

Guidelines for Effective Communications

Own your feelings while genuinely listening to others express theirs:

- listen with empathy: put yourself in the speaker's shoes
- re-state whatever you heard the speaker say to ensure that you got the intended message and that the speaker feels s/he was heard
- use "I" statements to express your thoughts, perspective, opinions, and (especially) feelings; this increases your personal power without putting the other person on the defensive through saying "You did/said...."

Communicate responsibly:

- develop rituals (at home and/or in the workplace) to provide a forum for airing differences; learn to "disagree without being disagreeable" by leaving personalities out of the discussion!
- take advantage of the technique known as "the neutral third party": anyone can take it upon him- or herself to call a "time-out" where people breathe deeply, hold silence, and calm down

Be aware of beliefs, assumptions, and patterns of communication:

- examine your own assumptions and beliefs before learning about others'
- look beyond specific "positions" on an issue, especially in a conflict situation, in order to focus on needs and interests
- see conflict as an opportunity and a normal part of life; conflict is transformational!
- notice if you're playing games (e.g. taking on the role of victim/persecutor, smart one/stupid one, parent/child, and so on), be willing to laugh at your game-playing, and choose to behave authentically instead of playing a role

Use body language to move communication forward, not block it:

- match your body language to the other person's; for example, if you're in disagreement with someone, it's best if both of you are either standing or sitting
- be aware of your tone of voice: is it neutral, belligerent, conciliatory, whiny, etc.?
- when angry, take an exercise break to physically relax the body; this helps the emotions and mind calm down, as well

Choose attitudes and behavioral responses that focus on solutions:

- avoid using absolutes when speaking ("always", "never")
- address any concern or conflict within 24 hours of it arising, so negative feelings don't fester
- maintain your calm in conflict situations to de-escalate them
- choose to maintain a positive attitude; if you can find at least one good thing about the situation or the person you're in conflict with, you're well on the way to effectively addressing the situation or connecting with the person
- make and keep agreements
- be creative about looking for and finding win/win situations
- forgive