



Exercise: Communicating without Judgment

When we are listening to people in workplace situations, we may have an emotional response and make judgments or assumptions about the intent and meaning of their message. We may, in other words, read things into what they are saying, rather than focusing on the literal meaning of their words. These judgments and premature conclusions can lead us to respond in a way that fuels mistrust and conflict. It can be particularly important for managers to listen without judgment in order to help prevent negative emotions from developing in what should be harmless or neutral situations. Non-judgmental listening can help you develop an understanding of the situation that may allow you to move forward effectively.

To help avoid making difficult conversations worse, or neutral conversations difficult, you can:

- Turn down your internal dialogue and stay focused on what is being said, rather than thinking ahead and speculating on unspoken meanings.
- Breathe, stay calm, and neutralize your emotions.
- Listen carefully and acknowledge the validity of alternate perspectives.
- Move from judgment to curiosity by asking questions to gain better understanding.
- State your observations and experiences neutrally using specific examples, rather than personalizing a situation by generalizing about someone's character traits.
- State your perspectives, needs and desires assertively.
- Reframe the problem into a mutual, objective statement that recognizes common ground.

The above list is deceptively simple; these are challenging techniques that can take considerable time to master. But each item on the list represents an indispensable tool for managers seeking to improve their effectiveness and ability to minimize the emotional nature of interactions.

Keep this list handy, and read through it quickly before any interaction you anticipate may be challenging and may potentially give rise to negative emotions.