

Communicating with your Supervisor

1. Determine what your supervisor's goals and obligations are and how your job relates to them. If you know that your supervisor has to report the monthly budget to the department head and you play a role in creating the budget, your job directly relates to your supervisor's obligation. Your supervisor is accountable for work that you are doing, if you aren't providing what he/she needs in order to meet his/her goals or obligations, there will be a greater likelihood of discord. Reflect on your supervisor's responsibilities and look for ways that you can help your supervisor meet his/her obligations and you'll have a better chance of having productive communication.

2. Assess what you are doing well and continue doing it. Assess what you need to improve and ask yourself, "Does this create a disruption?" If the answer is yes, you should identify methods to eliminate the disruption. This will help to set you up for positive and productive communication with your supervisor. If your supervisor has to spend effort correcting your performance or behavior, he/she will be less likely to be receptive to your communication.

Example: Lisa is good at generating ideas on process improvement but is not good at meeting deadlines. This has caused concern for her supervisor in the past. Lisa needs to continue generating ideas but should also look at ways to improve her organizational and planning skills. For example, she could use Outlook or take a time management or project management course, etc.

3. Some communication problems are created as a result of unmet expectations. If your supervisor has laid out your expectations for you, you should follow them, that is your job. If you are not meeting expectations but are not sure what the expectations are, ask. If your supervisor doesn't have time to give you a list of expectations, create your own and send it to him/her to see if you are on track. You could say the following, "I know you are busy but I wanted to make sure that I understand your expectations of me so I can meet your needs. I've listed the essential functions of my job and what I believe the expectations are for each one. Please let me know if I have missed anything or if I'm off base."

4. Always be professional. This is easier said than done but it is an integral part of communication during difficult times. Breathe, relax, take a time out if necessary, and don't make comments that you may regret later. It is a common tendency to take constructive feedback about your job as a personal attack. This tendency will be minimized if you remember that your job is something you do, not who you are. Accepting feedback and learning from it can help you become a better employee and a better communicator.

Non-verbal communication should also be professional. Folding your arms, leaning back in your chair, or not making eye contact can be construed by your supervisor as anger, not taking your job seriously, or being disingenuous, respectively. This can be a challenge. In the example of folding your arms, your intent may not be to show anger it may just be a habit that you have. However, the person you are communicating with may take it the wrong way. Be mindful of your non-verbal communication and ask if you feel that someone has misinterpreted your non-verbal cues in the wrong manner.

5. Resolve disagreements respectfully. Respect your supervisor's position. When there is a disagreement, present your side respectfully and professionally keeping in mind that your supervisor, in most circumstances, has final decision making authority. Refusal to listen to or go along with a supervisor's request could be seen as insubordination.

If your supervisor trusts you, you will have a higher likelihood of resolving a disagreement in a positive manner. Trust can be created by demonstrations of previous ethical conduct, disclosing interests, and demonstrating true consideration of the other party's interests (Carrell & Heavrin, 2008).

An important component of resolving disagreements is to utilize active listening skills when communicating with your supervisor. If you are really listening to someone so you understand the person's position, you are less likely to have unresolvable conflict. You are also more likely to discover the root cause of conflicts and potential conflicts. By understanding the other person's perspective and sharing your own, you can determine what the root cause of the conflict is and move to the next steps of resolution (Gallagher, 2009).

6. Adapt your communication style. People communicate with different styles such as assertive, elaborate, or organized. If your supervisor doesn't add a lot of extra information when they speak, they are more assertive and in most cases would prefer a similar style of communication when listening. If your style is more elaborate and you prefer to give details, you may need to adapt your style to meet your supervisor's communication style needs. You aren't changing who you are, just the method in which you deliver a message. You can't change someone else's communication style but you can adapt your own.

Example: Jason's communication style is analytical. He likes to methodically go through steps and stages of how he arrived at a certain conclusion. His supervisor prefers direct communication and doesn't care about the details-just the results. Jason should tailor his message from analytical to direct in order to communicate more effectively with his supervisor. There are four common styles of communication, director, relater, socializer, and thinker (Alessandra & O'Connor, 1996).

The common communication styles:

Director- Gets to the point, is not concerned with details, looks at the bottom line, wants the pertinent information in a short amount of time.

Relater- Prefers to strengthen the relationship before discussing the pertinent information, looks for inclusion and partnership, and preserving mutual respect. Prefers stability over risk.

Socializer—Outgoing and optimistic. Enthusiastic people who are at the center of things. Lots of ideas and love to talk about what they are involved in. Willing to take risks.

Thinkers--Self-controlled and cautious. Prefers to analyze a situation thoroughly before making a decision.

Everyone utilizes a combination of styles depending on the circumstances, however they have one or two dominant styles that they rely on for most communication.

(Alessandra & O'Connor, 1996).

Additional information on the four communication styles:

The Four Communication Styles

Based on previous [theories of human interaction](#)—such as Hippocrates “four temperaments” and Carl Jung’s psychological types—Alessandra has mapped out four communication styles on four quadrants, as seen below.

1 Director

This communication style is driven by two things: the need to get thing done and the need to control. They are most comfortable in settings where they manage others and take control of situations. Fast-paced and goal-oriented, Directors are focused on bottom-line results and

achieving success. This go-getter mentality makes them innate leaders, but it also means they can come across as impatient and insensitive.

How to Communicate with a Director

- Be clear, brief, fast, and precise. Be well-prepared to provide solutions to their problems.
- Skip the small talk and get down to business.
- Highlight key points. Avoid going into too much detail.
- Find out their goals and provide options with clear costs and benefits.
- Supply concrete data to back up claims of progress. Show how goals have been obtained.

2 Socializer

Most people love socializers. They are fun to be around, always make others laugh, and they thrive on being the center of attention. Charismatic and energetic, they always want to be where the action is. They are eternal optimists who are good at selling others on their vision and goals. Although their enthusiasm and charm make them influential people, as leaders, they can sometimes be impulsive decision-makers who take risks without verifying information. They listen to their intuition—which can be a good thing—and what their “gut” is telling them. On the downside, they have short attention spans, and they find it hard to be alone.

How to Communicate with a Socializer

- Take time to build a relationship and socialize with them.
- Create a fun, lively atmosphere with new and diverse elements.
- Help them make a list of priorities, but try to skip the unimportant details and boring material.
- After a meeting, be clear about who is going to do what and by when. Put everything down in writing.
- Make them look good in front of others. Be slow to criticize them. Instead, motivate them with praise.

3 Thinker (Analyzer)

This communication style is very analytical and geared toward problem-solving. Methodical and detail-oriented, Thinkers are usually slow decision-makers who are very deliberate about the choices they make. Before taking a specific route, they do their homework by weighing pros and cons and looking at problems from every angle. Their high expectations of others and themselves can make them come across as overly critical and pessimistic. They are perfectionists by nature and can easily fall into the trap of “analysis paralysis.” Since they tend to be skeptical, they usually want to see promises in writing.

How to Communicate with a Thinker

- Avoid too much small talk and socializing.
- Go slow and give them time and space to think things through.
- Be well-prepared to answer their questions thoroughly with precise data.
- Put everything down in writing.
- Make good on your promises.

4 Relator

Of the four communication styles, this one is the most people-oriented. Relators are warm, nurturing individuals who value interpersonal relationships above all other things. They are very loyal employees, devoted friends and excellent team players. Peacemakers by nature, they often avoid conflicts and confrontations. They are also ideal team players since they are always willing to build networks and share responsibilities. Like Thinkers, they are thorough planners and highly risk-averse. They value reliability, balance and sincerity.

How to Communicate with a Relator

- Be patient and show sincere interest in them as a person.
- Build a relationship and learn more about their personal lives before getting down to business.
- Reduce their fears by clearly explaining how a certain change will benefit them and those around them.
- Be predictable and follow through with your stated promises.
- Be warm and inviting. Focus on their feelings.
- Don't ever push them into a corner to get what you need

References

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