



INTERPERSONAL
COMMUNICATION

Advanced Communication Series



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Being a good conversationalist has a great impact on your personal and professional lives. Every friendship and business relationship you have began with a conversation. Begin conversations with strangers by asking about the other person or commenting on your current mutual situation. Listen carefully to the responses and ask appropriate follow up questions. Questions that begin with what, how, or why will generate more information and more conversation opportunities.

OBJECTIVES:

- ▶ Identify techniques to use in conversing with strangers.
- ▶ Recognize different levels of conversation.
- ▶ Initiate a conversation with a stranger.
- ▶ Use open-ended questions to solicit information for further conversation.

Time: 10 to 14 minutes

CONVERSING WITH EASE

How do you feel when you walk into a room full of strangers? Are you uncomfortable, anxiously scanning the crowd for a familiar face? Do you tremble at the thought of trying to make conversation with people you don't know? Do you think others will find you dull? Do you avoid going to parties or other gatherings just to escape these unpleasant feelings?

Conversation is an important part of life. Talking with someone else stimulates us. It provides new ideas and enables us to explore ideas we already have. It also fulfills a basic need – human contact. Every friendship that has enriched our lives began with a conversation.

Conversation also plays an important role in our success in life. Successful people usually share a common characteristic: They can carry on a conversation with just about anybody. Within minutes, for example, successful executives can put prospective clients and other people at ease, creating positive first impressions that enhance their personal and professional leverage.

WHY WE HESITATE

Remember when you first joined your Toastmasters club and had to give your Ice Breaker speech? Most likely you were nervous about it. Such nervousness is natural. After all, you were taking a risk in speaking about yourself to a roomful of strangers. What if you said or did something embarrassing? What if they didn't like you? These strangers had a great deal of power over you; their reactions to your speech had a great impact on how you felt about yourself.

The same feelings apply when you meet someone new. You want to make a good first impression. But in doing so you first have to make yourself vulnerable. Talking with another person opens up the possibility of disclosing something about yourself; the possibility exists that the other person will not respond positively.

LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

What can you do to give yourself an advantage when striking up a conversation? Skillful conversationalists know several ways to prepare for that initial encounter. But first it's important to understand the different levels on which everyone communicates.

Level One: Small Talk. The first level of a typical first-time communication is "small talk." Small talk includes remarks about the weather, our immediate surroundings, and current events. On the face of it this type of talk seems superficial and meaningless, but small talk does have purpose. Once you've exchanged some

dialogue with someone else for a minute or two, you've had a chance to make an assessment of the other person, to decide if you have something in common and whether you'd like to carry the conversation any further. And don't worry about any necessity for disclosure. Since you don't know the other person, you are not expected to say or reveal anything personal about yourself, nor are you expecting the other person to do so.

Level Two: Fact Disclosure. Should the initial phase go well, you may want to know your conversational partner better. If this is the case with the other person as well, the conversation will then proceed to the next level, as you both begin to disclose facts about yourselves that are not very personal. For example, you may tell the other person your occupation and hobbies. At this level you usually find out if you have something in common. For example, you may discover that the other person likes to ski, too, or is an engineer just like you.

A successful conversation begins with the first level of communication – small talk.

Level Three: Viewpoints and Opinions. If both of you still feel positively about one another, then your conversation generally proceeds to the third level of communication. In this phase, you share more personal viewpoints and opinions. For example, you may give your opinion about politics or mutual acquaintances.

Level Four: Personal Feelings. At the fourth level, you both disclose feelings of a more personal nature than those of Level Three. For example, you may speak about the problems you are having with one of your children and your concern for the child's future.

A successful conversation begins with the first level, proceeds at a comfortable pace through the second and third levels, and ends in the fourth level – not necessarily at the first meeting, however. It may take several meetings and long conversations to reach Level Four.

Now and then we've all been startled by an encounter with someone who begins at Level One conversation, then suddenly advances to Level Four. Consider what happened to Leslie when she met Elizabeth during a party at the home of a mutual friend:

Leslie: Hi. My name is Leslie. I don't think we've met before. *(small talk)*

Elizabeth: No, we haven't – I'm Elizabeth. *(small talk)*

Leslie: Elizabeth! I'm pleased to meet you. I've heard Sharon speak about you. *(fact)*

Elizabeth: Yes, I've known Sharon for a long time. We went to school together. *(fact)*

Leslie: You must be good friends then. *(opinion)*

Elizabeth: Yes. She's been a good friend and a great help to me – especially in the last six months. I'm going through a divorce now, and it's been horrible. I wish I had never met the man. I had no idea he could be so mean and petty. This whole thing has just been devastating. *(fact and feeling)*

Leslie: *(awkwardly)* Oh – I'm sorry...

Oops! Leslie was interested in striking up a conversation with Elizabeth, not in becoming her psychoanalyst. But as it stands now, the acquaintance is over before it has begun. Like most of us, Leslie has been intimidated by the sudden shift into a Level Four conversation, and she hastily makes an excuse and leaves.

SUCCESSFUL CONVERSATIONS

Beginning a dialogue with someone you've never met before requires a positive attitude. In order to approach someone you've never met before, it helps not only to hold the conviction that everyone is interesting, but that all these interesting people will find you interesting as well! Before striking up a conversation with a total stranger, it's important to believe you can learn something from everyone – and that you have a great deal to offer others. Read newspapers regularly and become knowledgeable about current events. Being familiar with the arts, entertainment, science, and politics will enable you to contribute to a conversation and will make you interesting to others.

Beginning a dialogue with someone you've never met before requires a positive attitude.

Those initial moments of conversation with a stranger will generally involve three subjects: yourself, the other person, and your current mutual situation. Since people are far more interested in themselves and their immediate circumstances, consider those two areas as likely starting places. Begin the conversation by asking the person's name, city of residence, or other related information, as in the following conversation:

- You:** Hi! I don't believe I've seen you here at our church before. Are you a newcomer?
He: Yes, this is the first time I've been here.
You: Well, I'm glad you could join us today. Are you new here in town?
He: Yes. I just moved here from Nebraska.
You: Really? I have relatives in Nebraska. By the way, my name is . . .

Suppose you are at a party honoring your friend Phil, who was just promoted to vice president of the company where he has worked for 10 years. After helping yourself at the buffet table, you end up standing next to another guest, and the following conversation ensues:

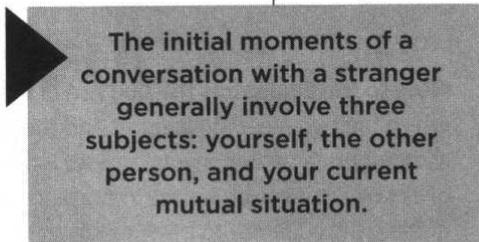
- You:** So do you work with Phil?
She: No, I'm his tennis instructor.
You: Oh, really? I didn't know Phil could play tennis.
She: He can't!
You: *(laugh)* How long have you been an instructor...

In both of these conversations, notice how the first person picked up on facts about the other person and then moved the conversation into those subject areas. A good conversationalist is, above all, a good listener. He or she has learned to wait for information that the other party will divulge and then move the conversation into those subject areas by asking related questions. Conversation flows naturally after that when such tactics are used.

Another way to start a conversation is to offer a compliment such as, "What a beautiful necklace! Is it an heirloom?" or "You dance very well. Have you taken lessons?" Usually the recipient will appreciate your attention and respond. Just be sure your compliments are sincere. A falsely made compliment is dishonest, and – if detected – you stand to make an enemy or, at the very least, develop a rather nasty reputation!

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

As the above conversations illustrate, your first few questions most likely will require only a yes or no answer ("Do you live around here?" "Have you been here before?"). But ask too many of these types of questions and your conversation will be difficult, since you'll lack the additional information that enables you to ask follow-up questions. Instead, ask open-ended questions which are worded in such a way that a more detailed response is necessary. Most open-ended questions begin with the words *what*, *how*, or *why*. For example, instead of saying, "Are you here on business?" (which requires only a yes or no answer), ask, "What brings you here to St. Louis?" The respondent may then reply, "I'm here for the poultry industry convention," and you could say, "Oh really? What work do you do in the poultry industry?" Most likely the conversation will continue. Likewise, rather than asking, "Does it rain much in Edinburgh?" which again requires only a yes or no answer, revise your question to "What kind of weather do you have in Edinburgh?" and follow up on the response with appropriate questions.



The initial moments of a conversation with a stranger generally involve three subjects: yourself, the other person, and your current mutual situation.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

This project involves five parts. First, before the club meeting, select a partner from your club – preferably someone whom you do not know very well – and together choose a scenario to role play for three to five minutes. You will enact a situation in which you both meet for the first time at a location such as a party, convention, or bus stop, and you start and carry on a conversation with your partner. Be sure to read about role plays in the Appendix, and make sure your partner reads it, too. You alone must initiate the conversation and establish a common interest. Do not rehearse the conversation with your partner.

Next, for your presentation, you will present a four- to five-minute speech explaining the importance of good conversation skills and the conversational process and techniques. This will help your audience to better understand the presentation's objectives and to evaluate the presentation. Next, you will briefly introduce the scenario you have chosen to role play and your partner. Then you will enact the three- to five-minute scene with your partner. You will conclude with a short (two to three minutes), informal discussion with your partner and your audience about the conversation. You may want to ask what you could have said or done differently that would have been more effective, if the impression you made with your conversational partner and the audience was generally favorable, and similar questions.

EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **CONVERSING WITH EASE**

Title _____

Evaluator _____ Date _____

Note to the Evaluator: The purpose of this project is for the speaker to enact a role play with another member in which the two meet as strangers and the speaker begins a conversation. The circumstance under which they meet as strangers (a party, convention, etc.) is determined by the speaker and the speaker's partner. The speaker was first to give a brief speech about the importance of good conversational skills, and the conversational process and techniques (to help the audience to better understand the presentation's objectives and to evaluate the presentation). Then the speaker was to introduce the role play scenario and the partner, then conduct the role play, initiating a conversation and establishing a common interest with the other person. Finally, the speaker was to lead a brief discussion with the partner and the audience about the role play. It is suggested you read the entire project before the presentation. In addition to your oral evaluation, please give written responses to the questions below.

- ▶ How well did the speaker explain the value of conversational skills and different conversational techniques?

- ▶ How effectively did the speaker initiate the conversation?

- ▶ How did the speaker establish a common interest with the other person?

- ▶ How effectively did the speaker use open-ended questions to carry on the conversation?

- ▶ How did the speaker advance from one level to another? (The levels are small talk, fact disclosure, viewpoints and opinions, personal feelings.)

- ▶ How comfortable did the speaker appear to be in the conversation?

- ▶ What could the speaker have said differently that may have been more effective?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Negotiations are successful when both parties walk away pleased. This is a “win-win” negotiation, and you can reach it when you know what both you and the other party want and the reasons you both want them. Then generate a list of options that will benefit you and the other party, present them to the other party, and discuss them until a mutually satisfactory agreement is reached. Be honest, direct, and appreciative.

OBJECTIVES:

- ▶ Employ win/win negotiating strategies to achieve your goals.
- ▶ Enjoy the benefits of win/win negotiating.

Time: 10 to 14 minutes

To negotiate successfully, you must thoroughly understand the conflict or problem.

THE SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATOR

You meet with a vendor to discuss a contract, ask your boss for a raise, rent an apartment, or discuss with friends where to go for lunch. Every day in some way you work out agreements with people. Yet too often we accept too much without question. Price tags can be changed, leases and policies can be flexible. Anything is negotiable if you are willing to take the necessary risks. Negotiating is a skill, and – like any skill – it can be learned.

TYPES OF NEGOTIATIONS

Most negotiations end in one of these ways:

Win-Win. Both parties come out of the negotiation satisfied, knowing that neither has taken advantage of the other and that both have profited personally and professionally from the transaction.

Win-Lose. One party wins at the other’s expense. The successful negotiator feels good about the negotiation, but the other doesn’t.

Lose-Lose. Both parties reach an agreement, but neither feels good about the outcome.

The first outcome is the most productive and practical. In win/win negotiations, both parties are aware of the other’s needs and wants, and actually work to fulfill those needs and wants. Each party is willing to give up a certain amount in order to achieve the desired results. When the negotiating is finished, both parties walk away as pleased and contented friends.

Negotiating a win/win situation requires that you know your priorities, the other party’s priorities, and the options and areas in which you will be able to compromise.

KNOWING WHAT YOU WANT

To negotiate successfully, you first must have a thorough understanding of the conflict or problem you are trying to resolve. Perhaps your business is booming and you need to expand your office space; you would like to lease a neighboring office, but it is already occupied. Or you want to vacation in the Caribbean, while your spouse prefers skiing in Europe. Maybe you could use a salary increase. Or perhaps your friend is demanding too much of your time lately, and you would like some time to yourself. When you have clearly identified the conflict or problem, you will be able to start resolving it.

KNOWING WHAT THE OTHER PARTY WANTS

Once you know your own position, you must learn the other party's position. What does the other party want or need? What is the point of view? Perhaps the occupants of the office space you would like to lease are not happy with its location but are pleased with the low rent they are paying.

Be sure to probe for hidden reasons, also. Usually you and the other party will each have several reasons for your ultimate goal. Be sure to know the other side's priorities, as well. For example, maybe the business next door is not happy with its location, but due to financial problems it cannot bear the expense of moving at this time. Knowing priorities and hidden situations allows you to think of things you could do or say to make them receptive to your plan. When you make an effort

When you make an effort to understand and empathize with the position of the other party, it's easier to establish rapport.

to understand and empathize with the position of the other party, it's easier to establish rapport. But avoid making judgments. This may put the other party on the defensive and resistant to you and your ideas.

Likewise, make sure the opposing party is aware of your wants, needs, problems, and concerns, too. They need to see and empathize with your problem as well. But don't appear to be putting your needs and wants ahead of theirs or you will put them on the defensive.

KNOWING OPTIONS

Once you understand your own position and that of the other party, you are able to develop your win/win strategy. This strategy requires you to develop alternatives to meet the needs of both parties.

For example, as you have decided that the present location of your business is ideal, you would like to lease the office next door for some additional space. To persuade the current occupant to move, your next step is to generate some options that would give you the space you want and yet benefit the other party as well. Some possible options include offering to pay moving expenses, helping the business find another suitable location at the same cost, and/or paying the first month's rent at the other party's site of relocation. And always be ready to compromise in some areas if the other party is hesitant to accept your plan or offer.

LEADING THE DISCUSSION

Once you have analyzed the situation, you are ready to seriously negotiate. Keep the discussion in the win/win mode. Begin by offering one of your options and then describe how the other party will benefit from this option. Avoid making the other party appear to concede or lose; emphasize that you are trying to find a mutually agreeable solution. Make the other party feel that it is really gaining more than it is giving up. Continue offering options if necessary.

The other party may also have options to present. Listen to them and remain open-minded. Every situation has many possibilities; don't discount any idea just because it wasn't yours or because it appears impractical on the surface. It may contain a kernel of a great solution.

If an option offered to you is indeed unacceptable, say so and offer another option in its place. "I wouldn't be willing to negotiate on that, but I would consider doing this instead." If the other party continues to push an option, keep repeating your refusal until your answer is accepted.

NEGOTIATING TIPS

The other party will be more likely to consider your requests if you do the following:

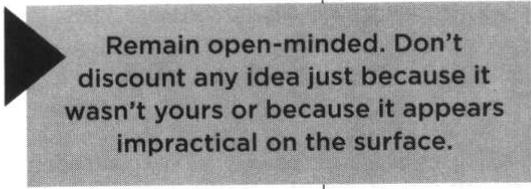
- ▶ **Break the ice.** Take the time to establish a friendly relationship before you begin negotiation proceedings. Make small talk and establish positive feelings about one another.
- ▶ **Use "I" statements.** Say, "I would like you to consider this . . ." or "I need your help . . ." Remember, you are the one who has the problem and needs the help of the other person.
- ▶ **Be honest and direct.** Don't waste your energy being devious. Chances are the other party will see through you, resulting in a loss of your own credibility as well as the other person's respect.
- ▶ **Show appreciation.** Recognize what the other person has done for you or will be doing for you. Smile and express your thanks!
- ▶ **Stick to the issue.** Don't wander off the subject or allow the other party to direct the discussion to different issues.
- ▶ **Time your discussion.** Make your meeting as convenient as possible for everyone involved. Meet in a neutral place or at the place of the other party's choosing. Consider a morning meeting, since most people are more energetic and open to new ideas at that time. Avoid meeting after lunch or late in the day when energy levels tend to drop.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

This project consists of five parts. First, before the club meeting, you will select a partner with whom you will together choose a scenario to role play for three to five minutes. You will play the part of a person who wants or needs something from the other person and is negotiating to get it, using the techniques outlined in this project. Your partner will play the role of the person who is reluctant to fulfill your request. Again, you and your partner may choose the scenario. Perhaps you want a raise from your boss, or a better price on a new car. But do not rehearse. Be sure to read about role plays in the Appendix, and make sure your partner reads it, too.

For your presentation, you will present a four- to five-minute speech about the negotiation process. This will help your audience to better understand the presentation's objectives and to evaluate the presentation. Next, you will briefly introduce the scenario you have chosen to role play and your partner. Then you will enact the three- to five-minute scene with your partner.

You will conclude with a short (two to three minutes), informal discussion with your partner and your audience about the negotiation process which took place. You may want to ask what you could have said or done differently that would have been more effective and other similar questions.



Remain open-minded. Don't discount any idea just because it wasn't yours or because it appears impractical on the surface.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

A few communication techniques can turn an angry confrontation into a positive, calm discussion. The secret is to avoid being defensive, and to follow these steps: Listen to the other person; acknowledge the criticism; ask questions; paraphrase to reflect what the other person is feeling or thinking; and agree with the truth. As you talk, remain calm, don't take anything personally, use non-verbal listening skills, and show respect for the other person.

OBJECTIVES:

- ▶ Respond non-defensively to verbal criticism.
- ▶ Employ a five-step method to identify the problem, defuse the attack, and arrive at a solution.

Time: 10 to 14 minutes

DEFUSING VERBAL CRITICISM

"You forgot our anniversary. You really don't care about me, do you?"

"The way you run your business is deplorable."

"You have no idea what you are talking about."

"How could you get us into this mess?"

Angry statements and accusations such as these generally indicate the beginning of an argument. Arguments are inevitable. After all, no one can agree with others all of the time. But conflicts can actually be healthy. People who are capable of expressing their differences without becoming hostile are less likely to suffer from emotional and physical stress and have a much better chance of resolving problems to the satisfaction of both parties. Moreover, criticism helps us recognize our flaws and correct them, making us better people.

Being accused of forgetfulness or ignorance, however, doesn't seem to be the right way to begin a "productive" conflict. After all, when you are criticized harshly, it's easy to become defensive. You feel obligated to prove your criticizer wrong, and from there the conflict only escalates. But by using a few simple communication techniques, you actually do have the power to turn the criticism into a positive discussion.

Before applying these techniques, however, it's important to first understand why it's so easy to become defensive when criticized.

IMAGES

How you handle criticism is related to the way in which you perceive yourself and the way in which you would like others to perceive you.

The way in which you perceive yourself is called **self-image**. Your self-image consists of the beliefs and values you have about life and living in general – what is good, bad, right, or wrong. Formed in your childhood, this self-image is bestowed on you by your parents, teachers, friends, and family. If you received positive treatment from these people, you developed a healthy self-esteem and self-worth and a positive self-image.

The way in which you would like others to perceive you is called your **public image**. Most likely you try to present a favorable public image. You want others to think of you in a particular way – honest, knowledgeable, patient, funny, helpful – and so you try to make your actions reflect these characteristics.

When people criticize you, they are making judgments that most likely conflict with either your self-image or public image. Being called a cheater, for example, may cause you to become defensive because you have always considered yourself honest and were raised to be honest. On the other hand, you will probably become even more defensive if there is some truth to the attacker's accusation and you do have a

flaw. You respond to the attack by disputing the other person's comments and trying to reinstate your favorable public and self-images.

RESPONDING TO CRITICISM

Verbal criticism may be responded to in one of four ways.

Withdrawing. Sometimes you may opt to accept the criticism silently, without a verbalized response. You may even get up and leave the room. The rewards of such responses, however, are limited. Although the conflict does not escalate, you end up losing self-respect as well as self-esteem because you did not stand your ground and defend yourself.

Rationalizing. The strategy behind this method is initially to admit the merit of the criticism, then quickly follow with an explanation of why you behaved that way or said the words that brought about the criticism, i.e., "Darling, I've been so busy at work that I'm afraid our anniversary simply slipped my mind." Unfortunately, by the time you've spun out your rationalization to its conclusion, the other person has usually had more than enough time to find holes in your response.

Counterattacking. Trying to divert negative attention from yourself and your faults to the criticizer and his or her faults is another common technique. ("Why, I've been running this business for over 15 years. I have heard many complaints about your service and products but never one about mine.") Counterattacking only escalates the conflict and avoids the real issues.

Responding non-defensively. In this method, you listen non-judgmentally and calmly to the attacker, recognizing the person's need to communicate regarding a problem. The problem is determined and then you begin working with the speaker to resolve it. This option is obviously the most productive and rewarding, but it also requires the most effort on your part.

The following steps may be used in responding non-defensively:

Listen non-judgmentally and calmly to the attacker, recognizing the person's need to communicate regarding a problem.

Listen. Usually we tend to take criticism at face value. In any conflict, however, a lot of feeling may be buried beneath the spoken words. It is important to listen with an open mind to those words and ask questions to find out the feelings they may be hiding. Once these feelings have been addressed, it will be easier to determine the issues and resolve the conflict. Remember the example of the forgetful spouse? In such an exchange, it is easy to assume that the matter of the forgotten anniversary is the primary issue. But if a discussion is pursued, the real issues come to light. The forgotten date, as it turns out, is no match for concern over those long work hours that the other person has spent away from household responsibilities.

Acknowledge. Indicate to your criticizer that you recognize the criticism. Acknowledging criticism does not mean you accept or agree with its content; rather you are simply recognizing that the other party has opinions and feelings that deserve consideration. This helps your criticizer feel he or she is being listened to, and aids in reducing anger. So instead of acting on the defensive, the errant spouse might acknowledge that by saying, "I sense that you are hurt because I forgot our anniversary." Be careful about your tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures, when acknowledging criticism. Any hint of sarcasm or disbelief puts you back on the defensive and makes the criticizer angrier. But if the criticizer feels you are sincere and concerned about resolving the conflict – and not just with pacification – your words will signal that it is acceptable to discuss these feelings.

Ask questions. Suppose your spouse responds, "Yes, I am hurt that you forgot our anniversary. You always forget things." It becomes apparent to you that the forgotten anniversary is not the

only reason she is upset, but you don't know what the other reasons could be. You need more information. Ask questions. "I must have forgotten other things lately. What did I forget?" Again, sincerity is vital.

Paraphrase. Use your own words to reflect what the other person is feeling or thinking. This gives the criticizer the opportunity to clarify his or her own thoughts and feelings and to correct you if you are wrong, and it enables you to learn more about the problem. For example, you could reiterate your spouse's list of things you have recently forgotten: "I forgot Jimmy's birthday, neglected to pay the mortgage last month, and forgot to take Andrea to the dentist." Paraphrasing shows the other person you are really listening.

Agree with the truth. If the criticism has merit, why not say so? To deny the facts would only increase your criticizer's anger. "Yes, I see that I have been somewhat forgetful lately." But you do not have to agree with the criticizer's interpretation of the facts. For example, if your spouse states that because you are forgetful, you no longer care about the family, it is not incumbent on your part to accept this interpretation or judgement.

By the time you have reached this final step, the real issue or problem is being addressed, and you are able to discuss possible solutions to the problem with the other party.

Keep these tips in mind during the conflict:

- ▶ Remain calm. A non-defensive response means you must keep calm and serene as you are being criticized.
- ▶ Don't take it personally. Your criticizer may call you names or accuse you of outrageous actions; remember, this may simply be evidence of irrational or over-emotional thinking.
- ▶ Use non-verbal listening skills. Smile, lean toward the speaker, nod, murmur acknowledgment, and maintain eye contact. All of these show the speaker you are listening.
- ▶ Show respect for your opponent. Even if the person is screaming or shouting at you, acknowledge the anger and frustration by calmly saying, "It's clear this is really upsetting to you. Let's try to talk about it."

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

This project involves five parts. First, before the club meeting, you will select a partner from your club and together choose a scenario to role play for three to five minutes. Your partner will verbally criticize you, and you must determine the reason for the criticism and defuse it. For example, you recently received a promotion. Your co-worker is angry because she thinks you took credit for one of her ideas and received the promotion as a result, although she hasn't said so directly. Or you could be a salesclerk dealing with an unhappy customer. Using the techniques above, you will determine the underlying reason for the criticism, then defuse it. Do not rehearse the role play with your partner. Be sure to read the Appendix for information about role playing, and make sure your partner reads it too.

Next, for your presentation, you will give a four- to five-minute speech about the process of defusing criticism. This will help your audience to better understand the role play's objectives and to evaluate it. You will briefly introduce the scenario you have chosen to role play and your partner. Then you will enact the three- to five-minute scene with your partner.

You will conclude with a short (two to three minutes), informal discussion with your partner and your audience about the conversation that took place. You may want to ask what you could have said or done differently that would have been more effective and other similar questions.

▶ PROJECT 4

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Coaching is an opportunity to help someone do their best. In your coaching session, describe the reason for the discussion, your concern, and the impact the performance has on you and others. Acknowledge and listen to the other person, and ask their opinion on ways to improve performance. Discuss solutions and reach a mutual agreement. Be sure to follow up on the person's progress and praise positive results.

OBJECTIVES:

- ▶ Determine reasons for someone's substandard performance.
- ▶ Coach the person to improved performance.

Time: 10 to 14 minutes

▶ Through coaching, people learn what is expected of them, their current performance level, and where they must improve.

THE COACH

An employee is continually late with weekly reports. Your son is not doing his chores to the best of his ability. The vice president membership of your Toastmasters club has not been mailing new member applications to World Headquarters, so the new members have not been receiving the *Toastmaster* magazine or the *New Member Kits*.

For whatever reason, the work that needs to be done is not being done, or is not being done to your satisfaction. If you want it done and done properly, you need to coach or counsel the people responsible for doing the work.

BENEFITS OF COACHING

When people function efficiently and effectively, everyone benefits. Your job, whether it is as employer, parent, or club president, is easier. Responsibilities are shared, tasks are completed properly, and productivity increases. People feel good about themselves because they are working to the best of their abilities. Everyone feels part of a team. They know what they are supposed to do, how they are supposed to do it, and how their work affects achievement of the group's goals.

Coaching plays an important part in helping people function efficiently and effectively. Through coaching, people learn what is expected of them, their current performance level, and where they must improve – important information they need to do their best. Coaching is your opportunity to help someone do their best.

WHERE TO START

Before you speak with the person whose performance is unsatisfactory, you must do some research. Usually people don't perform well for one of these reasons:

- ▶ Poor training. Nobody ever showed them or told them how to do the work properly.
- ▶ Inadequate equipment. They don't have the right materials or equipment.
- ▶ Time. They don't have the time to do the work properly.
- ▶ Motivation. They feel overworked and underappreciated or are unhappy with the job, co-workers, management, friends, or family. They are not motivated to perform.

You must determine which of these reasons applies to the situation. Asking yourself the following questions may help you determine which reason applies, whether coaching is needed to solve the problem and, if it is, what your coaching session should address.

- ▶ Does the person know what is supposed to be done and when? If not, you will need to tell him or her.
- ▶ What is the specific difference between the present performance level and the desired performance level? The person needs to know what he or she must do to perform satisfactorily.
- ▶ Does the person know his or her performance is not satisfactory? If not, provide feedback.
- ▶ Does the person have the skills required to do the job? If not, he or she will need training.
- ▶ Is the performance standard realistic? If it is not, no one will be able to perform to your expectations.
- ▶ What impact does the performance problem have? The person should know how poor performance affects others.
- ▶ Does the person have adequate resources to do the job? If not, provide them.
- ▶ Are obstacles beyond the person's control affecting performance? If so, remove the obstacles and performance most likely will improve.
- ▶ Does positive performance yield positive rewards? If the person performs well and receives an undesirable reward for doing so (twice as much work to do in less time, for example), the person's incentive to perform decreases.
- ▶ Could the person do the job if he or she wanted to? If not, coaching will not help.

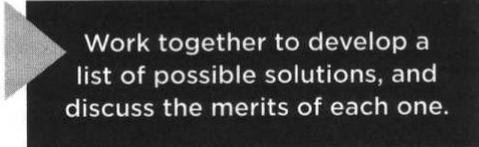
Once you have analyzed the situation and decided that the person could perform to your expectations if he or she really wanted to, you are ready to begin your coaching session.

THE COACHING SESSION

Your coaching session will be more successful if you hold it in a private place where you will not be overheard. Only you and the other person should be present. Make sure you will not be interrupted, and allow plenty of time for discussion. Focus on the situation at hand. Be warm and friendly, calm and positive. Greet the person with a smile, and begin the session.

1. **Describe specifically the reason for the discussion.** For example, you could say to your vice president membership, "Julie, I would like to discuss Applications for Membership with you."
2. **Express your concern about the area of performance you would like improved.** "Our new members have not been receiving their magazines and manuals for months after they have paid their dues and completed the applications for membership. Apparently their applications are not being sent to World Headquarters right away."
3. **Describe the impact the performance problem has on you and others.** "This means all of these new members don't receive their Competent Communication and Competent Leadership manuals and other materials as quickly as they should. When members don't have the manuals, they have difficulty preparing and presenting projects. Some of them get discouraged and leave the club."
4. **Acknowledge and listen to the other person.** The person may apologize, offer excuses, and offer to do better. Listen to whatever is said.
5. **Seek the person's opinion on ways to improve performance.** "What can be done to get those membership applications mailed within two hours after you receive them?"

6. **Discuss solutions.** Work with the person to develop a list of possible solutions, and discuss the merits of each one. Offer suggestions when appropriate, but build on the person's ideas when possible. "Keeping a supply of postage stamps and envelopes on hand would be a good idea, I agree."
7. **Agree on a solution and actions to be taken.** "So we agree: Tomorrow you will buy envelopes and postage stamps. As soon as you receive a membership application, and the check from the treasurer, you put them in one of the envelopes, attach a stamp, and mail it on your way home from the club meeting."
8. **Follow up. Ensure accountability by checking progress with the person.** "Did you have any trouble buying those stamps and envelopes?"
9. **Praise positive results.** "Roberto and Ellen told me they received their manuals last week. Thank you for sending in their applications so quickly. I really appreciate your efforts to send in applications promptly."



Work together to develop a list of possible solutions, and discuss the merits of each one.

As you coach, remember to:

- ▶ Keep your feedback related to behavior. Avoid judgments by describing rather than evaluating behavior. Say, "New member applications haven't been sent in as quickly as they should be," not "You aren't doing your job."
- ▶ Use "I" statements rather than "you" statements to reduce defensiveness. Say, "I'm concerned that our new members get their manuals quickly," not "You don't understand this, do you?"
- ▶ Speak calmly. Use unemotional language, tone, and gestures. Say, "I'm sure that with the envelopes and stamps on hand, you'll find it much easier to send in these applications," not "Now you'll finally be able to do your job."

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

This project has five parts. First, before the club meeting, you will select a partner from your club and together choose a scenario to role play for three to five minutes. You will play the role of the coach, and the other person will be the person whose performance is unsatisfactory. You may select the scenario of your choice. For example, you could play a sales manager whose star salesman's performance has faltered. Your partner could play the star salesman. Using the methods outlined in this project, conduct a coaching session. Be sure to read the material on role plays in the Appendix and make sure your partner reads it, too, but do not rehearse.

Next, for your presentation, you will present a four- to five-minute speech about the coaching process (this will help your audience to better understand the presentation's objectives and to evaluate the presentation). You will briefly (one minute) introduce the scenario you have chosen to role play and your partner. Then you will enact the three- to five-minute scene with your partner.

Finally, you will conclude with a short (two to three minutes), informal discussion with your partner and your audience about the coaching process which took place. You may want to ask what you could have said or done differently that would have been more effective and other similar questions.

EVALUATION GUIDE FOR **THE COACH**

Title _____

Evaluator _____ Date _____

Note to the Evaluator: The purpose of this project was for the speaker to enact a role play with another member, with the speaker coaching a person whose performance has not been satisfactory. The speaker and the partner may select the situation of his or her choice. The speaker was first to give a brief speech explaining the coaching process (to help the audience to better understand the role play's objectives and to evaluate it). Then the speaker was to introduce the role play scenario and the partner and conduct the role play. Finally, the speaker was to lead a brief discussion with the partner and the audience about the role play. It is suggested you read the entire project before the presentation. In addition to your oral evaluation, please give written responses to the questions below.

- ▶ How clearly did the speaker explain the coaching process?

- ▶ What was preventing the person from performing satisfactorily? How did the speaker determine this reason?

- ▶ How effectively did the speaker begin the coaching session?

- ▶ How did the speaker work with the person to arrive at a solution?

- ▶ Did the speaker focus on describing behavior rather than evaluating or judging it?

- ▶ How did the speaker avoid putting the person on the defensive?

- ▶ How effective was the coaching session? If you were the person being coached, would you be motivated to improve?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Asserting yourself effectively is a challenging communication skill because you must express your own concerns and feelings calmly without making the other person defensive. First, state the problem and tell your feelings. Specify a solution and describe the positive consequences that will happen if the other person fulfills your request. Speak up immediately and don't let the problem fester. Be direct, friendly, and calm.

OBJECTIVES:

- ▶ Enjoy the mental and physical benefits of being assertive.
- ▶ Employ the four-step method for addressing a problem and asking for help.
- ▶ Overcome resistance to your requests.

Time: 10 to 14 minutes

The first step in asserting yourself effectively is to realize the problem you are experiencing is your own.

ASSERTING YOURSELF EFFECTIVELY

A co-worker makes distracting noises while chewing her gum as you attempt to concentrate on a project with a fast approaching deadline. Your son continues to leave the milk carton on the table instead of returning it to the refrigerator. Yesterday the painter applied too much paint on the front door, and today you can see the unattractive rivulets that have dried down its length. Then there's the repairman who insists your washing machine is fixed, despite the loud squeals you hear each time it runs a cycle.

How do you handle such situations? Do you try to ignore the gum-chewer, gritting your teeth all the while, or do you scream, "Jenny, you sound like a cow! Can't you be quiet?" Do you return the milk to the refrigerator, even though your child is perfectly capable of doing so himself, or do you lose control and shout, "How many times have I told you to put the milk away when you're through?" Do you sand off the excess paint on the front door, or do you telephone the painter and accuse him of shoddy workmanship? Do you shut the door to the laundry room so you can't hear the washing machine, or do you angrily tell the repairman he doesn't know what he is doing?

Ignoring problems, fixing them yourself, and losing your temper are all typical responses to stressful situations. But while the first two approaches may solve problems on a short-term basis, long-term negative effects are likely to follow. Anger and resentment tend to build up over time, and repressed anger can lead to physical and emotional problems such as headaches, ulcers, and depression. On the other hand, losing your temper, making threats, shouting, and calling someone names only puts the offending parties on the defensive and incites uncooperative behavior.

Asserting yourself effectively is probably one of the most challenging communication skills. If you do not have the right attitude and verbal skills, you will do more harm than good.

The first step in asserting yourself effectively is to realize the problem you are experiencing is your own. For example, the gum-chewer herself isn't distracted by the noise she makes; on the contrary, each day she is able to complete her work satisfactorily as she smacks away on her gum. It's YOU who is bothered and has difficulty meeting a deadline because of her habit. Likewise, your son experiences no problem when he leaves the milk on the counter. YOU are the one who is annoyed and inconvenienced by making a special trip to the grocery store and spending extra money after the milk spoils.

Instead of blaming, judging, or attacking the other person and putting that person on the defensive, how about expressing your own concerns and feelings and then asking for the other person's help? Try this approach:

State the problem. Describe the problem or situation and behavior that is bothering you. In the case of the gum chewing co-worker, you could say, "Jenny, Ms. Matthews asked that I have this report ready for her by 2:00 p.m. I'm trying to complete it, but I'm distracted and can't think when you chew gum."

Tell your feelings. Next, explain to the other party how the problem affects you. For example, you could say to Jenny, "I'm worried that I won't finish this report by 2:00 p.m. and Ms. Matthews will be angry."

Specify a solution. State what you would like done. This would mean asking Jenny in a firm and non-hostile tone of voice, "Could you please stop chewing gum until I am finished?"

Describe the consequences. Finally, mention the positive consequences that will happen if the other person fulfills your request. Regarding the gum-popping Jenny, your conclusion could go something like this: "If you stop, it will help me focus on my work so I can finish on time. Ms. Matthews will be pleased, too."

TIPS

Your efforts at assertiveness will be most effective if you follow a few simple rules.

- ▶ Speak up immediately. Don't wait for hours, days, or weeks before approaching the other party about your problem. Dealing with the problem immediately will be less stressful and more productive. Speaking with Jenny right away about her gum-chewing will give you more time to complete your report.
- ▶ Be direct. Merely telling Jenny that you can't concentrate when it is so noisy may not have the effect you want. Jenny may not realize she makes distracting noises while chewing gum. She may think you are annoyed with Fred because of some noise he is making. State the specific problem and what the other party can do to remedy it.
- ▶ Be pleasant. A smile and friendly tone of voice will make others more willing to do what you would like them to do.
- ▶ Be calm. Maintaining your composure will also help to maintain your credibility and to attract the sympathy of the other party. Again, if you act outraged or offend the other parties, they will not want to help you.

WHEN THE OTHER PARTY RESISTS

In most situations, using the above method will solve the problem. Occasionally, however, the other person may not comprehend your problem or may take offense despite your best efforts.

For example, after asking Jenny to stop chewing gum, she may respond, "I can't help it. You know I'm trying to quit smoking, and chewing gum helps me fight the urge to have a cigarette." Or she may respond, "Well, you drum your fingers on your desk and it drives everybody here crazy."

In the first response, although Jenny has acknowledged your problem, she is apparently more concerned with her own personal problem (trying to quit smoking) than she is with your problem (trying to get your work done). In the second response, she has become defensive, avoided the issue, and attacked you. Neither response addresses your request.

The only way to resolve the situation is to continue delivering your message until it is received, understood and acted upon to your satisfaction. This may mean repeating your request.

For example, when Jenny states that chewing gum helps her to fight the urge to smoke, try responding calmly with, "I know you are trying really hard to quit smoking. But I need to finish this report for Ms. Matthews."

Suppose Jenny retorts, "That's an easy request for you to make. But I can't go for three hours without doing something to control the urge to smoke." Or perhaps she has informed you that, "Not chewing gum will make me miserable." Manipulative attempts such as these are a smoke screen, and it's important that you keep the conversation to the issue at hand: your work. Instead of being diverted respond by stating, "I understand how uncomfortable you may be. But Ms. Matthews needs this report by 2:00 p.m."

Continue repeating your message until the other party acknowledges what you have said and complies with your request.

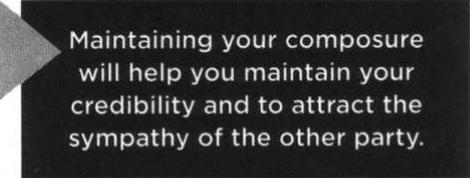
YOUR ASSIGNMENT

This project consists of five parts. First, before the club meeting, you will select a partner with whom you will choose a scenario to role play for three to five minutes. You will assume the part of a person asserting yourself regarding some service received or an event experienced. The other person will play the part of the person responsible for your dissatisfaction. Emphasize to your partner to resist your initial request; to get what you want, your challenge will be to break down the other person's resistance.

For example, your partner could play the part of a person in a movie theater who continually talks during the show, whereas you will take on the role of the person seated in front, annoyed because you cannot hear the movie. Or perhaps your partner could play a waiter or waitress at an expensive restaurant, and you are experiencing poor service. Be sure to read the Appendix for information on role playing and make sure your partner reads it, too, but do not rehearse.

Next, for your presentation, you will present a four- to five-minute speech about the assertiveness process (this will help your audience to better understand the role play's objectives and to evaluate it). Next, you will briefly introduce the scenario you have chosen to role play and your partner. Then you will enact the three- to five-minute scene with your partner.

Finally, you will conclude with a short (two to three minutes), informal discussion with your partner and your audience about the assertiveness session which took place. You may want to ask what you could have said or done differently that would have been more effective and other similar questions.



Maintaining your composure will help you maintain your credibility and to attract the sympathy of the other party.

THE ROLE PLAY

In a role play, you are asked to pretend to be yourself, or another person, in a particular situation. You are asked to behave as you feel you (or the other person) would under the circumstances.

You may think this sounds like acting, but it is not. An actor's goal is to bring to life the writer's ideas in order to influence and entertain an audience. In a role play, the people involved are not concerned with the audience, only with themselves. Their goal is to think, react, and behave as closely as possible to the way someone placed in that particular situation would think, react, and behave.

A role play contains two basic elements: a scenario and a set of role descriptions. The scenario is the situation or environment in which the role play takes place, and it may include the constraints in place.

For example, one scenario could be: You have worked for several years for a small company that recently landed a multi-million dollar contract. You want to ask your supervisor for a raise. The role descriptions involved would be those for you and your supervisor. You are defined as a hard-working employee who puts in many extra hours making sure the job is done properly. Your supervisor is defined as penny-pinching and somewhat threatened by you, since your work is so outstanding. Working with this scenario, you must approach the subject of a pay increase with your supervisor on the basis of your defined role, and your partner must respond as your supervisor within that defined role. Both of you must deal appropriately with whatever responses are given by the other. After the role play is over, you can analyze the interaction and identify what you could have said or done differently that would have been more effective.

The purpose of a role play is to give you the opportunity to learn and practice interacting with others in a non-threatening environment; the role play projects in this manual give you the chance to study and practice the skills needed to handle challenging real-life interpersonal communication situations. Role plays benefit everyone: They help you to understand others better, and the audience can observe the interaction and draw lessons from it as well.

For each of the projects in this manual, you will participate in a role play. For most of the projects, you and your partner will select the situation or scenario in which the role play takes place and define each participant's role.

You may not rehearse the role play or discuss it in any other manner. Your behavior and words during the actual presentation before the club should be spontaneous.

PROJECT COMPLETION RECORD **INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION**

PROJECT	SPEECH TITLE	DATE	VICE PRESIDENT EDUCATION'S INITIALS
1. Conversing With Ease			
2. The Successful Negotiator			
3. Defusing Verbal Criticism			
4. The Coach			
5. Asserting Yourself Effectively			

Save this page to verify your completion of the projects in this manual. Submit the Project Completion Record form from the appropriate manuals when applying for the Advanced Communicator Bronze, Advanced Communicator Silver, or Advanced Communicator Gold awards.