

# Conversation Management

*Effective Communication Skills for the  
Workplace*

OURA

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## Listening

Good Listener

Bad Listener

What Does He/She Do?

How Does This Make You Feel?

What Does This Make You Do?

*“One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears- by listening to them. “*

## Barriers to Listening

1. We have better things to say
2. We think we know what they'll say
3. Too many distractions
4. We're busy listening to our own thoughts
5. We don't like the speaker or the message
6. Our minds are closed
7. We only hear what we want to hear
8. We jump to conclusions
9. We'd rather talk to be in control
10. We're thinking about what we want to say next
11. We mentally criticize the speaker or message
12. We put what we hear into the context of our own experiences rather than trying to see it from the speaker's viewpoint. *“You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time.”*

M. Scott Peck

## The Conversation Skills

1. **Empathy** is the key for reducing defensiveness and for building trust.

Typically, empathize when:

- emotions dominate
- emotions are important to problem solving
- emotions are in the way

2. **Encouraging** promotes dialogue by inviting the speaker to continue the discussion.

Typically, encourage when:

- you want more information about ideas, facts, or feelings
- the other person appears hesitant

3. **Paraphrasing** is the flip-side of empathizing. You focus in the other person's content- the ideas- rather than the emotion.

Typically, paraphrase when,

- you think ideas should predominate
- you want more information about what's been said
- you are confused or unclear
- you have been given a lot of information
- you want to make sure you heard and understood

4. **Questioning** is to seek information, clarify meaning and avoid problems.

Typically, question when:

- you know what information you need
- you are unclear about something
- you want to guide the conversation

5. **Informing** conveys a message to the other person.

Typically, inform when:

- more information is needed by the other person to go further in the conversation
- explaining something
- the other person is ready to listen
- time is critical

6. **Directing** involves one person giving instructions to another.

Typically, direct when:

- you expect compliance from the other person
- you are delegating responsibility
- you are teaching
- you don't have time to do anything else
- you believe the person has the knowledge and skill to carry out the direction

## Conversation Climate

Climate is variable, ranging from supportive to defensive. In a supportive climate, conversationalists can hone in on the content of the discussion because emotional reactions do not prevail. In a defensive climate, people are distracted by their own or the other person's emotional response.

## Alligator River Story

Once upon a time, there was a woman named **Abigail** who was in love with a man named **Gregory**. Gregory lived on the shore of the river and Abigail lived on the opposite shore of the river. The river that separated the two lovers was teeming with man-eating alligators. Abigail wanted to cross the river to be with Gregory. Unfortunately, the bridge had been washed out. She was wearing a tight skirt and a low-cut blouse because she wanted to look sexy for Gregory. **Sinbad**, the ferry captain, said that he would take her across; however, the look in his eyes frightened her. **Ivan**, a close friend of Abigail's, did not want to be involved at all in the situation. Abigail felt that her only alternative was to take the ferry, even though she did not trust Sinbad. After leaving the river shore, Sinbad told Abigail that he couldn't control himself and had to go to bed with her. When Abigail refused, he threatened to throw her overboard. He also said that if she complied, he would deliver her safely to the other side. Abigail was afraid of being eaten alive by the alligators, and didn't see any other alternative for herself, so she did not resist Sinbad. When Abigail told Gregory about what happened to her, he viewed her as asking for it because of the way she was dressed. He saw her as unclean and cast her aside with disdain. Heartsick and dejected, she turned to **Slug** who was a black belt in karate. Slug felt anger at Gregory and compassion for Abigail. He sought out Gregory and beat him brutally. Abigail was overjoyed at the sight of Gregory getting his just due. As the sun sets on the horizon, we hear Abigail laughing at Gregory.

Characters	
1.	Most Offensive
2.	
3.	
4	
5.	Least Offensive

## **Courageous Conversations**

### ***Surviving and Thriving in Difficult Interactions***

#### **Dr. Viktor E. Frankl**

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude to me is more important than facts.... We cannot change our past...we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our attitudes.

#### **William James**

Whenever you're in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude.

#### **Kahlil Gibran**

Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you as by the attitude you bring to life; not so much by what happens to you as by the way your mind looks at what happens.

#### **William James**

The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.

#### **Irving Berlin**

Our attitudes control our lives. Attitudes are a secret power working twenty-four hours a day, for good or bad. It is of paramount importance that we know how to harness and control this great force.

#### **W. C. Fields**

Attitude is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than what people do or say. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill.

#### **Albert Einstein**

Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character.

#### **Zig Ziglar**

It is your attitude, not your aptitude, that determines your altitude.

#### **Oscar Wilde**

We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.

## **Gibb Categories**

The Gibb categories of defensive and supporting behaviour are six sets of contrasting styles of verbal and nonverbal behaviour. Each set describes a communication style that is likely to arouse defensiveness and a contrasting style that is likely to prevent or reduce it.

**EVALUATION** is a style that judges the other person, usually in a negative way. They judge what the other is feeling rather than describing the speaker's thoughts, feelings, and wants.

**DESCRIPTION** is a communication behaviour involving messages that describe the speaker's position without evaluating the person.

### **Evaluation**

You're not making any sense.

You're inconsiderate

### **Description**

I don't understand the point you're trying to make

I would appreciate it if you'd let me know when you're running late—I was worried

**CONTROL** is a defensive-arousing message in which the sender tries to impose some sort of outcome on the receiver.

**PROBLEM ORIENTATION** is a supporting style of communication in which the communicators focus on working together to solve their problems instead of trying to impose their own solutions on one another.

### **Controlling**

There's only one way to solve this problem

Either you start working harder, or you're in big trouble

### **Problem Orientation**

Looks like we have a problem. Let's work something out.

The production in your department hasn't been as high as I had hoped.

**STRATEGY** is a defense-arousing style of communication in which the sender tries to manipulate or deceive the receiver.

**SPONTANITY** is a supportive communication behaviour in which the sender expresses a message openly and honestly without any attempt to manipulate the receiver.

### **Strategy**

What are you doing Friday after work?

### **Spontaneity**

I have a piano I need to move Friday after work. Can you give me a hand?

NEUTRALITY is a defense-arousing behaviour in which the sender expresses indifference toward the receiver.

EMPATHY is the is a supportive communication behaviour in which the receiver accepts the other feelings by putting herself in another's place.

**Neutrality**

That's the way the cookie crumbles

Things like this happen when you don't plan properly

**Empathy**

I know you put a lot of time and effort into this project

Ouch—looks like this didn't turn out the way you expected

SUPERIORITY is a defense-arousing style of communication in which the sender states or implies that the receiver is not worthy of respect.

EQUALITY is a type of supportive communication that suggests that the sender regards the receiver as worthy of respect.

**Superiority**

You don't know what you're talking about.

No, that's not the right way to do it!

**Equality**

I'm not sure I agree

I'd be happy to help if you'd like—just let me know.

## Gibb Categories: Defensive and Supportive Language

For the statement below, write two statements a speaker might make. One should contain defense-arousing language and the other supportive language.

Label the Gibb categories that your words represent.

Example

*A neighbor's late-night stereo music playing is disrupting your sleep.*

*Defense-arousing statement:*

Why don't you show a little consideration and turn that damn thing down? If I hear any more noise I'm going to call the police!

*Type(s) of defensive language:*

Evaluation, control

*Supportive statement:*

When I hear your stereo late at night I can't sleep, which leaves me more and more tired. I'd like to figure out some way you can listen and I can sleep.

*Type(s) of supportive language:*

Description, problem orientation

Each small group will be assigned one of the following.

1. It is two o'clock on a Friday afternoon, and your team is waiting for a member to join you for a meeting. You know he is out with his new girlfriend for lunch. You expected him back at 1:30 and you need his input at this meeting. What do you say when he arrives at 2:00?
2. You are a member of the coffee fund (which costs \$10.00 per month) and you have a coffee once a day. A colleague of yours is not a member of the coffee fund, yet, from your desk you see him help himself to coffee at least three times a day. You decide to confront him. What do you say?
3. You are the team leader of a group that has reached a milestone. You are now waiting for another group to reach its milestone before you can continue. You find out that the other team leader has allowed two of his members to take a Friday off work even though the team is behind in its project. You confront the other team leader. What do you say?
4. You are an engineer who is explaining the software changes to a technician who is having difficulty understanding them.
5. You have done considerable research and feel strongly that the project should go in a certain direction. A generally disagreeable colleague thinks the project should proceed in a very different direction- one that you think would be a big mistake. At a meeting this issue arises. What do you do/say?
6. On many occasions a colleague drops by your office without calling first. He spends quite a bit of time discussing personal issues that you really don't care to hear about. Since you simply have work to do, this behavior puts you in an uncomfortable position.

Defense-arousing statement:

Type(s) of defensive language:

Supportive statement:

Type(s) of supportive language:

*"Keep your words soft and sweet in case you have to eat them."*  
Anonymous

*"There are four ways, and only four ways, in which we have contact with the world. We are evaluated and classified by these four contacts: What we do, how we look, what we say, and how we say it."*  
Dale Carnegie

## Appendix A: Words That Make a Difference

### Words that make a difference:

#### Fight Starter:

You didn't do this right.

#### Communication Helper:

There are a few areas on this form that we did not complete.

### Use "I" Instead of "You":

#### Fight Starter:

You're wrong.

You're confusing me.

#### Communication Helper:

I can see there's been a misunderstanding.

I'm confused.

### Avoid Giving Orders:

#### Fight Starter:

You have to...

You should have done it this way.

#### Communication Helper:

Will you .... please?  
It would be best if we (you)...

We want to get this working smoothly. Doing it like this will...

### Take Responsibility:

#### Fight Starter:

I can't.

It's not my job.

#### Communication Helper:

I don't have the authority. However, Mary should be able to help you.

Let me see what I can do to help. John is a specialist in that area. Let me call him for you.

### Avoid Causing Defensiveness:

#### Fight Starter:

You never do it right.  
What's your problem

#### Communication Helper:

This is often not done properly.  
Please tell me what happened