

Module 7: Building Respectful and Productive Work Place Relationships

The goal of this module is to learn how to create a respectful, trusting, supportive and productive work environment.

In this module we will address:

1. The preferred culture of Cooperative Extension
2. Definitions of politeness, civility, courtesy and respect
3. Barriers and bridges to effective communications
4. Creating your department's ground rules for effective communication
5. Listening in a focused, attentive manner
6. Improving abilities to provide credit
7. Giving and receiving feedback
8. Improving abilities to manage conflict

Section 1: The preferred culture of Cooperative Extension

The culture of an organization consists of its vision, values, management philosophy and climate. UW Cooperative Extension's vision is to be Wisconsin's first-choice educational network for engaging people and their communities in positive change. Extension's values include:

Applying research to solve local problems

Holding ourselves accountable for the highest standards of scholarship

Respecting the indigenous knowledge of the people we serve

Excellence and innovation: Exploring new approaches to meeting educational needs and holding ourselves to the highest standards for program quality and effectiveness.

Creating and maintaining partnerships including county, state and federal governments, private and public organizations, campus and county faculty and staff and volunteers.

Honesty and Integrity: Serving as good stewards of public trust and resources

Seeking diversity in our faculty, staff and clientele and welcoming differences in people, ideas, programs and partnerships.

Continuing a local presence in communities.

Managerial-Leadership Philosophy

Our managerial leadership philosophy at UW Extension includes the expectation that leaders at all levels will carry out their functions according to the following core values:

1. honesty (trustworthy, truthful, reliable)
2. competence (capable, qualified, skillful, effective)
3. broad-mindedness (open, flexible, receptive)
4. dependability (reliable, conscientious)
5. supportiveness (helpful, championing, comforting)
6. forward-looking (visionary, future-oriented)
7. fair-mindedness (just, objective, unbiased)

All departments should also provide faculty and staff with the resources necessary to carry out their programming functions and provide opportunities for all faculty and staff to achieve personal and professional growth.

County department heads are expected to encourage faculty and staff to work with them collaboratively and harmoniously to ensure departmental effectiveness.

County Extension departments are to foster creativity, innovation, high morale, teamwork, shared leadership, responsibility, and accountability for all members through work climates.

Section 2: Definitions of politeness, civility, courtesy and respect

For Cooperative Extension to fulfill its vision and live out its core values and managerial-leadership philosophy, each department needs to create and sustain a climate marked by both high productivity and high morale. Professor Ed Schein, the renowned professor of organizational behavior, once said that if “a group or organization is not able to manage its internal interpersonal relationships in a positive and productive manner, then the group or organization will not be able to build and maintain itself as a functioning entity capable of achieving its potential.” Research has shown that such functional climates are marked by politeness, courtesy, civility, and respect. What do those terms mean?

Politeness: Being duly respectful or indulgent with other people according to social norms.

Courtesy: A voluntary, helpful consideration

Civility: Being friendly in a reserved correct sense

Respect: To feel or show deferential regard for, to avoid violation of or interference with others, willingness to show consideration or appreciation

Section 3: Barriers and bridges to effective communications

Great departments—those that are marked by high productivity and high morale—are places where excellence in communications abounds. But what is communication, what are its elements, and what are some of the barriers and bridges to effective communications?

Communication is simply the creation of understanding. Please see Appendix C. As you can see, it requires not just a sender but also a receiver. The message sent must be understood as intended.

For effective communication to occur, one also has to control noise. The noise can emit from the sender. He or she may not have a clear idea; may be oblivious to the audience's language level, needs and wants; may not care if the receiver interprets the information correctly; or may not carefully plan the communication to get positive results.

The noise may also emit from the message. The content may be poorly organized, impenetrable, or contradictory; the tone may be condescending, arrogant or wishy-washy; the attitude of the speaker may be harsh, rude and sarcastic.

In addition, the noise can emit from the channel selection. Perhaps, the words and the gestures contradict one another. You've been in conversations in which the words said, "Yes," but the body language screamed, "NO!!!!!" Perhaps, the sender selected the wrong medium for the message, using, for example, inflexible e-mail to resolve a conflict with a peer.

The noise can emit from the receiver as well. He or she may not be paying attention to the sender, the work environment may be noisy and prevent understanding, or the receiver may be distracted.

Noise can also occur when the listener does not ask questions for clarification, for example, of terms, deeper meanings or vague statements.

The most important contributor to misunderstanding, however, is the noise that is implicitly contained in word usage. Each of us has our own specific meanings of every noun, verb, adjective and adverb in our language. We develop our meanings through personal experiences. If receivers don't go through the exercise of putting the message into their own words and feeding them back to the sender, misunderstanding can easily occur.

Lastly, noise can emit from the feedback the receiver gives to the sender. It may be nonexistent, delayed, vague, dishonest or inappropriate.

To eliminate these barriers to effective communications, people do the following:

As a Sender:

1. Understand the audience(s) language and needs
2. Use the “you” attitude, putting the audiences first
3. Clarify for themselves the idea, purpose, and desired end result
4. Be strongly motivated to create clear understanding
5. Plan the communication thoroughly (please see Attachment #2 for a useful template)

As a Receiver, effective communicators—

1. Attend to the other
2. Minimize external and internal distractions
3. Ask appropriate questions
4. Assign approximate meaning
5. Paraphrase what they hear the other saying—put it in their own words

Lastly, effective communicators send Feedback that is marked by—

1. Timeliness
2. Specificity, concreteness, clarity

3. Honesty
4. Politeness, courtesy, civility, respect

Please see Appendix D for some exercises that will help you clarify critical points about communications.

Section 4: Creating your department's ground rules for effective communication

A tool that departments across Cooperative Extension use to create and sustain climates marked by politeness, courtesy, civility and respect is called "Creating Ground Rules for Communication." An example is provided in Appendix E.

This simple, effective process includes:

1. Identifying desired goals
2. Brainstorming effective ground rules
3. Rating level of importance
4. Establishing plan to maintain awareness of the group's efforts

The process works this way:

1. Schedule at least 1½ hours for all group members to participate. Pick a time and day to maximize participation. It is best to have a facilitator who is not a member of the group.

2. The facilitator will be responsible for running the meeting.
3. Task #1 is to come to agreement as to how decisions will be made by the group: e.g., unanimous, consensus, majority rules, the director rules. It is recommended that the goal be consensus, with majority rules as a fall back. This, however, requires that the minority(s) believes they had the opportunity to be heard, were understood, and that their views were honestly considered.
4. The group should then agree on their goals. Come to consensus on where your department currently is in terms of politeness, courtesy, civility, and respect. Come to consensus on where your department needs to be.
5. The group should then brainstorm ideas for ground rules.
6. When the brainstorming is completed, the proposed rules should be evaluated as to the relative importance of their desired outcome.
7. The group should then seek consensus on which rules should be their working standard.

8. The final list should be formally adopted including each member signing their name indicating their willingness to comply and help each other maintain the standards they have adopted.

9. It is recommended that a reading of the ground rules take place at every formal meeting of the organization.

10. Create an evaluation form for ground rules (see the earlier example)

Section 5: Listening in a focused, attentive manner

As described earlier, listening well is not an innate trait. Like all other skills, it can be broken down into a set of behaviors that need to be repeatedly practiced to be mastered. Here, we describe verbal and nonverbal behaviors that help and hinder effective listening, four skills in responsiveness that promote active listening, and a practical exercise that you can use to improve your ability to listen with understanding to others.

The following helping and nonhelping verbal and nonverbal behaviors come from studies and instruction in counseling psychology (Barbara Okun, *Effective Helping: Interviewing and Counseling Techniques*. North Scituate, Massachusetts: Duxbury Press, 1979). As you read through the following, ask yourself: “To what degree do I practice these behaviors when I am interacting with others?”

Helping Behaviors

Verbal

uses understandable words

reflects back and clarifies what the other is saying

appropriately interprets

summarizes for the other

uses verbal reinforcers: “mm-mm,”

“I see,” “Yes”

calls the other by his or her first name

uses humor occasionally to break the tension

is nonjudgmental

adds greater understanding to the statements of the other

phrases interpretations tentatively to elicit feedback

Non-Verbal

uses a tone of voice similar to that of the person needing the help

maintains good eye contact – no glaring or staring blankly

occasionally nods the head

shows some facial animation

positions self close to the other

occasionally smiles

uses a moderate rate of speech

leans in toward the other

Most important of all of the above are being nonjudgmental and maintaining appropriate eye contact. Maintaining appropriate eye contact is the most important nonverbal behavior in our culture. The good listener's eyes are wide open, relaxed, focused, warm, and smiling, inviting the speaker to continue. Looking away from the other person as he or she is speaking, rolling of the eyes, staring blankly into space, glaring at the other are all signs of disinterest, nonconnection, or a threatening demeanor, all alienating the speaker. One major purpose of active listening is to build bonds of trust between the sender and the receiver. Being judgmental and using one's eyes as weapons destroy trust and build social distance.

Again, as you read through the following list of nonhelpful behaviors, ask yourself the question, "To what degree do I practice these behaviors when I am interacting with others?"

Nonhelping Behaviors

Verbal

advice giving

preaching

placating--soothing, mollifying

blaming

cajoling--to persuade with deliberate

flattery

exhorting--urging strongly

extensive probing and questioning,

especially "why" questions

directing, demanding

distracting gestures

using words the other doesn't understand

straying off the topic

too fast or too slow rate of speech

intellectualizing

overanalyzing

talking about self too much

Non-Verbal

looking away from the other

sitting far apart or turned away from the other

physical sneers

scowling

tight mouth

shaking or pointing finger

yawning

closing eyes

Listening Skills

Four listening skills deserve special attention: reflecting, paraphrasing, clarifying and drawing out. Here are some explanations of these skills.

Reflecting: Restating as exactly as possible what another person has said. The opposite of reflecting is ignoring or judging.

Paraphrasing: Attempting to restate a speaker's lengthy or complex statement in his or her own words. The opposite of paraphrasing is challenging.

The ability to listen, and to demonstrate you have heard by reflecting or paraphrasing, are significant skills because they promote feelings of acceptance and understanding necessary for effective communication.

Reflection and paraphrasing are most useful when the speaker has stated relatively clearly and fully what he is thinking or feeling. Sometimes, however, even though the listener has accurately heard the speaker, he does not understand what the speaker means or he senses that the speaker may be trying to say more or less than what she actually has said. In these instances, it may be necessary to clarify what the speaker has said and to draw her out.

Clarifying: Here, the listener asks clarifying questions to understand what was said. Such questions can be either open-ended or closed-ended. Interpreting is the opposite of clarifying.

Drawing Out: Here, the listener encourages the speaker to expand what she said. Drawing-out questions may ask about the central idea of what is said or about the non-verbal cues given by the speaker. Sometimes silence can be used effectively to encourage speakers to expand on their comments. Listeners also find effective the use of the simple expression, "Please tell me more." The opposite of drawing out is projecting values.

Excellent listening affords all of us the opportunity to build bonds of trust, respect, appreciation of diversity, and personal growth. For an exercise on active learning that can be used by everyone in your department, please see APPENDIX F: This is Your Life Interview.

Some people say that they don't ever have enough time at work to do such interaction. We challenge that by suggesting that once every two weeks, eat lunch with a different person at work and conduct such a conversation. Active listening to your peers, colleagues and clients compared to many other department activities can be one of the best means to promote a work climate marked by high productivity and high morale.

Section 6: Improving abilities to provide credit

Another tool that people use to create more productive and happier workplaces is crediting, or positive reinforcement. B.F. Skinner, the renowned behaviorist psychologist, like his predecessors Pavlov and Watson, stipulated that behavior is determined by its consequences. That is, if a person performs an act and then is rewarded for that performance, the person will generally repeat the performance. On whole, people are pleasure seekers and pain avoiders—we seek rewards that help us further our objectives.

For positive reinforcement to work well, the praise must be earned, timely and individualized and the giver of it must be sincere and specific.

Unearned praise given by a distrustworthy sender does a lot more damage than no praise at all. Thus, ensure that the receiver deserves the reinforcement and that you deliver it with sincere, honest intent, politely, civilly, courteously and respectfully.

Secondly, much of the praise given in workplaces is too general to be really useful. What, specifically, comprises a “Good” job? What’s “Excellent”? Thus, ensure your praise mentions specific facts regarding the actual performance of the receiver—timeliness, quality, quantity, reduction of waste, happiness of clients, etc.

Third, if you provide praise too long after the performance, its positive effects diminish. Giving positive reinforcement only during annual performance review makes it seem ritualistic and dishonest.

Lastly, not everyone wishes positive reinforcement be given in the same way. Some people love public praise, their name in lights; others would die if they were singled out in public. Give praise privately unless you know for sure the receiver desires a public venue.

A Method of Giving Credit

Here is a simple formula that you can use to provide positive reinforcement at home and at work:

Make a *general reference* to the performance being credited.

Sincerely *thank* the person.

Give *specific examples* of the performance.

Mention the *personal qualities or competencies* that led to the performance.

Mention the *resulting benefits* to the department or organization.

Forms of Rewards

Different people desire different rewards. An inappropriate reward is often never forgotten just as an appropriate one can be cherished forever. Examine the

following possible rewards and examine how the people in your sphere of influence would respond to each. For each item ask:

Do you have it under your control or can you get it? If your answer is "No," delete it

Would it be reinforcing for that person or group?

Letter of commendation

Asking person for advice or opinions

Verbal praise

Letting the person report her results to upper management

Increased responsibility

Allowing a person to make decisions affecting his work, organization, strategies, or plans

Memo to superiors on performance of subordinates with copy to subordinate

Passing along compliments from others

Choice of tasks

Put positive information into personnel folder

Remove constant supervision

Early start on vacations requirement

Represent department at meetings

Time off

Training for a better job

Additional help

Talking to person about something she is interested in

Work on special projects

Help you in some of your duties

A “thank you,” a nod, a smile, a handshake, a pat on the back

Personal phone call or note from you

Flexibility in work scheduling

Promotions

Raises

Flex time

Fringe benefits

Gift certificate

Plaques, trophies, diplomas

We’re sure you can add to this list. The best way to determine what reinforces the receiver would appreciate is to ask the person or someone who really knows the person well.

Section 7: Giving and receiving feedback

Another tool that good communicators use to help enhance the climate of a department is constructive feedback.

As with most other types of communications, for feedback to be used effectively, it must be earned, honest, specific, timely and respectfully delivered.

A Process of Providing Constructive Feedback

1. Listen to the suggestion or observe the performance.
2. Give an itemized response: Specify merits and concerns
3. Identify ways to retain merits and reduce or eliminate concerns:
Invite/make suggestions; Give/invite reactions
5. Summarize suggestions/steps agreed upon.

Guidelines for Receiving Constructive Feedback

Resistance to feedback is often caused by: fear of attack, our early upbringing, negative experience with people we perceive as hurtful, etc. Some suggestions to allay our fears and open ourselves up to helpful feedback include:

1. Approaching the situation with an intent to learn rather than protect.
2. Resisting the instinct of feeling personally attacked
3. Not denying the feedback
4. Not defending yourself
5. Not justifying yourself
6. Not arguing
7. Not saying, "yes but"
8. Repeating back in your own words the message you heard
9. Asking the person to be more specific. The intent for doing this is to gather more relevant data which will help you understand what, why, when and where the desired behavior is expected of you.
10. Offering or asking for a solution for addressing how to close the gap.

Section 8: Improving abilities to manage conflict

The realities of today's office environment include conflict between individuals and units. In this section, you will find information on the causes of conflict, some enlightened assumptions about conflict, and helpful tools to use when managing conflict in your personal and professional life. This section is placed last in the module because it is built on all that has gone before it. To manage conflict well, you need to be able to send appropriate and clear messages, listen with your eyes and ears, and give and receive constructive feedback.

Causes of Conflict

Two types of causes can readily be identified; some of the items overlap. You can use the following causes to analyze a conflict that you or your department is currently experiencing, the idea being if you can identify the root of a conflict, there is a better chance for resolution.

Organizational

1. **Task Interdependence.** When units within an organization depend upon one another for information, resources, time, money, people, etc., conflict is inevitable. Coordinating and sharing resources is difficult. The more interdependent the units are, the greater the potential for conflict.

2. Shared Resources. All organizations have limited resources. The greater the squeeze of time, money, facilities, people, etc., the higher the potential for conflict.

3. Goal Incompatibility. Units often have different goals. For example, clients might demand more services while the county wishes to slash budgets. Units may also have different standards. For instance, quality assurance wants the goods to meet all the specs, but sales wants to ship them “as is” and send the revised software later. Conflict arises to the extent that goals or standards are incompatible.

4. Differentiation. Units develop their own ways of doing things: policies, procedures, norms, management styles, etc. To the extent that these differ between units, the potential for conflict is higher.

5. Uncertainty. Most organizations work in changing, turbulent environments caused by new technologies, new customer demands, new regulations, shifts in the economy, etc. Coping with these changes creates stress. The greater the changes, the greater the potential that the people will see themselves as losing rather than winning. Win-lose situations create conflict.

6. Reward Systems. Organizational incentives often cause conflict between units. If one unit is rewarded for the attainment of goals at the other unit's expense, competition rather than cooperation is fostered.
7. Jurisdictional Ambiguities. When job responsibilities between units are unclear, conflict will result.
8. Communications Breakdowns. Poor communications, intentional or unintentional, usually result in misunderstandings and misperceptions between units. Mistrust and conflict increase as communications break down.
9. Differences in Power or Status. High-status units possess more influence than do those of lower status. Conflicts arise when low-status units resist being influenced or try to increase their power at the expense of higher-status units.

Interpersonal

1. Perceived Incompatibility of Self-interests. Parties believe that a win-lose situation exists; one person will gain while the other will lose. Conflicts arise when people perceive conflicts in motives, goals, aspirations and roles.
2. Perceived Scarce Rewards. Parties think the pie is not big enough for two.
3. Perceived Inequity of Rewards and Status. People are particularly sensitive to matters of equity, believing the rewards they receive should equal their contributions.
4. Differences in Self-Concept and Temperament. Conflict arises when person A's self-image differs from B's perception. For example, person A doesn't perform a task because she fears failure; person B thinks she is just lazy. Person A is extroverted, articulate, outgoing, preferring engagement; person B, introverted, quiet, thoughtful, preferring isolation. Both believe the other has problems. People differ in where they prefer to focus their attention and get energy, how they prefer to take in information, how they prefer to make decisions, and how they prefer to deal with the outer world.
5. Ego-Centrism/Obliviousness of Others. Some people falsely assume that they are the only ones right in their judgments about the world. People

differ in beliefs, values, priorities, norms, standards, methods and attitudes. Misunderstandings and disagreements are normal and can be resolved. Actual differences cannot be resolved unless one or both parties change. If they don't want to compromise their differences, they can at least agree to disagree.

6. Poor Communications. What person A meant to say and what person B understood often differ. People don't always agree on word meaning. Some senders are inarticulate; some listeners, oblivious. People are not equally informed and see facts differently.

7. Perceived Absence of Mutually Acceptable Alternatives. Person A wants to play music loudly in the front room; person B wants to study quietly there. Neither wishes to move. Perhaps no mutually acceptable alternatives exist or perhaps both parties are stubborn. Fistfight ensues, but conflict is not resolved.

Some Assumptions About Conflict

There are many causes of conflict that affect departments daily. The following assumptions provide a helpful, optimistic, courageous and realistic approach to dealing with conflict in the workplace.

1. Conflict and disagreement are normal in human relationships.
Because of different life experiences (upbringing, culture, education, previous experience in relationships, etc.), people see the world differently and most think that their view is correct. People are often in conflict because they do not understand the other's frame of reference; do not understand or share the same values, objectives, and priorities; or are competing for the same resources—attention, money or position.

2. Conflict may be a good thing.
Conflict provides an opportunity for people to recognize and value differences of opinion, open up their worldview, expand their perspective, and solve problems. It gives both parties the opportunity to learn, improve, practice tolerance and achieve satisfactory resolution of emotional tension.

3. A mutually acceptable solution can often be found. If one can adopt a “win-win or no deal” attitude and communicate in an honest, courageous, assertive, but considerate and respectful manner, people can move from disagreement to compromise to collaboration to synergy.

4. Any of the parties in conflict can contribute to its resolution if one takes personal responsibility and initiates communications.
- My contribution to relationships is under my control; the parts others choose to play are not under my control.
 - When I change, my relationships change.
 - Waiting for other people or situations to change so that I can change equals no change.
 - The way I am treated by others depends partly upon how I “train” them to treat me.
 - Risk-taking is part of change. I may be rejected.

5. Trusting behavior can evoke trusting behavior.

The principle of social reciprocity stipulates that we get back what we give to others. “What goes around, comes around.” If people want others to trust them, listen to them, care for them, respect them, etc. they must give trust and respect first.

6. Consensus and synergy are likely only when people choose to cooperate in a win-win relationship rather than compete. Sometimes one must accommodate; other times, one must compete with all you have. Some people feel they always have to compete, to win at all costs. When dealing with a battler on an unimportant issue, let him or her win to gather social credits for later use. When

dealing with a critical issue, stand for what you believe is right with everything you have. When it is over, let go and move on.

7. Some conflicts may never be resolved because of fear, rigidity, intolerance, anger, paranoia, disfunctionality, or other emotional or mental impairment. Most often it is best to sidestep others' negativity, sarcasm and malicious ridicule.

Communication Ground Rules for Conflict Management

Because conflict management is of such importance, it has its own set of communication ground rules. Above all else, both parties have to agree to have a face-to-face conversation about their disagreement. Without both parties agreeing to negotiate, the conflict will not be resolved. Second, before two people can even attempt to have a conversation about a specific conflict, we strongly urge them to review and commit to the following dos and don'ts. Sometimes, it is very helpful to have a facilitator help the parties in conflict by holding them accountable for following through on the rules.

To ensure effective communication, please confirm your agreement to follow these ground rules. The guiding principle is to approach communication with an

intent to learn rather than an intent to protect. Add to the list if you wish, but ensure that each addition is specific and realistic.

Be honest. Say what is on your mind

Be specific

Provide examples

Don't use the words "never" and "always"

Listen and paraphrase what you hear the other person saying

Ask questions to clarify what the other is saying

Maintain good eye contact

Focus on behavior the other person controls

Focus on one behavior at a time

Don't interrupt

Be direct but tactful

Use "I" instead of "You" statements

Don't ridicule, taunt, or be hostile or rude

Don't defend yourself by blaming others

A Process of Conflict Management: Stop, Start, Continue

A truly effective process to deal with a conflict that you are having with another is to use an approach that comes out of marital counseling. It's called Stop, Start and Continue.

1. Create/validate communication ground rules.
2. Each person writes one 3" X 5" card for the other, specifying--
 - One thing the person wants the other person to stop doing
 - One thing the person wants the other person to start doing
 - One thing the person wants the other person to continue doing

Note: No more than one specific behavior is to be written for each start, stop, and continue. That will prevent piling on. Also, the behavior must be under the control of the person addressed.

3. The pair starts, by first one of the parties providing the stop on his or her card to the other, listening for feedback, answering questions, and negotiating agreement. The receiver listens in depth, asks for specific examples, probes for deeper understanding and paraphrases what he or she hears the other saying. If the other is not willing to commit to stopping the behavior, then he or she must indicate his or her reasons for not being able to make the commitment to change.

4. The process continues with the other person providing his or her stop to the other, following the process in #3.
5. The process continues with the giving, receiving, negotiating and committing to the remaining starts and continues.
6. Cards containing commitments are then posted, reviewed often, and used by one another to hold the other accountable.
7. The parties and the facilitators debrief on the process and provide affirmations for the courage to care and to communicate.

APPENDIX B: Selected Bibliography

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APPENDIX A: Module Team

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