

## Communication

Communication skills are ranked FIRST among a job candidate's "must have" skills and qualities, according to a 2010 survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

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

- verbal (sounds, language, and tone of voice)
- aural (listening and hearing)
- non-verbal (facial expressions, body language, and posture)
- written (journals, emails, blogs, and text messages)
- 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 an interview, for example, employers are impressed by a job candidate who answers questions with more than one-word answers (such as yeah...nah...dunno), demonstrates that he or she is listening, and shares information and ideas (by asking questions for clarification and/or follow-up). The interview can be an indication to employers of how the candidate or employee will interact with supervisors, co-workers, and customers or resolve conflicts when they arise. Remember, non-verbal communication is also critical in 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. Though some supervisors may specifically ask for your opinion, others may assume if there is something important they need to know, you will bring it to their attention – or if there is something you are unsure about, you will ask. Knowing how to listen carefully and when to ask for help is important. If an employee and a supervisor learn to communicate well (in whatever method that works), there is a greater 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 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 they 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 practice communicating how, when, and to whom to disclose a disability on the job or in post-secondary education and/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 any mistakes of the past have helped them to become more focused and dedicated young adults.



## 1. **Whats' Your Point?**

**JUST THE FACTS:** This activity helps participants understand the importance of being specific when offering and receiving communication. Often times 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...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/actress). • 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 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.

**Suggestion:** 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, youth may wish to retry one or more of the skits and create their own characters.

After each skit is read, ask the following questions: • **Role Play #1:** How did Jade handle Mr. Z.'s comments? What did she do right? 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 demonstrated such a mature attitude? 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 each situation, he/she was 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** 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 per group). Have participants share (if they are comfortable) 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.

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