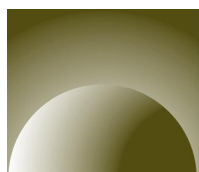
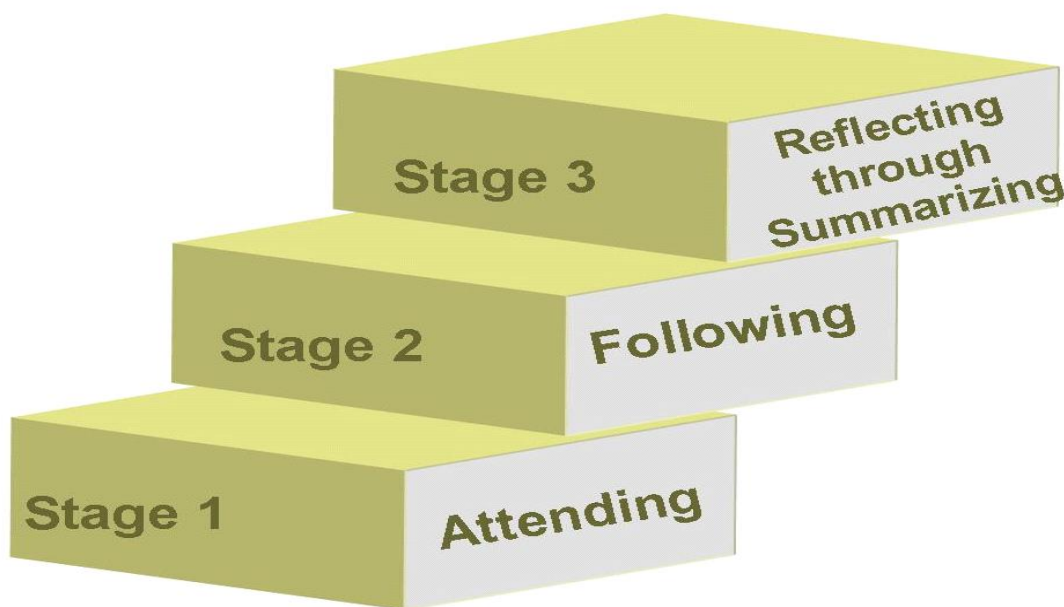

Active Listening

Increasing Team Effectiveness

This module was developed by former ICA staff Karen Snyder and Jim Troxel while they were part of Millennia Consulting and they used this module in their teaching at DePaul University.

The Power of Being Attentive



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Active Listening

Enhancing communication among team members and when playing the role of a facilitator in any group situation

One of the most important factors in the success of teams is communication. Throughout the life of a team you will be communicating – with team members and stakeholders.

Here are some skills you can learn to become a better communicator and to enhance communications within your team.

Learning Objectives

- To understand the barriers to effective and accurate communication within your organization and your team.
- To be able to employ practical communication skills including Reflective Listening
- To handle the emotional components of conflict.
- To develop a greater appreciation for the people on your team.

Our Views about People

To be better communicators, we need to recognize our assumptions about the people we work with.

The statements in the following table represent assumptions about how people behave in relation to their work. Consider each pair of statements for a few minutes and, in each case, circle the place on the scale that most accurately represents your view for the majority of the people at your work place.

When finished, add the scores and divide by 8 to get an average.

Most people have no real interest in the work they do	1	2	3	4	People enjoy work and achievement
People are interested only in their own benefit	1	2	3	4	People like to help others
Fear of punishment makes people work harder	1	2	3	4	Punishment leads to fall in result
People are basically dishonest	1	2	3	4	People are basically honest
People avoid responsibility	1	2	3	4	People enjoy responsibility
People are basically not open in their dealings with others at work	1	2	3	4	People are basically open in their dealings with others at work
Discipline and control produce the best results	1	2	3	4	People respond best when given freedom of action
People are not interested in the objectives of our organization	1	2	3	4	People are interested in the objectives of our organization
Total all scores =	÷ 8 =				

The Three Stages of Reflective Listening

<p>Stage 1</p> <p>Attending</p>	<p>Body Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open position Incline your body forward Responsive motions and gestures Appropriate eye contact 	<p>Distraction-free Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few competing sights or sounds Assure privacy Avoid furniture barriers Appropriate distance from speaker (4-12 feet)
	<p>Stage 2</p> <p>Following</p>	<p>Door Openers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploratory open-ended questions Say what you see Attentive silence
<p>Stage 3</p> <p>Reflecting</p> <p>through</p> <p>Summarizing</p>	<p>Reflecting Thoughts</p> <p>Search for core concern</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concentrate Suspend judgment Sum up clues (visual, vocal, verbal) <p>Restate message</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use own words Concisely Appropriate language 	<p>Reflecting Feelings</p> <p>Feeling words or phrases: “excited,” “angry,” “disappointed,” “pleased,” “down in the dumps,” “between a rock and a hard place”</p> <p>Descriptive actions – what might feel like doing “telling him off,” “giving her a piece of your mind,” “quitting immediately”</p>
	<p>Listener Summarizes Speaker</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the major theme(s)? Highlight key points Summarize conclusion Point to goals or input 	<p>What’s Behind the Feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State the feeling Tie it to the thoughts “you feel ... because ...” “you feel disappointed because the promotion went to someone else.

Exercise: Are You Listening?

When someone tells you about a problem, how well do you respond? Here's an exercise that will help you find out. Check the response that you would be most likely to make in each case.

1. I don't know what's wrong with me. I keep making mistakes. My manager has yelled at me twice, and I don't blame her for being unhappy with me.

- A. Why do you think you are making mistakes?
- B. Why don't you tell your manager how sorry you are and that you'll do better in the future?
- C. I hate to have someone yell at me when I make mistakes.
- D. Maybe your manager has got a point. Have you ever thought about that?

2. My boss just hired a new administrative assistant to manage our office operations. I was hoping to get that job, but they hired somebody from outside. They must think I'm not qualified for promotion.

- A. You must be terribly disappointed.
- B. Maybe the new person is simply better qualified than you are.
- C. I think you should tell your boss how you feel and say that you are interested in advancement.
- D. Do you have any idea why they thought you're not qualified?

3. When my supervisor makes mistakes or is late meeting deadlines, I hear her telling people it is my fault when it isn't.

- A. I wouldn't put up with that kind of nonsense like you have.
- B. It sounds like you're wondering what to do about it.
- C. What kind of mistakes does she blame you for?
- D. If I were you I'd quit my job and find a better one.

Active Listening

4. I am supposed to assign work to the other secretaries in the office, but our manager is always interfering. He gives work to anyone he feels like and interrupts what they are doing. As a supervisor, I feel undercut.

- A. You should discuss the situation with the manager.
- B. Has he always done this?
- C. You ought to know by now that 'the boss is the boss.'
- D. I sense you're upset that your manager doesn't work through you and you're not sure what to do about it.

5. When I talk something over with my manager, he doesn't really listen to me. He has his mind made up after I say the first sentence. Then he just wants to get our meeting over with.

- A. Have you tried stop talking when you think he isn't listening to you any more? That might get his attention.
- B. He probably knows what you're going to say after your first sentence.
- C. What kind of things do you talk over with the manager?
- D. It's frustrating, isn't it, when someone won't hear you out?

6. I think I'm doing all right in my job, but my manager never says anything about my work. For all I know she's dissatisfied with it.

- A. Has she ever criticized your work?
- B. If I were you I'd ask, 'How am I doing?'
- C. That happens to secretaries a lot. They are taken for granted. You shouldn't expect the manager to say anything.
- D. I'm sure you'd like to know what she expects of you and how she feels about the quality and quantity of your work.

Active Listening

7. I've heard of people who work best under pressure. My problem is worse than that - I sometimes think I work only under pressure.

- A. You know better than to wait until you're under pressure to start an assignment.
- B. Are you saying you're concerned about being able to work only under pressure?
- C. Why do you think it's a problem?
- D. Have you thought about taking a time management course to help you plan?

8. I'm really tired of being swamped. I've got so many people asking me to do things that I can never catch up.

- A. It sounds like you're really stressed out.
- B. Do you have to do everything all those people asked you to do?
- C. If I were you I'd talk it over with the manager.
- D. Your problem is you let others run your life.

9. I rush to finish work by the deadline I am given and then it sits on some manager's desk for a week. I'm sick of being given phony deadlines.

- A. How often does that happen?
- B. Why don't you take your time if you think the deadline is a phony?
- C. It sounds like you feel they are taking advantage of you.
- D. For God's sake, don't have a cow!

10. She was my friend until she was promoted to supervisor. Now she points out my mistakes in front of everybody.

- A. Isn't it embarrassing to be told about your mistakes in front of other people?
- B. That's easy. Stop making mistakes, and you won't have a problem.
- C. Why don't you get together with some other people who feel as you do, and talk the situation over with her?
- D. How often has she done this?

Exercise Answer Sheet

Transfer your answer to each situation by circling the corresponding letter in each row on the table to the right.

The "R" column = **"Recommend"**

The "A" column = **"Ask"**

The "C" column = **"Criticize"**

The "E" column = **"Empathy"**

Experts say "E" responses are generally the most effective in the situations offered. Identifying with the person enables them to open up more for you to then guide them in coming up with their own solutions. It shows you care, which is your first responsibility as a listener.

The "R" answers usually are ineffective because we really don't know another's situation with the amount of information provided. The goal is to get the other person to come with their own solution to their problem.

The "A" response is seen effective in only certain situations. Too frequently, however, they are really just a prelude to giving advice. If you are prone to "A" type response, be sure to check any follow-up tendencies to offer your own recommendations. In some cases they are a good way to get the person to talk some more. "A" response can be a good follow-up when leading off with "E" responses.

The "C" responses are the least effective replies because they have the listener criticizing the person, frequently without all the facts and information to made a real judgement as to what the person needs.

	COLUMN			
Situation	"R"	"A"	"C"	"E"
1	B	A	D	C
2	C	D	B	A
3	D	C	A	B
4	A	B	C	D
5	A	C	B	D
6	B	A	C	D
7	D	C	A	B
8	C	B	D	A
9	B	A	D	C
10	C	D	B	A
Column Total				

Feedback Technique

Intent: To reinforce (praise) or redirect (criticism) to improve a team member's performance.

Why Feedback is Necessary

- Team members often don't know the impact of their actions
- Team members need to be talked with
- Team members want to do well
- Team members need coaches

When Feedback is Necessary

- As soon as a problem/positive is identified
- In non-confrontational manner
- Regular review is appropriate
- For only one minute

Tips for Giving Feedback

- Deal with only one issue at a time
- Deal with the **ACT**, not the **VALUE** of the person
- Address the inappropriate or appropriate behavior
- Be tough, nice and quick

Traps to Avoid

- "Gunny-sacking" – storing up reprimands
- Overwhelming the team member
- Attacking the person's worth
- Doing it in public

FEEDBACK FORMULA

What I most appreciate about you is . . .
You could be even more effective if . . .

The Five Step Coaching Process

For communicating in difficult situations

- 1. Getting Agreement That A Problem Exists**
 - Use the Reflective Listening Process
 - This step usually takes half the time
 - Don't assume you know the issue
 - Clarify the consequences
 - Listen until you experience the other person's point of view
 - Finally, summarize what you've heard the team member say
 - Then, if necessary and appropriate, state your views, needs and feelings (using the Feedback Technique)
- 2. Mutually Discuss Alternative Solutions**
 - Identify first of many options
 - Allow the team member to come up with multiple options
 - Many options open up perspectives
 - Identify what could be done differently
- 3. Mutually Agree On Action To Be Taken To Solve Situation**
 - Allow team member to make decision
 - Feedback on what is said
 - Confirm what the team member said
 - Confirm the plan of action and follow-up
 - Clarify your role and others in the action plan
- 4. Follow-up For Action**
 - Schedule regular review (No follow-up exacerbates the problem)
- 5. Recognize Achievement**
 - Celebrate success (recognition motivates behavior)



Exercises

Situation 1

You pride yourself in having good lines of communication with all your team members, making sure you say something to each one every day. Periodic team meetings strengthen the sense of openness that you deem one of the primary reasons for your team's excellent record and productivity.

One day, however, you sense something is not well with Jean, a team member who has been with you from the beginning. She has always been the quiet, efficient type. Never rocking the boat, she puts in a solid day's work everyday. Consequently, you have gradually increased her team responsibilities. You see her as the team's best member.

You happen to come upon her just at a time when she is getting off the phone after having some difficulty with one of the service providers she monitors in her regular job. You simply ask how things are going and she retorts quite expressively that she's had it working here; she's tired of having to work so hard; she can't take it any more; the team's new routine is crazy; things aren't going so well at home; and furthermore you never listen to her so what's the use in telling you all these things anyway.

For a moment you are completely thrown for a loop. But you regain your composure and remember the "Coaching Process." How do you respond to her, remembering that her outburst was symptomatic of the problem, not the problem itself?

Situation 2

Joe has been with the agency a long time and on the EI team from just about the beginning. He is doing his best but can't quite fill his new team responsibilities. The change to the new work assignments has been hard for him to accept as well.

You're not sure if the issue is motivation, reluctance to change, actual physical limitation, a combination of all three, or something else altogether. He's fairly well liked and respected by his teammates, and you suspect some have been "covering" for him on occasion. However, because of the stress on everyone with the team – and regular work – responsibilities, some members have expressed displeasure with him, something that up until recently was unheard of. You, yourself, have been looking the other way and don't want to really see what you deep down know to be true.

One day Joe shows up late for a team meeting during a pattern of tardiness. You know you can't avoid the issue any longer. So, after the meeting is over, you invite Joe to sit down and talk with you for a moment.

Again, using the "Coaching Process," proceed with a conversation with Joe. Remember, don't assume you know what the problem is and that he doesn't.

Active Listening

Situation 3

You have been away from the unit for about an hour and when you return you can tell something is “in the air,” though you are not sure what. You sense tension near the client reception room where some of the desks and office staff are located. You notice one worker looking up at you as you pass by, biting her lower lip.

You casually mention to one of your colleagues you know best, “What happened in here? Someone have a fight?” She looks up at you and says matter-of-factly, “Actually, yes.” You ask, “What happened? Who was involved?” You are told that Dick and Nancy had gotten into an argument in front of some of the clients.

Just then Nancy slams a drawer into its file cabinet. You know something is needed now. What do you do? Do you invite both of them to talk with you at the same time or one at a time? Either way, what do you say and do?

Situation 4 (A&B)

It's getting close to wrapping up the team's first year of operation and the EI steering committee has asked for an assessment of the process and how each person was involved. You dislike this formality as much as the team members but know it's good to periodically talk with each one about how they are doing. Two team members present a particular challenge to you.

A) One, Fred, seems to be always very busy doing his team responsibilities. He seems reasonably conscientious and never gives you any problems about tardiness, or anything else. On the surface he presents the ideal team member. The problem is that he never seems to get anything done. He's a hard working team member who doesn't produce.

B) Karen, on the other hand, is just the opposite. She seems not able to get anything done without constant supervision, checking, and rechecking. At first, you figured this was because she was new, but now that she has been on the team for nearly a year, you had expected much more. Frankly, you are kind of tired of dealing with her.

How might the “Coaching Process” help you in these two situations?

Situation 5

Sarah is one of your best team members but lately her heart doesn't seem to be with it. You sense she is restless about things.

One day she asks if she can talk with you. You say, “Sure. What about?” She asks if you can schedule a private conversation, upon which you say, “Of course,” and kick yourself for being insensitive.

When the conversation starts, Sarah simply says that she would like to move on and try some other things. You know losing her, even with her less-than-enthusiastic self, would be a real blow to you and the team.

How might the lessons from today help you talk with Sarah?

Communication Agreement

This sample communication agreement represents a composite of actual agreements that various communities have adopted, plus a few ideas of our own. It makes most sense to use this with groups or communities that are going to be together over a long period of time. Use it as a template or discussion starter for developing your agreement. Be sure to put this agreement in writing, distribute a copy to everyone in the group, and post the agreement where new members and visitors can see it.

Take responsibility for your own feelings. Do not expect others to read your mind. Use "I" statements and refrain from blaming. Don't assume you can ever speak for or on behalf of the group; you can finally only speak for yourself.

Communicate directly with the person or persons involved in an issue. Do not work through go-betweens or serve as a go-between for others. If someone asks you for information about an issue in which you are not directly involved, direct him or her to the proper source.

Do not speak critically about others behind their backs unless you voice the same criticism to their faces. To avoid unhelpful speculation, give specific names when you make a critical comment in a meeting.

State your position or concern before asking how others feel about it. Do not set someone up to give a "wrong" answer. Be courageous and put yourself on the spot first.

Practice active listening. Listen silently and with your whole self until the speaker has finished speaking. Then restate what the speaker has said and wait for a confirmation.

Provide continual feedback. Do not allow resentments to build up and do not forget to give positive strokes.

Respect and validate others' feelings. If you do not agree or do not support another's statement, acknowledge what has been said, then make your point.

Use humor softly, not sharply.

The solution is not a model, it's a path -- and the key to that path is dialogue. ... I believe the only way answers will emerge is through real talk among people. When everything is reduced to polarized issues, shrill name-calling and sound-bite simplification, we've lost public talk about our values -- the basis of all real problem-solving.

Frances Moore Lappe