

Team Awareness Training

For Workplace Substance Abuse Prevention

Small Business 4-Hour Edition

Module 5

Improving Workplace Communication



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Module 5

Improving Workplace Communication

Participants will:

- Identify norms and responsibilities in workplace communication
- Identify and reduce blocks to effective listening

Materials

- ✓ Flip Chart or chalkboard
- ✓ Overhead or LCD projector and screen
- ✓ Markers or chalk
- ✓ Pens or Pencils for participants
- ✓ Slides or handout of slides for participants to follow
- ✓ A water soluble or erasable pen for overheads
- ✓ Handout materials (see below)

Prepare before class

Review all overheads and/or flipchart statements.

Handouts - Have available or make copies for each participant:

Seven Guidelines for Effective Communication

Slides/Overheads

Step 1: Mini-lecture: Communication norms and responsibilities (Slide 53)

Rationale (for the facilitator)

Workers often are hesitant to come forward with their concerns about coworker substance abuse or other coworker problems that may interfere with workplace productivity and cohesion. In many cases, this hesitancy may reflect a lack of basic assertiveness skills and an uncertainty and anxiety about communication responsibilities inherent in work settings. This module allows participants to (1) explore issues of personal responsibility in various workplace communication situations and (2) to review and practice skills that contribute to responsible and effective communication. This module also serves as an introduction to Module 6 that provides more guided review and skills practice for peer referral.

Session Purpose: Introduce the overall topic and purpose. (You may use your own words, but cover the two main ideas in the overhead).

Explain that “norms” means social rules or what is expected to be the “normal” or routine ways that people agree on how to communicate with each other.

Explain that communication norms and responsibilities go together. For example, we may only communicate what we think is normal to communicate because it is what we think is expected. The question is who are we responsible to when we choose to communicate or not communicate? Also, do we withhold information because it may hurt the group? Do we share information because it may help us?

What makes someone easy to talk with? (Slide 54)

You may flipchart responses to the question shown on Overhead.

ASK: What makes someone easy to talk with? As participants give their responses, reinforce any reference to specific behaviors, such as “they show you they are listening... facing you, making eye contact, being relaxed, smiling, they spend time with you, don’t allow disruptions or distractions to take away from spending time, etc.” Mentioning of other traits or qualities is also good—such as approachable, attractive, warm personality, honest, friendly, easy going. Facilitators want to impress the idea that a relaxed or easy going style has specific behaviors and manners associated with them.

Show Overhead 55 and Explain: “The workplace is an important communication setting. Like all communication settings it, too, has rules and guidelines. Of special importance in workplace settings are communication responsibilities. Let’s consider some communication guidelines we may find in a workplace setting:”

- How would you describe the workplace setting—as “formal” or “informal”?
- Who is allowed to speak in the workplace?
- Who or what governs who is allowed to speak in the workplace?
- How about how you are allowed to speak—what are the rules?
- When should you speak up at work?
- What responsibilities do you have in a workplace communication setting?

The workplace is a unique communication setting, with its own set of guidelines and responsibilities. As mentioned earlier, the very life of any organization depends on communication. In healthy and productive organizations, communication is geared toward the actual work process, as well as information sharing, problem solving, and heading off potential problems before they take their toll.

In keeping with your policy, there are specific communication responsibilities each worker has concerning safety issues, impaired coworkers, or suspicions of coworker impairment.

Let's look next at some general ideas about communication strategies for addressing these responsibilities.

Step 2: Seven guidelines for effective communication (Slide 56)

Distribute handout Seven Guidelines for Effective Communication. Review Overhead and discuss each point below. Provide examples and model appropriate nonverbal signals such as eye contact, level tone of voice, emotional neutrality, and active listening.

Explain: "If you suspect coworker impairment or other violations of policy, you are faced with several choices—do nothing, talk to a supervisor or manager, or talk to your coworker about getting help. Complaining to other coworkers or engaging in gossip may make you feel better, but it won't solve the problem.

And that's a key point. If you suspect violations or have concerns, problem solving communication is the kind to focus on.

Let's review some key ideas for effective, problem solving communication:"

Think about what you want to say. Before bringing up the issue, give it some consideration. Think about what you know, what you suspect, what you are concerned about. Make notes. Have some idea of what you want to have happen as result of the meeting.

Make your move. Request a meeting to discuss the issue. If you decide to talk with a supervisor or manager, ask for an appointment. If you are comfortable talking with the co-worker, ask him or her to meet with you.

Get right to the point. When we are anxious or nervous, we may talk around a subject. This dilutes your effectiveness when the main point finally arrives.

Practice good communication. Use I-Messages and listening skills. I-Messages are non-blaming and non-aggressive ways of presenting ideas, feelings, and concerns. Listening creates a supportive atmosphere.

Make a clear statement about what you want to see happen. If you are reporting to a supervisor, these might be a request for action. If talking with a co-worker, make a clear request that the behavior stop or that help be sought.

Roll with resistance. Supervisors may not want to hear about the problem or may downplay it. Co-workers may become angry or deny the problem. These are normal defensive reactions to hearing things we don't like as human beings. Listening respectfully and using a "broken record" can help dissipate strong feelings and make sure that your clear request for action is taken seriously.

End on a positive note. Thank the person for their willingness to listen. State your belief that the supervisor or co-worker can and will handle the problem.

Step 3: Really Listening Exercise (Slides 57-61)

SHOW and read Overhead 57-58. (“Lets not complicate...” and “I know you believe that you understand...”)

SAY: “We are about to do a listening exercise. As we can see from this overhead, listening and hearing are not the same thing. We can listen very well and believe that we understand what was said. Unfortunately, what we listen to, what we hear, and what we understand may have little to do with the message intended for us.”

SHOW Overhead 59 (Listening Do’s and Don’ts) and review each point.

◆◆ **Option:** Create a handout from Overhead #11

SAY (after reviewing the overhead): “I will leave this overhead up during the exercise so you can refer to it as needed.”

Really Listening Group Exercise. (Slide 60)

ASK participants to get into groups of three or four individuals.

DISTRIBUTE Handout “Really Listening” so that each group has at least one handout.

REVIEW Handout and Instruct participants to take about 2 minutes each to express their views. Ask them to monitor themselves so that everyone gets a chance to speak and respond.

SHOW and emphasize the rule in Overhead 61. (“Each person can speak only after restating the ideas of the previous speaker accurately...”)

Topics for “Really Listening” are listed here.

<u>Topics</u>
Capital punishment
Euthanasia
Liberal politics
Conservative politics
How to Best Deal with Terrorism
Gun Control
Censorship
Frozen human embryos
Salaries of football players
Sports team rivals: (for example, Cowboys fans vs. Bronco fans, etc.)
Cloning
The US Space program
The United Nations
Schools/Education

Discussion: Lead a Discussion using the following discussion questions

- Was it easy to really listen, or was it hard to do?
- What was hardest to remember to do?

- What came easiest?
- Did it get easier as you went along?
- How did this kind of listening compare with the kind you do every day?
- Did this method of listening help you see other people's point of view?
- How could you use this kind of listening to increase how well you understand what other people are trying to say?

Concluding Points: Make the following concluding points:

Listening is the foundation of effective communication.

Effective listening leads to effective speaking. If nothing else, it helps us avoid jumping to conclusions, putting a foot in the mouth, etc.

Listening is a skill. Honest. The more you practice, the better you get at it.

The world loves a listener. When asked to list the qualities they truly respect in others, most people put "good listener" on the list.

Learning to listen better can help reduce stress and confusion in most areas of life: work, family, relationships, and healthcare.

As we will see next (Module 6), listening is also the foundation of being able to encourage people who might need to get help.

OVERHEADS

- 53. Employees may know more...
- 54. What makes someone easy to talk to?
- 55. Communication & responsibility
- 56. Seven guidelines...
- 57. Let's not complicate...
- 58. I know you believe...
- 59. Listening do's and don'ts
- 60. Each person can...
- 61. Really listening activity

Handouts:

- 10. 7 Guidelines...
- 11. Controversial topics (sample in Step 3)
- 12. Listening Do's and Don'ts (optional)
- 13. Really Listening