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## Communication Tips for Speakers and Listeners

Communicating effectively can be challenging when dealing with a distressed worker. You may find your own emotions interfere, making communication more complex and demanding than in calmer or more neutral situations. There are a few basic techniques or tips you can use while speaking and listening to improve your communication style when dealing with workers' negative emotions. They are easy to understand, but require some practice before you may feel that you are mastering them.

### Speaker Tips

When speaking to a worker, paying attention not just to your words but also to how the overall conversation is proceeding may help you convey your message more effectively. The following tips can be helpful to keep in mind when you are the “speaker”:

- **Speak attentively:** Just as one listens attentively, one should also speak in the same manner, maintaining appropriate and direct eye contact and looking for body signals (facial or posture) that indicate that the other person is engaged. If the worker seems disengaged or seems to not be listening, you may need to modify your approach and also pause to inquire if you are making sense.
- **Phrase meaningful questions:** One way to shorten a conversation (and therefore make it unproductive) is to ask questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no.” Instead, try to ask open-ended questions, as this may elicit more helpful, accurate information that may help you understand the worker's perspective.
- **Avoid monologues:** Stick to the point and avoid overly lengthy or repetitive statements. We sometimes repeat ourselves when we feel we have not been understood. Instead of repetition, which may seem condescending, pause and allow the worker to clarify and reflect on what they hear from you.
- **Accept silence:** Sometimes one of the best ways to make a point is to pause or leave a period of silence after speaking. This can allow you and the worker to digest what has been said.
- **Don't cross-examine:** Avoid firing questions at the worker when attempting to gather information during a conversation. Tact and diplomacy express respect and may be far better means for learning what you need to know.

### Listener Tips



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Many people listen to others, but only in the narrowest sense...they may hear the words, but they do not actually hear what others are saying. Good listening skills involve gaining a clear understanding of what is being said as well as what is intended by the speaker. The following tips may be helpful when you are in the role of “listener”:

- **Listen attentively:** Maintain good eye contact with the worker and acknowledge that you are hearing them.
- **Don't interrupt:** It's difficult to hear when you are talking yourself. It is natural to feel that you want to 'fix' things or that you have an effective answer. The problem is that if you have not heard all of what the person needs to say, your 'fix' may be for the wrong issue.
- **Clarify what you hear:** Regularly summarize or otherwise clarify your understanding of what is being said. This may help make sure you are obtaining the correct message. It is also important to admit if you don't understand something.
- **Reflect on what you hear:** This differs from clarification. Reflection involves showing the worker that you are aware of or understand what they are feeling. You hold up a metaphorical mirror so the worker can see more clearly what he or she is saying and what reactions it is eliciting.

It can be helpful for both parties to attempt to summarize their conversation so that no loose ends remain and both can have a clear understanding of what has been discussed. A summary can also allow you to set a direction for constructive follow-up.