternative, you can download photos of people displaying each emotion and have participants match or identify what each picture describes. Continue until all words or pictures have been used/guessed.



Conclusion

Read the following statement to the group: **ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS.** Then ask:

- How many have heard this expression? When? Where?
- What does it mean?
- How is this possible when actions do not “speak”?



Journaling Activity

Many people dream of being successful, but their actions can sometimes hold them back. What are some ways you can be sure that your actions help you to achieve your goals in life?



Extension Activity

Consider the following seven types of nonverbal signals and cues we often use to communicate our interest in and to others. Create a list of Do's and Don'ts for avoiding common body language mistakes on the job.

- **Facial expressions:** The human face is extremely expressive, able to convey countless emotions without saying a word. And unlike some forms of nonverbal communication, facial expressions are universal. The facial expressions for happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear and disgust are the same across cultures.
- **Body movements and posture:** Consider how your perceptions of people are affected by the way they sit, walk, stand or hold their head. The way you move and carry yourself communicates a lot of information to the world. This type of nonverbal communication includes your posture, bearing, stance and subtle movements.
- **Gestures:** We wave, point, plead and often use our hands when we are arguing or speaking in an animated way. However, the meaning of gestures can be very different across cultures and regions, so it's important to be careful to avoid misinterpretation.
- **Eye contact:** Since the visual sense is dominant for most people, eye contact is an especially important type of nonverbal communication. The way you look at someone can communicate many things, including interest, affection, hostility and attraction. Eye contact is also important in maintaining the flow of conversation and for assessing another person's response.
- **Touch:** We communicate a great deal through touch. Think about the messages made by a firm handshake, a timid tap on the shoulder, a warm bear hug, a reassuring pat on the back, a patronizing pat on the head or a controlling grip on your arm.
- **Space:** Have you ever felt uncomfortable during a conversation because the other person was standing too close and invading your space? We all have a need for physical space, although that need differs depending on the culture, situation and closeness of the relationship. You can use physical space to communicate many different nonverbal messages, including signals of intimacy, aggression, dominance and affection.
- **Voice:** We communicate with our voices, even when we are not using words. Nonverbal speech sounds such as tone, pitch, volume, inflection, rhythm and rate are important communication elements. When we speak, other people "read" our voices in addition to listening to our words. These nonverbal speech sounds provide subtle but powerful clues into our true feelings and what we really mean. Think about how tone of voice, for example, can indicate sarcasm, anger, affection or confidence.

Activity 3.

Oh, Puh-leeeeeze!

There are many creative ways to complete this activity. A few suggestions include:

- Write each of the following words on an index card, or print and cut them out. Fold each card and place into a bowl, hat or bag. Students can pick a word and attempt to act it out for the group. For students who read braille, use a braille printer to be sure the word can be read and understood by all.
- Write words on sticky notes or sentence strips and place around the room. Act out the emotion and see if participants can guess and move to the right one.
- Say the word out loud and have participants draw what this emotion looks like to them. Share with the group.
- Download photos that represent each emotion. Participants can match pictures to words.

AFRAID

ANGRY

ANXIOUS

BORED

CONFUSED

CONTENT

CURIOUS

EXCITED

FRUSTRATED

HAPPY

INTERESTED

JEALOUS

LONELY

OFFENDED

OVERWHELMED

PROUD

SAD

SCARED

SHOCKED

SHY

STRESSED

SURPRISED

THANKFUL

WORRIED

4. Listen Hear!!

JUST THE FACTS: This quick activity is designed to get participants to start thinking about the importance of two-way communication.



Time

15–20 minutes



Materials

- One sheet of paper (8 1/2" x 11") for each participant
- One sheet of paper for the facilitator



Directions

Give each participant one sheet of paper. Then, offer the following directions, pausing after each instruction to give the group time to comply. Simultaneously complete the activity yourself using your own sheet of paper.

1. Pick up your sheet of paper and hold it in front of you. Close your eyes and listen carefully to my directions. The rules are: (a) no peeking, and (b) no questions.
2. The first thing I want you to do is to fold your sheet of paper in half. (Pause)
3. Now, tear off the upper right-hand corner. (Pause)
4. Fold the paper in half again and tear off the upper left-hand corner of the sheet. (Pause)
5. Fold it in half again. (Pause)
6. Now, tear off the lower right-hand corner of the sheet. (Pause)
7. Now, open your eyes and unfold your paper. If I did a good job of communicating and you did a good job of listening, all of our sheets should look exactly the same! (Invariably, they won't!)

Hold your sheet up for everyone to see. Ask participants to compare their sheets. Ask why no one's paper matches the others exactly. You will probably get responses such as, "You didn't let us ask any questions!" or "The way you gave us directions wasn't clear!"



Conclusion

Part of the communication process (and being a good communicator) is recognizing that people may need to receive information in different ways to be successful. If the goal of this activity was really to have everyone's paper snowflake look exactly the same, what changes could have been made to the directions?

Discuss the need for effective two-way communication at home, at work and in the community with friends. Ask the group to work together or in smaller groups to create a definition of "good communication" by thinking about what good communication looks like. Be sure the list includes the responsibilities of being a good communicator and a good listener.



Journaling Activity

Think of a time when you could have been a better communicator or a better listener. Describe the situation. What happened? What is more important: communicating in a way that is easy for you or communicating in a way so that others can understand you? Is there a difference? Explain.



Extension Activity

Talk about the different TV shows participants watch. Discuss the differences in the ways people communicate (or don't communicate) with each other—and how miscommunication has caused problems and conflict for the show's characters. Select a conflict from a recent episode and have participants describe, discuss or act out how the problem was solved/portrayed in that scene.

Questions to consider: What was the conflict? What strategies did the characters use to solve the problem? Were the strategies effective for solving the problem solving peacefully? If not, what strategies might the characters have used instead?

Finally, create a public service announcement (video) that promotes solving conflicts in peaceful ways.

*You may also wish to check with your local Department of Juvenile Services or other social services agency and find out about conflict mediation specialists in your area. Invite them in to talk with the group about conflict and ways to handle unhealthy situations before they get out of control.

5. Quit Talkin'! I Know What to Do!

JUST THE FACTS: The purpose of this activity is to discuss the importance of understanding directions before you start a task. Participants will examine the pros and cons of different types of direction and decide which type of direction they are most comfortable with and how to receive that type of direction as often as possible.



Time

15 minutes



Materials

- One copy of Activity 5 for each participant
- Stopwatch or watch with a second hand



Directions

This activity can be completed independently or in groups of two. Say: For this activity, you will have three minutes to complete a short quiz. I'm going to pass out these papers and ask you to not look at them until I say so. When I say "go," you will have three minutes exactly to do what is asked of you on this paper. Ready, get set, go!



Conclusion

Discuss with the group how they felt about this activity? Was it fun, frustrating, easy or difficult? What aspects of the activity made it so? What is the moral or message of this lesson? How does this message relate to work?



Journaling Activity

Give an example of a time when you really thought you knew what you were supposed to do but did not. What happened?



Extension Activity

Consider all of the different ways directions can be offered and how they can be collected or received. Think about people who might have difficulty reading the English language or understanding the spoken word. What are some different ways instructions can be given to ensure that everyone understands?

Next, have students think about how they learn best (if possible, complete a basic learning-style assessment). Are they primarily visual learners, auditory learners or hands-on/kinesthetic learners? Consider ways in people can communicate what type of learner they are before getting information. Think about school or a job. How might you be proactive in helping a teacher or a supervisor understand how you need to be taught? Share strategies with the group.

Activity 5.

Quit Talkin’! I Know What to Do!

You have three minutes to take the quiz below.

1. Read everything before you do anything.
2. Write your name in the top left-hand corner of this page.
3. Circle the word “name” in sentence #2.
4. Draw five small squares in the upper right-hand corner.
5. Put an X in each square you have just drawn.
6. Put a circle around each square.
7. Sign your name under the title of this page.
8. After the title, write, “yes, yes, yes.”
9. Underline sentences #7 and #8.
10. Put an X in the lower left-hand corner of this page.
11. Draw a triangle around the X you have just made.
12. Stand up and (loudly) call out your first name.
13. On the back of this page multiply 5 by 4.
14. Draw a circle around the word “top” in sentence #2.
15. On the reverse side of this paper add the numbers 25 and 100.
16. Count out in your normal speaking voice from 1 to 10.
17. If you are the first person to get this far, say, “ME, ME, ME!”
18. Using your pencil, punch three small holes at the bottom of this paper.
19. If you think you have carefully followed these directions, stand up, turn around and whisper, “I have carefully followed the directions.”
20. Now that you have finished reading the directions carefully, do only sentences #1 and #2. Sit quietly until everyone else is finished.