



**Communication and Building Relationships**

**What does communication mean to you?** In the box below, you might want to write your thoughts on the question and who you feel is a good communicator.

**Some general rules on good communication**:

1. **Be Present and don’t multitask.** It is very easy to be distracted by everything around you and to be constantly checking your phone. However, if you choose to have a conversation with someone, be engaged in the conversation, you’ll gain a lot if you are. Don’t be half in the conversation and half out.
2. **Assume you have something to learn.** Bill Nye famously said “Everyone you will ever meet, knows something you don’t.” The idea here is that when you have a conversation with someone, whether it’s a fellow student or family member, set aside your personal opinion and learn from what they are saying, because they will be an expert at something.
3. **Use open ended questions.** It is easier to think about what closed questions are. Closed Questions are questions where the response involves a yes or no answer. E.g. ‘Did you like this event?’ – the answer is ‘yes’ or ‘no’ if they didn’t. They are questions you would ask in a game of Guess Who. However, this type of question is extremely limiting and it will take you a lot longer to get to the true answer. A good communicator will ask open ended questions which puts the burden on the person you are asking, to articulate how they feel or what they think. So, in contrast to the question given in this section, it would be better to ask ‘How did you find the session?’ In this wording, it requires the person being asked, to think about how they feel and would give them a chance to give honest feedback.
4. **If you don’t know, say you don’t know**. You may be great leaders but that doesn’t mean you have to know the answer to every question. That is why we work in a team, so our skills that need to be developed can be supported by other individuals.

It is also important to know that it is perfectly okay to take a moment to think about a question/ problem. You won’t always be expected to answer straightaway. A good way to think about it is: pretend you are on a tv or radio show and that everything you say is being recorded. You wouldn’t want to claim something that is incorrect just because you don’t want to look like you don’t know the answer. Therefore, take your time and say ‘I’m not too certain of the answer to your question, but I will be sure to find out and get back to you.’

1. **Don’t equate your feelings with theirs.** All experiences are individual. If someone comes to you and tells you about a problem they are having at work, at home, at university or in a relationship, do not start talking about your similar problem. No two problems are the same and by talking about yours, you immediately make the situation about you which is not what they came to you for.
2. **Try not to repeat yourself.** Give your instructions once, keep them clear, use direct language and don’t over explain. Speaking too much is a common mistake and you lose the engagement of the individuals you’re talking to. When asking for opinions on a question or problem, it is quite common people will simply reiterate a point that has already been said. A good way to combat this and make meetings more efficient is to use the phrase ‘has anyone got anything new to add?’ instead of ‘has anyone got anything to add?’ The latter invites people to repeat previously made points, whilst the former encourages only new additions to the discussion. Plato stated:

“Wise men speak because they have something to say; Fools because they have to say something.”

1. **Actually Listen**. Don’t appear to just listen. This is one of the most important skills you can develop. It’s the difference between listening and hearing. Buddha stated that “If your mouth is open, then you aren’t learning.” We have all been there when you’re talking to someone and you can tell that they are waiting for you to finish so they can speak or because are they are not interested.

So how do you listen? The solutions are simple: don’t wait for your turn to talk. Ask questions, don’t give answers all the time. What’s in front of you is the most real thing that is happening in that present moment. This point links back to the points already made- be present, ask open ended questions and assume you have something to learn.

1. **Use body language**. You can learn an awful lot by the way someone holds themselves. A lot of trust is gained via nonverbal communication, meaning that body language will play a crucial part in your role as a leader. Making eye contact, smiling, using hand gestures and how you stand are all things to consider when you are speaking. All great leaders will hold themselves in a specific way to portray a particular image.
2. **Go with the flow:** things won’t always go to plan. The hard truth is that actually very few things go to plan but one of the skills you will develop is your ability to adapt to these situations. The good news is that even great leader and/ or movements fail at some point. But the best learning comes from something that doesn’t go right- so use any experiences that don’t go to plan to understand how you can improve.

**How will you benefit from being a good communicator?**

* It builds trust: if you can listen and embrace other points of view then they trust that you are making optimal decisions for the group.
* Able to resolve conflicts/ problems: this is so important because when a problem arises you are fully equipped to deal with the situation at hand.
* Provides clarity and direction: it means whatever you are doing in your capacity as a leader, you are able to do so efficiently as you have clearly communicated the task at hand. It allows your teammates to have the confidence to carry out their own work.
* Increases engagement: by talking to your teammates about their work and making sure everyone knows what they are doing and making them feel comfortable to come to you with a problem results with your teammates feeling more engaged with their work as a whole.
* Promotes team building: good communication means team members are able to rely on each other more easily meaning one person won’t have to carry everyone for a given task.
* Builds relationships: by listening, and offering advice/ feedback, it makes people feel heard and understood. This then creates mutual respect between the two individuals.

**Building Relationships**

What do you need for a good relationship? Maybe think about good relationships in your own life, whether they are professional or personal, and jot them down below.

**Some areas to consider:**

* **Trust** – This is the foundation of every good relationship. When you trust your team and colleagues, you form a powerful bond that helps you to work and communicate more effectively. If you trust the people you work with, you can be open and honest in your thoughts and actions, and you don't have to waste time and energy "watching your back."
* **Mutual Respect** – When you respect the people who you work with, you value their input and ideas, and they value yours. Working together, you can develop solutions based on your collective insight, wisdom and creativity.
* **Mindfulness** – This means taking responsibility for your words and actions. Those who are mindful are careful and attend to what they say, and they don't let their own negative emotions impact the people around them.
* **Welcoming Diversity** – People with good relationships not only accept diverse people and opinions, but they welcome them. For instance, when your friends and colleagues offer different opinions from yours, you take the time to consider what they have to say, and factor their insights into your decision-making.
* **Open Communication** – We communicate all day, whether we're sending emails and text messages, or meeting face to face. The better and more effectively you communicate with those around you, the richer your relationships will be. All good relationships depend on open, honest communication.

**How to build good working relationships:**

1. **Develop your people skills**- what do we mean by this? Forbes states that people skills are various attributes and competencies that allow one to play well with others. These skills include (but are not limited to): your ability to relate to others, communication, patience, trust, empathy, flexibility, the ability to keep an open mind and negotiation skills. People want to connect with individuals on a human level and by developing these skills will significantly improve your relationships.
2. **Avoid Gossiping** – very simply this will spread rumours / might upset people/ means you can’t be trusted. By gossiping you lose the ground you may have made in other areas. Eleanor Roosevelt stated: “…small minds discuss people.”
3. **Be positive** – this is about keeping morale high and being able to inspire your team when times are tough. Morale will be low at points and it’s important you remain positive as a leader because people will turn to you for inspiration.
4. **Know your boundaries**. You want to get along with colleagues/ teammates and be their friend but you will also need to deal with any conflict or problems. Therefore, if you were best friends with your teammates this would be difficult. This point will be more applicable at perhaps a later stage in your career as opposed to your initiatives whilst at university.
5. **Focus on your emotional intelligence**. This is to do with empathy- to really understand what someone else is feeling- being able to put yourself in their shoes. If you can master this, you have done most of the work. However, it is no easy task but when you do you will be able to really understand how your team work and what they need from you.
6. **Identify your relationship needs.** Do you know what you need from others? And do you know what they need from you? Understanding these needs can be instrumental in building better relationships.
7. **Work hard**- this is the most important. As leaders you are expected to take you team forward. If they see you working hard then they will work hard too.

The best piece of advice that can be given is: don’t ask someone to do something that you would not do yourself.

**Where can I build these relationships?**

There are various approaches you can take to build working relationships. The list provides you with some examples:

* **1 to 1 meetings**. This is a great opportunity for you to get to know someone you are working with/for on a personal level or at least more personally than you would get to in a group. It allows them to talk to you about how they are feeling and how they are getting on. It’s more time consuming but you make a lot of progress. It also doesn’t have to be formal; a chat whilst getting a coffee will suffice.
* **Team Meetings**: This provides the opportunity for everyone to work together and to get to know each other as a group. It takes the pressure off compared to a 1x1 meeting, but make sure that all individuals feel listened to and not simply the loudest voices.
* **Lunch/ Tea Breaks**: A very quick and informal way to check in on people you’re working with. It takes no time to hear how they are or how they are getting on.
* **Emails/ SMS:** If you are unable to meet face to face then sending emails or text messages is a great way to remain in contact and to maintain those relationships. Sending words of encouragement for someone to read in their own time will go a long way to the morale of the individual.

**How to handle a bad working relationship?**

When you are faced with a conflict, it can help to think about a few things:

What is my role in the conflict?

What is the motivation of the person bringing the conflict?

What harm is this causing myself or others in the workplace?

Is it my job to help?

Have I been asked to help?

Do I need to work with this person or team?

What has already been done?

**Here are some tips of how to handle conflict:**

* **Address the conflict immediately.** However, this does not mean rush into the wrong decision- you might want to wait things out and hope they resolve on their own. Just by naming that something is happening can help you feel less stressed and pressured by the situation. By addressing the situation sooner rather and later will prevent any deep-rooted problems which are a lot more difficult to resolve.
* **Have an open-door policy.** Instead of being hands off when it comes to conflict, you may want to let your teammates know that you are available. You might not be able to solve problems, but you might be able to lend an objective ear to the conversation.
* **Continue to do your work.** While you might be distracted by the conflict that is happening, it is essential that you continue to do the work that you have been tasked with doing. This will ensure that your standing at work remains high and that you are not causing additional conflict along the way.
* **Reach out for help when you need it.** Even as a leader, if you find that you cannot get past the conflict as easily as you thought you could, reach out to your manager to see how you can work together to get things sorted out.
* **Be focused on the idea that solutions are possible.** While it might be difficult to be positive about what is happening, it will be less stressful if you can focus on the fact that there is a way to work through things. When you can remember that solutions are possible, they can often present themselves.
* **Have outside interests.** If you are a person that focuses primarily on work and nothing else, it is going to be difficult to let go of a conflict. You will want to have outside interests that you can turn to, so you can let off steam and you can get outside perspectives.