

# *Improve Your Work* Relationships *with* Better Communication

Do you ever go to work dreading a conversation with that co-worker? If you're like most people, there are co-workers you mesh with and others you don't.

Good working relationships are important. They can help you meet your work goals and make work more enjoyable. One way to strengthen your work relationships is by improving how you communicate.

## *A new pair of shoes*

The first step to better communication is to put yourself in your co-worker's shoes. This can be tricky. His or her personality type, work style, goals, and/or priorities may not be the same as yours.

For instance, someone may want to make small talk before talking about a project. Someone else may prefer to get straight to business.

Seeing things from your co-worker's point of view doesn't mean you have to agree. It does, however, mean trying to understand where your co-worker is coming from.

## *Active listening*

Ready for that two-way conversation? The next step is active listening. When someone makes us upset, we tend to think about how we can defend ourselves. We may also feel too angry to really hear what he or she is saying. Instead, make an effort to really listen. These tips can help you show the other person you're all ears:

- Give signals: Keep eye contact, nod or say "okay" or "mm-hmm" when the other person makes a point. Your co-worker will pick up on these cues.

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- Repeat back, in the other person's words or your own, what the speaker's most important points are. You might say, for example, "What I hear you saying is..." and restate the point. Your co-worker will feel heard. Your co-worker will also have the chance to let you know if he or she meant something else.

### *Understand*

You've shown you've heard the other person. Next, let your co-worker know that you understand his or her logic. You might say, "I understand how you can see things that way."

This approach improves the chances that your co-worker will listen to you.

Another tip: When you hear your co-worker making a good point, use it to build middle ground that both of you can agree on.

### *Stand your ground*

You've listened. You've shown your co-worker that you understand where he or she is coming from. Now you want to make sure your opinions are being heard as well! That's where assertiveness comes in.

Being assertive means speaking up for your own interests while keeping others' interests in mind.

An aggressive person, on the other hand, recognizes his or her own interests but ignores the interests of others. An aggressive person also often uses aggressive (or passive-aggressive) words, or aggressive body language (such as glaring or pointing).

To improve your work relationships, it's important to talk assertively, but not aggressively. Try these tips:

- Stand straight and steady and maintain eye contact.
- Speak in a clear, steady voice.
- Speak with confidence. (Try stating your point of view without saying "I think" or "Maybe" beforehand.)

If this is hard for you, practice in "low-risk" situations, such as when you're returning an item to a store.

Remember – Technology makes it easy to avoid talking face to face, even with co-workers who sit across the aisle.

Know that a warm "good morning" and a smile can go a long way toward making your bond stronger.

### *One final tip*

Looking for more tips on improving your relationships or thriving at work? Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) member website is a great resource. (You can access the EAP member website using the log-in information below.)

### *Need help?*

**Call toll-free, 24 hours a day,  
seven days a week:**

**1-866-EAP-4SOC | 1-866-327-4762**

TTY/TDD callers, please dial 1-800-327-0801.

**Or visit us at: [eap4soc.mhn.com](http://eap4soc.mhn.com)  
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