

Unit 5: Getting Along at Work

Learning Objectives

When you complete this unit, you will recognize the importance of:

- knowing the elements of communication
- knowing different ways to communicate
- avoiding common barriers to communication
- listening attentively in class and on the job
- following instructions accurately
- asking questions
- understanding nonverbal communication making a good impression
- communicating respect for yourself and others
- representing yourself as you are
- communicating truthfully
- honesty and tact in negative feedback
- teamwork
- avoiding common barriers to teamwork
- ethics in communication
- keeping promises on the job
- dealing with unethical behavior
- dealing with discrimination at the workplace
- understanding, avoiding, and resolving conflict

Working without communication is possible. Messages - in words and actions - are always being sent, received, and interpreted. Even if you are working alone, the quality of your work sends a message to the worker who follows you. Good communication is essential. It keeps the job on track. It helps workers understand exactly what they should do, and lets customers know exactly what they can expect.

Not all communication is good communication. Maybe the message was not complete, or the sender was not fluent in the receiver's language. The receiver might have been too distracted to hear it, or didn't understand the context. The listener might have heard the spoken message - but body language sent a very different message. Unclear communication can lead to mistakes on the job, problems with fellow workers, lost business, and even serious injury.

Insert Introduction Video (Location: Getting Along at Work Title Page)

Unit 5: Getting Along at Work

Elements of Good Communication

The sender is responsible for the content and clarity of the message. If the message is likely to hit some emotional buttons - for example, if the worker has done a poor job - then the sender is responsible for maintaining a professional tone while conveying the necessary information.

The *message* can be spoken, written, drawn, or delivered by body language. Written and spoken messages should be concise, but complete. Work-related messages should have a professional tone, and should include ways to contact the sender if more information is needed.

The *receiver* is responsible for paying attention to the message, and asking questions if the message is not clear. The receiver should not make assumptions about the message. If the message involves a task that needs to be done, the receiver is responsible for making sure the task is carried out, or for passing the message on to the appropriate person.

Feedback lets the sender know if the message was received accurately. Feedback also can involve questions, objections, support, criticism, and other reactions.

Ways to Send Messages

The construction trade is no different from any other industry that offers products and services to the public. We have to speak with clients in clear, everyday language so that they understand the job we do and the expectations they can reasonably have about our work.

To avoid costly misunderstandings, we must speak clearly with our skilled coworkers in technical terms. For the same reason, we need to speak clearly with other trades and professionals, when possible using their industry jargon if we are comfortable doing so.

Writing. To be sure that messages are conveyed accurately, construction workers often rely on written communication. (Imagine laying out a project on metal and giving only spoken instructions forming it up, without marking it with the specifications for cutting, bending, and rolling!) We routinely use specifications, shop tickets, cut lists, and written notes of all kinds.

Drawing. Sometimes pictures are better than words. To convey technical information and job specifications, we use sketches and building plans every day.

Insert Ways to Send Messages Activity
 Video- Location- Getting Along At Work—
 Good Communication—Slide 3

Unit 5: Getting Along at Work

Sign Language. Some workers use sign language because they do not hear. Hearing workers sometimes develop an informal sign language so that they can communicate in a noisy environment.

Body Movement. Like most primates, humans use nonverbal communication to communicate how we feel about what is happening around us, or what we are saying or hearing. Nonverbal communication can be very powerful. We need to use it with care.

Barriers to Good Communication

The construction environment presents many barriers to good communication.

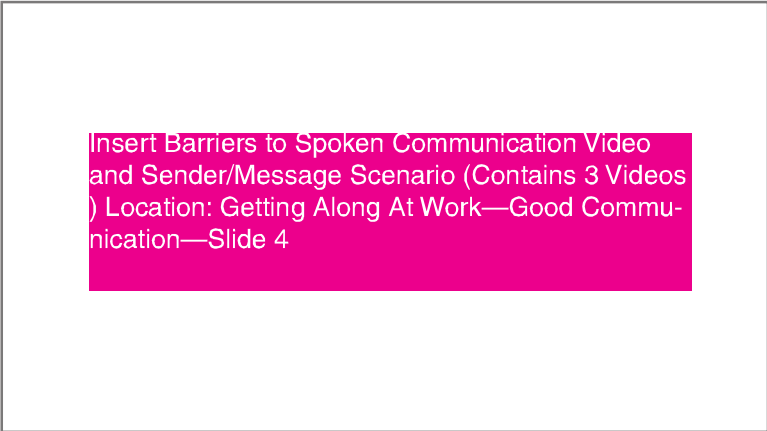
Unclear messages. Problems occur when a message can be taken two or more ways. Suppose a worker tells the supervisor that she finished running a line of duct. She may mean

that she hung the last piece of duct and came to report. The supervisor may assume that “finished” means that she picked up all the scrap from the area and put away all the tools and ladders.

Say exactly what you mean. Speak clearly, and - unless you are absolutely certain that all your jargon will be understood - avoid slang. Be thorough - don't assume that others can read your mind.

Noise. If the area is noisy, don't assume that others can hear you. Follow up on your communication.

Language context. Finally, don't assume that the person you're speaking to can understand your language, or is familiar with the context of your message. Verify that he or she really understood.



Unit 5: Getting Along at Work**Listening Skills in Class**

Even though teaching skills may vary, all instructors want you to focus on the content of classes rather than on the instructor's delivery. Ask content-related questions if you think you missed something.

We use *our eyes* in conscious listening almost as much as we use our ears. To stay involved in a presentation:

- a. maintain eye contact with the instructor,
- b. look at the demonstration, and
- c. bring your eyes back into focus and if you find your mind wandering. (if your mind does wander, don't berate yourself. Simply bring your attention back to the matter at hand. With practice, you will learn to filter out distractions.)

Choose to be interested in what you are being taught. This is your new livelihood. The more it

interests you, the better you will learn your skills, the more you will bring to the workplace, and the happier you will be in your chosen career.

Active listening keeps you on your toes. Pay attention to key phrases. Look for the “why” behind every explanation. Ask silent questions as you listen to your instructor, and if they are not all answered during class, ask them out loud.

In discussions, be aware of your emotional filters, which may prevent you from accurately hearing what is said. Listen with an open mind. Instead of making a quick judgment, welcome the opportunity to think. When you develop the habit of listening intently, you will be more interested at the end of class than you were at the beginning.

Insert Listening Skills Video Location: Getting Along At Work—Good Communication—Slide 5

Unit 5: Getting Along at Work

The Importance of Questions

Asking Questions. Apprentices are not expected to know everything from the start. To understand the job, you must ask questions. Most journeymen and instructors were apprentices themselves not long ago, and understand how important questions can be. Apprentices who do not ask questions may appear overconfident or uninterested - traits that cause concern among coworkers on the job. A job can be ruined if an apprentice - or any other worker - is uncertain but doesn't ask for clarification.

Asking questions not only prevents confusion on the job, but it can also help during negotiations and discussions. If someone is trying to persuade us, asking questions can help ensure that we are basing our opinions on complete, accurate information.

Sometimes, we assume that others think like we do. Asking questions may reveal that they don't, and why. This kind of information can be crucially important on the job (and at home).

Answering Questions. On the job, all questions are good questions. Impatience has

a chilling effect on the free flow of information. If workers are reluctant to ask questions, crucial instructions might be overlooked, someone could get hurt, or the job could be stalled. Learn to read the situation. When appropriate, don't give a one-word answer - explain your reasoning. Sometimes the really important information comes after the word "because." Be sure you have really answered the question before you turn away. Develop the habit of checking that your response was fully and accurately understood.

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal messages can be sent and perceived through (a) body movements, (b) gestures, (c) eyes, (d) tone of voice, and (e) facial expression. Some behaviors, such as rolling the eyes or turning one's back, can send a nonverbal message that we may not want to convey. Our tone of voice also carries a message that is distinct from the actual words we are saying.

Nonverbal rituals send important messages about our professional attitudes. We show respect in different ways when we are speaking to the client, to the boss, or to our coworker.

Insert First Impressions Scenario (Contains 5 Videos)
Location- Getting Along at Work—Respect—Slide 1

Unit 5: Getting Along at Work

Cultural Context. Some nonverbal communications are universal - that is, they are perceived the same way no matter the culture they are expressed in. Bowing, for example, seems to indicate deference almost everywhere.

Some behaviors we assume are universal may not be. In North America, for example, we tend to value a smile, a firm handshake, and direct eye contact. In other cultures, however, a smile might indicate embarrassment or “politeness no matter what.” Shaking the hand of someone in a superior position may be considered rude. And direct eye contact may be considered an open challenge to authority.

Respect

Respect is the foundation of any successful career or business - or life. Some of us learn it almost unconsciously from the way we were raised. Some of us learn about respect the hard way, after many years of making disrespectful mistakes. Respect - or the lack of it - can often be sensed instantly.

No matter when or how we learn it, for most of us, respect begins with self-respect and radiates out. It becomes a positive attitude about ourselves and the world. We find that the more we respect others, the more we are respected.

Appearance: Our appearance sends an instantaneous message to others whether we intend it to or not. In the construction trade, please dress with safety and respect (for yourself and others) in mind. Let professionalism take priority over self-expression. Appropriate dress lets others know how we intend to treat them and how we expect to be treated.

Behavior. Different standards of behavior may apply in the shop, at the job site, and when dealing with clients. But all behavior should be based firmly in respect. Make it a habit to behave in a professional and honorable way, no matter what.

Restraint. In difficult situations, exercise restraint. Respect yourself by referring a dissatisfied client to your supervisor rather than letting yourself be drawn into an argument. Respect yourself by refusing to support behaviors that demean individuals or groups. Choose how and when to communicate.

Attitude. Cultivate a positive attitude. Look to those you respect for guidance and mentoring. Listen to other people to learn how (and how not) to communicate effectively. Learn as much as you can.

Self Respect

Self Respect begins with honesty. Be yourself. You will always be surrounded by people who are better or worse at something than you are. Acknowledge your gaps of knowledge and skill, then work hard to become competent in those areas. Learn from the more experienced, teach the less experienced.

Pretending to be better or worse at your job than you are can make your coworkers wonder - justifiably - about your reliability and honesty. In some situations, such pretense can actually be dangerous.

Respect Others

Be tolerant of other people's beliefs and backgrounds, as long as they don't degrade safety, a respectful, professional work environment, or the quality and progress of the job. Similarly, live according to your own

Unit 5: Getting Along at Work

values, but don't force your beliefs on others. Every work situation requires flexibility and adjustment as coworkers learn the job, from productive teams, and grow in experience. Be willing to adapt.

Negative Feedback

Sometimes, negative feedback presents an opportunity. Feedback from a supervisor can alert us to job changes that need to be made, or expectations that should be revised. Feedback from a colleague can signal a problem that can be faced and resolved.

Sometimes, though, negative feedback creates problems. It may include information that you don't understand, or may be delivered in a tone or words that you don't like.

Giving Negative Feedback. Unavoidable negative feedback should always be delivered respectfully. If possible and appropriate, it should be framed in a positive context. Poorly delivered negative feedback can burn bridges. If you have to give criticism, think before you speak.

Getting Negative Feedback. If you are receiving criticism, think before you judge. Be patient. Avoid emotional reactions. Focus on the message itself rather than on the sender.

Teamwork

Construction workers routinely work in small groups. Then - as group members learn about each other, recognize how their talents can compensate for their weaknesses, and earn each other's respect - the group becomes a team. Team loyalty and pride become important motivators on the job. A good team is flexible, task-oriented, and much more productive on the job than several talented individuals working alone. On the other hand, one individual who doesn't carry his own weight can cause turmoil for a team and slow down the job considerably. The quality of the finished task reflects on every individual in the team. Knowing this, individuals can set aside their own interests for the good of the team - which usually translates as the good of the job.



Unit 5: Getting Along at Work

Team Building

Many of the qualities discussed elsewhere are intertwined with the subject of team building.

Respect. As an apprentice, you already know the importance of respecting your co-workers. The apprentice coordinator, your supervisors, and members of management have been in this business for a long time. They make your jobs possible, and deserve your respect. If we want to stay in business, we all must respect clients and members of the public by doing competent work and behaving professionally. Respect other craftsmen who are serious about their trades and skills. As you move forward in your career, respect less-experienced workers by being patient and willing to teach. Most importantly, respect yourself. Do your work as if you were signing your name to every task. You are.

Eagerness to Learn. As apprentices, you are obviously learning from your instructors and supervisors. But you will earn respect and success if you can maintain that willingness to learn throughout your career. Learn from your co-workers, other trades, professionals you talk to on the job. Never pass up an opportunity to learn something new.

Reliability. Be true to your word. If you say you are going to do something, do it. Over time, you will develop a reputation for reliability, which is priceless. In addition, be someone your co-workers can depend on for safety. Always look out for others around the shop and at the job site. Never put anyone in danger through carelessness, kidding around, or an uncontrolled emotional reaction. When you are assigned a task, do it well and completely. Don't expect anyone else to cover for you or clean up after you. Do your best to work around the legitimate needs of others.

Positive Attitude. Cultivate a positive, optimistic, can-do attitude. If you don't feel that way inside, choose a positive attitude anyway. Does this mean you should ignore real problems and pretend things are just fine? Of course not. We all function much better when we face reality and work to resolve our problems. But we can be realistic without being chronically negative. Chronic complaining, anger, or sulking drags everyone down. One person with a bad attitude can destroy a team. A bad day is not the same as a bad attitude. If a coworker is having a bad day, be willing to listen during a break. Don't try to solve the problem unless you are specifically asked for advice. If you are having a bad day, don't use it as an excuse. If a series of bad days turns into a serious problem, be willing to seek help.

Barriers to Teamwork

Teams depend on individuals who learn how to talk with each other. Take the time to develop this subtle skill. In stressful situations, help each other communicate so that emotional reactions don't override rational problem-solving.

Tact. As a rule, construction workers are not fragile people. We work in a tough environment and we expect a lot of each other. But a little tact goes a long way when we talk to each other on the job. Think before you speak. At the same time, don't expect everyone you work with to have impeccable social skills. Your co-worker may not intend offense when he or she speaks clumsily.

Chain of command. Ultimately, the supervisor makes the decisions. Unless you have a solid reason not to accept a decision - if, for example, it is clearly unethical or could cause injury - the supervisor should be respected. If you have a question about someone's work or

Unit 5: Getting Along at Work

decision, ask it respectfully. If you need to go up the chain of command, do so respectfully. Don't gossip about the situation. Speak directly but privately to the appropriate supervisor. If the situation is so dire that you need to make a moral choice, follow your conscience - respectfully. Focus on the issue, not on the person.

Ethical Dilemmas. Rarely, some teams go bad. Individuals may cover for each other in unethical ways. Group pressure may sway individuals to behave in ways that may be destructive to the work environment, the reputation of the union, or the survival of the business itself. Group pressure can also sway individuals to behave ethically. Different forms of prejudice, for example, rarely survive in a shop unless the group allows disrespect to flourish, either by actively engaging in it or by passively accepting it.

Ethics

Ethics may involve moral choices, decisions about ways to treat people, or even acts of courage. Sometimes, acting ethically means doing something that may make us unpopular with some people. It is difficult enough to find

ourselves caught up in an unprofessional situation. We may be faced with a much more difficult choice if we observe unethical or criminal behavior on the job. Although these situations are rare, they do present us with a dilemma - sometimes a serious one.

At the workplace, ethical dilemmas tend to fall into two categories: those dealing with honesty, and those dealing with respect.

Honesty

Making promises. Workers who deal with the public often have problems when they promise to do things that they know cannot be done. Never make a promise you know you can't keep. When customers are upset, you should refer them to your supervisor. It's a customer-relations problem when we don't follow through on a job-related promise, even if the failure is not our fault.

Fraud. It's a much more serious ethical problem when we deliberately choose to mislead, to defraud, or to put someone else in harm's way for our own gain. Some of these ethical lapses are serious personal failings; others are crimes.

Insert Honesty: Making Promises Scenario
(Contains 6 Videos) Location: Getting Along
At Work—Ethics—Slide 2

Unit 5: Getting Along at Work

Respect

Union men and women represent every ethnic, racial, and religious group, as well as one another. We hold a wide variety of beliefs and come from every background imaginable. It can be tough to be the new person on the job. If everybody else looks and thinks the same, the situation can be intimidating-especially if it's not the way the newcomer looks or thinks. As much as we try to eliminate such situations, biases like racism, sexism, homophobia, and religious or ethnic prejudice still exist. Sometimes these situations occur because good people don't examine their habitual stereotypes. They may make a remark without any thought that it might be offensive. Or they may try to cover an offensive remark or behavior with "just kidding." Sometimes, stereotypes have nothing to do with it- two people simply dislike each other. As long as they keep their feelings to themselves and treat each other fairly and professionally, there should be no problem at the workplace. If one or both begin looking for offense, however, it won't take them long to find it.

Ignorance or Malice? Anyone who has spent time as a minority member of a group learns to tell the difference between offenses that are committed in ignorance and those that arise from malice. Most reasonable people will

overlook ignorance - up to a point. The minority group (and any witness to the offensive behavior who knows better) has an obligation to let an ignorant co-worker know - tactfully but clearly - that the behavior is coming across differently from the way the offender may have intended it. The offender then has an obligation to stop. If the offensive behavior doesn't stop even after the offender knows it humiliates others, then the behavior can fairly be regarded as intentionally hostile.

When you are new, try to understand the culture of the shop or the job site. Get to know people - and give them a chance to know you - before you take offense at something they may not intend to be offensive. After observing the group, you will have a better chance of confronting any interpersonal problem in a thoughtful way-one that gives both you and the offender a chance to learn and grow.

If you are on the other side - an established member of the group - be welcoming to newcomers. Help them learn the ropes in their new shop or at the job site, but don't try to rush them. Think before you speak. The newcomer doesn't know you very well, and what you may intend as humor may be interpreted as a put-down. If the newcomer objects to a remark or situation, give him or

Insert Ethical Choices Sexual Harassment Scenario (Contains 6 Videos) Location: Getting Along At Work—Ethics—Slide 3

Unit 5: Getting Along at Work

her credit for having courage, and take the objection seriously. Don't go on the defensive. Listen. Learn. Be willing to change if you are unintentionally offending others.

Intentional acts of discrimination, harassment, or cruelty are not merely rude. They are serious problems and may even be criminal. If you observe or are the victim of such intentional behavior, you must speak to an appropriate authority figure in your workplace or your union representative. You may be asked to document the incidents with specific dates, times, words spoken, and other details. All moral and ethical considerations aside, the failure of team members to respect and support each another damages morale on the job, ruins productivity, and takes money directly out of everyone's pocket. Ultimately, a business can fail because of problems like these.

Conflict

People who have different views, goals, or beliefs can get along quite well until one person tries to change the other.

Power Struggle. Some kinds of competition can be fun, and - in the right setting - can bring out the best in us. But some kinds of competition cause conflict. One person may regard another as a threat to their security or position, and try to keep the competitor

contained. Sometimes such competition will be obvious, but not always. If one worker feels intimidated by another, competition may be expressed in gossip or passive-aggressive behaviors. Sometimes, the "competitor" may not even be aware that he or she is being perceived as a threat until an incident occurs.

Muddled Confrontation. Confrontation is not the same as conflict. Sometimes, problems have to be confronted. Sometimes, problems have to be confronted. When we are clear, respectful, and focused on the issues, confrontation can lead to negotiation and, if necessary, mediation. Both parties have a chance to win with dignity. When confrontation is not handled well, differences that could have been negotiated may escalate into conflict. The parties may be mired in intense emotions, hidden agendas, clumsy communication skills, or passive resentments, which keep them from focusing on a solution. The problem then becomes personal. Both parties lose.

Avoiding Conflict

Speak with Restraint. Some of us go one sentence too far when we disagree with someone. The remark may feel brilliant or witty to us at the moment, but often it cuts just enough to do real damage. Once we've said it, it can't be unsaid.

Insert Avoiding Conflict Empathy Scenario
(Contains 5 Videos) Location: Getting
Along At Work—Conflict—Slide 2

Unit 5: Getting Along at Work

Can You Let It Go? Not every irritation is worth a conflict. If our priorities are in order, we should be able to tolerate a certain amount of frustration in our daily lives.

Treat Others Fairly. Do not criticize the beliefs, backgrounds, or self-perceptions of others. We don't have to agree with them, but we do have to respect them. It helps to be honest with ourselves: What is it about their belief or background that bothers us? Is this their problem, or ours?

Watch the Body Language. In volatile situations, it is important not to undermine the situation by indulging in sarcastic facial expressions or disrespectful body language. Also, if the body language of the other person tells you that the situation is becoming tense, consider backing off.

Negotiate. Avoid taking disagreements personally. Keep the focus on the issue so that a solution might be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties. People of good will can usually work out their differences.

Stay Calm. Sometimes, we are blindsided by conflict. No matter what side of the conflict we might be on, we should wait a moment before reacting. Is there a way to defuse the situation? Perhaps a well-timed question can clear up a misunderstanding.

Don't Gossip. Do not bring in uninvolved third parties to make you feel better about your position. Badmouthing or gossiping about someone is poisonous to the workplace. Deal with the problem directly and fairly.

Avoid an Audience. Air your disagreement with someone privately or with a mediator. Never blatantly criticize someone in front of others.

Take a Time Out. If disrespect enters the conversation, or if you feel that emotions are about to go out of control, excuse yourself

and arrange to revisit the matter at a calmer moment.

Chain of Command. If you need to take the problem up the chain of command, do so. Be mindful, however, that the less serious the problem, the lower on the ladder it should be handled.

Focus on the Issue. If you have to confront a problem, do it fairly. If there is a conflict-resolution person on the staff, seek guidance for handling the situation appropriately. Focus on the problem, not on the person.

No Abuse. Never resort to verbal abuse, and do not subject yourself to the verbal abuse of others. Above all, never use profanity in a disagreement, whether or not it is directed at your adversary. Swearing can needlessly escalate even a mild disagreement into a hostile confrontation. When a person must resort to cursing in an attempt to win an argument, chances are they're trying to defend a weak position. Physical threats, can, of course, be interpreted as assault- and can carry dire consequences whether they are carried out or not.

Summary

Construction workers represent proud trades. We do an important, demanding, often dangerous job. Getting along at work involves more than pleasant banter in the lunch area. We rely on each other to deliver quality products and services- and to keep each other safe while we do so. We take pride in training our apprentices thoroughly. We challenge each other to keep up with the latest technologies. Our union supports us in all of these endeavors. We want every union member to represent the rest of us proudly and professionally.