

**PMEducation**

COMMUNICATIONS – Added Information

**PAGE INFO**

This page (Word.Doc) contains additional information about some of the topics found in the Communications Skills & Tips page on our site. You might want to print this document or leave it open as a handy reference, while looking at the website pages on Communications.

SKILLS for GETTING Information:

* ACTIVE LISTENING: Being a good listener is of fundamental importance to being a good communicator. It has been said, “There is a reason God gave us 2 ears and only one mouth!” Not just listening, but HEARING the other person is a great way to show respect and win friendship. People like the opportunity to talk, but are stifled if we monopolize the conversation.

Active Listening is a part of being a good listener. The word “active” means to ask clarifying questions, and re-phrasing what the other person said, to ensure your understanding. Ask “open-ended” questions (that is the kind which cannot be answered by a simple “Yes” or “No”. For example, instead of asking, “Did you like the presentation?” ask “What part of the presentation appealed most to you?”

* EFFECTIVE LISTENING: Grasping what is being said requires focusing on the other person. Don’t focus too much on what you are going to say next. Some people are so anxious to have their say, they miss what they are being told. In a conversation be fully engaged with the other person(s). Avoid distractions such as cell phones. Good listening is crucial to understanding Stakeholder requirements and expectations, obtaining feedback, and building relationships. So, pay attention to what others are saying. Work at understanding their meaning and even the “background message”. If you are not a good listener, you are not a good communicator.

SKILLS for GIVING Information:

* CLARITY and CONCISION: Pick words that are easily understood, using common, plain language. This is especially important if you are working in a technical field and conversing with non-technical people. Be aware of cultural differences, and language differences. Some of your Stakeholders are not working in their first language. Also, the same word can have different meanings in different cultures. Humor can be dangerous in this regard. Avoid slang and avoid abbreviations unless certain your audience will truly understand. On the telephone speak clearly and not too fast. **Make it easy for your audience to follow you.**

Good communications means saying just enough – not too much and not too little. Try to convey your message in as few words as possible. Don’t ramble on! If you do, your audience will either tune you out, or not be sure of what exactly you want to say (or both). Stick to one point at a time. If you change the subject, make it clear you are doing so.

SKILLS for BOTH GETTING and GIVING Information:

* NON-VERBAL: Up to 75% of the messaging is transmitted non-verbally. This includes body language and posture, eye movement, hand gestures, head movement, tone of voice, inflection pitch of voice, and word choices. A relaxed open stance (arms open, legs relaxed) and a friendly tone will make you appear more approachable and will encourage other people to speak openly to you.

Eye contact demonstrates you are focused on the other person and on the conversation, you are trustworthy, and confident in yourself. Without “staring down” the other person, the right amount of eye contact draws others into your conversation and opens them up to speak more freely to you.

An honest smile is worth a thousand words. It shows you care about, and like, the other person. Almost always they will smile back, and then you have instantly built a rapport through this non-verbal communication. Your smile must be sincere because a phony smile has exactly the opposite effect. Try thinking something nice about the person before smiling at them, and your smile will always be very natural.

SKILLS for BOTH GETTING and GIVING Information:

* EXPRESSING EMPATHY: It is important to note that empathy means “I know how you feel”. It does not mean “I agree with you”. It does not mean “I am so sad for your loss”, which is sympathy. Often in a project there are opposing points of view. Even when you disagree with the other person it is important to understand and respect their point of view.

A simple formula to try is “Feel, Felt, Found.” This has to be genuine so you need a real experience to draw on. Here is an example. Our road construction project is causing drivers to take a detour, and a resident complains. We could say, “I know how you feel. My own street was reconstructed last year, and I felt really inconvenienced. But what I found is the new pavement is very nice to drive on, and I will have it for the next 20 years.”

* FEEDBACK: This skill includes both getting feedback and giving feedback. Listen to the feedback you are given and ask clarifying questions for better understanding. If the feedback is valid, then make a point of using it to benefit your project. As a Professional Project Manager, you give feedback to your Team Members and other Stakeholders. You want to find ways to “be hearty in your approbation and lavish in your praise.” Praise is a very effective motivator. Negative feedback impacts a person 10 times more than positive feedback so there is never a concern of over-praising someone. Give negative feedback honestly, while allowing the other person to maintain their self-esteem.
* REMAINING OPEN-MINDED: Enter every conversation with a flexible open mind for the other person’s point of view. Use Active and Effective Listening to help yourself stay open-minded. When you demonstrate open-mindedness to others, they tend to be more open-mined to your ideas.