

# Four Habits for Effective Workplace Communication

Often it is our little habits that prohibit effective communication in the workplace. Whether it's giving too much advice, offering too much leniency, or sharing too much excitement or passion, here are four habits to increase effective communication in the workplace.

## 1. Hold your Tongue

When your employees are excited, it means they are engaged, so let them talk. This will take self-control, especially if you love to teach or love to share examples and stories. Take a step back and a deep breath instead of rushing to add your two cents. When you interrupt someone, you are simply taking up air space. Even if you are anxious to interject your own point of view, wait. The other person is unable to hear you when he is focused on finishing what he has to say. Encourage your employees to speak about their successes and ideas and you will keep them engaged.

## 2. Hold your Advice

It's easy to get into the habit of advising and rescuing rather than making them think, but giving advice too quickly makes associates and employees overly dependent instead of empowered. When associates or employees come to you seeking advice, act as a coach by asking good questions that empower them to reach inside for their answers. For example, "What are your choices?" or "What do you want the outcome to be?" is a great starting place to get them to think strategically.

The same rules apply in your personal life when friends or relatives come to you with options, simply respond by acknowledging their feelings.

If you are spending way too much time solving other people's problems or listening to their woes, it's not only an issue of people-pleasing and rescuing, it's also a boundary issue.

## 3. Hold Good Boundaries

For all the talk about no limits, a limitless relationship is a catastrophe waiting to happen. Boundaries put a frame around choices and let others know the structure and limits regarding expectations. An example where a boundary is needed is often with the open door policy that I mentioned a moment ago. Set a few limits as to how often your door is

open, and what the rules are for coming to you with a complaint. This type of boundary sets an expectation that increases productivity and improves workplace relationships. In addition, good boundaries contribute to effective communication in the workplace.

An example of ineffective communication is to say, "I need that document finished as soon as possible." An example of effective communication is to say, "I need that document on my desk by 2 p.m. Thursday the 15<sup>th</sup> of this month."

Boundaries also effectively communicate the consequences for bad behavior. For example, "If you miss one more day of work, I will have to put you on probation."

Beware though: Only set boundaries that you intend to enforce, otherwise your communication will be ineffective due to mixed messages. Communicate your expectations, and clarify the effects of crossed boundaries. If you experience resentment on a regular basis, that is an indicator that you may have a boundary issue, and you have not set the appropriate expectations and disciplines in place.

#### **4. Hold your Wrath**

You are so mad you could wring her neck! We've all felt that way, but instead of flying off the handle, wait! Practice the code of "no complaints, no excuses, and no regrets." Take a breath and let your co-worker or employee save face.

The key is to correct the problem without attacking the other person's character. Obviously this means no name calling or assumptions accusing the other person of alternative motives.

Speak about the problem and the desired behavior to show your support in making the desired changes. In other words, avoid finger pointing or bringing up old baggage. Simply speak about the result you want, and communicate the boundaries and consequences for failure to comply.

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