

## Manage Better Through Communication

**Good communication.** It's crucial for a productive workplace. The most effective work teams develop open communication and collaboration. They also learn to resolve conflicts among team members. As a manager, you're in an ideal position to help improve such communication within your workgroup. As your communication skills improve, so will your effectiveness as a manager.

**Seek to understand before being understood:** Active listening is an important tool for managers. Team members can become frustrated if their views aren't being heard, respected and supported.

By consistently supporting good communication with team members, you can help the team stay on track and address conflicts and disagreements. Difficult conflicts are inevitable in the workplace. However, if you have an organized strategy for dealing with them, you can help make conflicts serve a constructive rather than destructive purpose.

This issue of *Your Source* introduces you to techniques that support better workplace communication, including:

- How to identify and work well with your team members' various communication styles.
- How to foster good communication at work, even in difficult situations.
- How to keep communication positive in your workgroup.

As a manager, you're a bit like the conductor of a symphony—you're helping many different kinds of instruments work together to accomplish a larger goal. By listening closely to what's going on in your workgroup, you can help improve the team's overall results.

**Go online today!** Log on to access *Communicating in the Workplace* and other helpful resources in the *Spotlight* section. There you will find tools that can help you move forward as a manager.



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### *Recognizing Different Styles*

Being aware of different communication styles in the workplace can help you be a more effective communicator. You can do this by adjusting your presentation to the communication style of the other person.

*Open communicators*—These people tend to express their emotions and feelings freely. It helps to start with an informal conversation before getting down to business topics.

*Reserved communicators*—These individuals don't like to share personal information or what they think about things. You might limit your interactions mostly to workplace topics.

*Indirect communicators*—Often speaking more slowly, these individuals do not like loud, fast, or directly aggressive talk. They focus more on facts and figures than assumptions. Have data or evidence for backing up your suggestions, answers and views.

*Direct communicators*—They often talk more rapidly than indirect communicators. They are self-assured and don't mind taking risks. They are sometimes known as 'type A' personalities. With these individuals, get to the point quickly, be assertive in what you say, and provide solid evidence to back your points.

# Communication Strategies for Resolving Conflicts

Whenever two or more people get together to do something, there can be disagreement about how it should be done. In the workplace, this means team members may have different ideas about how to reach the workgroup's goals. But if disagreements are not resolved in a healthy manner, the conflicts can linger, creating tension and disrupting work.

## The Value of Conflict

While often not pleasant, conflict is a way that new ideas and solutions emerge. Without conflict, people can grow stale and unresponsive to the environment. Research shows that conflict is a necessary part of group development. It can move the group forward if you know how to confront it.

## Create an Environment for Constructive Conflict

It's important for leaders to encourage open forums where disagreement is expressed honestly, and no one gets attacked on a personal level. If conflicts become personal, you should interrupt the process. Remind team members to focus on resolving work issues, not complaining about individuals.

## Have a Conflict Resolution Strategy

Here are some techniques that can be part of your strategy for constructive conflict resolution:

- **Confront problems neutrally.** Set up time to discuss problems away from the daily work space.
- **Treat all participants with respect.** Your words can affect listeners positively or negatively. It's important to be sensitive to others' input.
- **Listen carefully.** Focus on and restate each person's position so you can be sure to understand their point of view.
- **Discuss alternative solutions.** List all possible solutions to problems. Don't pass judgment on "brainstormed" ideas. Conflicts should not be competitions.
- **Find common ground.** Agree to a compromise or solution that everyone in the group understands and can live with.
- **Get help when needed.** If a problem gets too emotional or out of control, consider asking for help from a neutral third-party mediator (e.g., human resources) in your organization.
- **Monitor the fix.** Once an agreed upon solution is put in place, track its effectiveness and make changes as needed.

**As a manager, what is the best approach to take when team members openly disagree with your view?**

- A. Ask questions about the team members' points, and also ask that they summarize your stated view.
- B. Remind team members that you are the supervisor, and your position should prevail.

*The correct answer is A. Listen carefully to team members' remarks. Ask them to summarize your main points. This gives you the chance to pinpoint possible misunderstandings and it could lead to creative solutions!*

## Now That's an Idea!

### Tips for Keeping Communication Positive

*Always take the high road—* Don't encourage gossip and/or negativity in your workgroup. Think and talk positively.

*Search for win-win resolutions—* Don't adopt a winner-take-all attitude in conflicts. Talk things out to develop mutually satisfying solutions.

*Get it together—* When a confrontation arises, it's okay to ask for a little time to cool down and gather your thoughts. Schedule a meeting for later.

*Keep it objective—* Be a facilitator rather than taking sides in a discussion or conflict. Act in service to the workgroup and you can help preserve relationships.

*Keep it light—* Try injecting some humor into meetings when you can.