

Sharpen Your Workplace Communication Skills!

Business consultant David Grossman said it best: *“You can’t not communicate. Everything you say or do, or don’t say or don’t do, sends a message to others.”*

We tend to think that good communication skills are important for lawyers or teachers. But in fact the rewards of effective communications benefit all of us regardless of our occupation. Since we spend an average of 2,000 hours per year at work, doesn’t it make sense to cultivate positive relationships with our co-workers? A recent survey of employees who describe themselves as “happy most of the time” at work revealed that they are adept at simple yet compelling communication skills. These include:

- **Smile, even when you don’t feel like it.** Presenting a warm and engaging attitude creates an “emotional contagion” that invites civility and cooperation even in challenging situations.
- **Be constantly aware of others’ feelings.** Disagreements are a part of life and certainly the workplace is not immune. But giving in to the temptation to “unload” on another can damage a relationship and reflect negatively on you – even if you are perfectly justified in your position. It’s far better to find a way to make your point without a verbal smack-down.
- **Be quick to praise.** Not only does this elevate others, it also elevates you as well. It’s a proven psychological fact (spontaneous trait transference) that saying positive things about another causes listeners to ascribe the very same positivity to you. Of course, the opposite is also true: Trash-talking another prompts your audience to see you in equally unflattering terms!



- **Think before you speak:** Laurence J. Peter cautions “Speak when you’re angry and you’ll make the best speech you’ll ever regret!” Strong emotions can lead to aggressive statements but they also invite blow-back from your co-worker. Might there be a way to discuss your issue or concern in a way that makes the other person *want* to resolve the situation quickly and fairly?
- **Remember that social media crosses all boundaries:** Some people think of social media as being separate and divorced from their place of work. These individuals may try to maintain cordiality while on the job, yet will not hesitate to skewer co-workers at their favorite social media site. There is no privacy on the Internet. Everything we say to our select “friends” can and probably will get back to the subjects of our ire.
- **Master the skill of “walking away:”** While we may not be able to control what others say about co-workers, there is no obligation to participate in or even silently remain present when derogatory statements are being made about a co-worker. This may be the most difficult “communication skill” to master.
- **Communicate instead of retaliate:** If you believe that a co-worker has (allegedly) defamed you – consider reaching out for a friendly resolution. An EAP telephone counselor can help you prepare for this important discussion.