

Session 1 – Communication/ Conflict Resolution Module

Principles of Positive Co-Worker Relationships

Respect People's Differences

Each of us may approach life and work differently. While it may be a challenge for some of us to work with people who don't think the way we do, everyone deserves to have his or her feelings and values respected.

Think Positive!

It's easier to talk and get along with people who are positive thinkers and not always talking negatively.

Acknowledge Your Co-Workers

Talk to each other on a casual basis. Say "Good Morning!" with a smile. You don't need to have regular conversations with every co-worker, but acknowledge their presence and be positive when talking to them. Sometimes a co-worker can be having a terrible day, and just one positive comment or compliment can make a dreadful day bearable.

Listen

Listen to your co-workers when they talk to you. You'll never earn respect or understand others until you give them your full attention.

Appreciate Others

No one person can or should do everything in a workplace. Just as you want support and appreciation for the job you do each day, show the same consideration for your co-workers.

Pitch In and Help Out

Don't let people down when you offer to do something extra or volunteer for a project. Be careful, however, that you don't come across as someone who wants to do it all or someone who only knows the right way a project should be done.

Live Up to Your End of the Job

Your employers have certain expectations of you and so do your co-workers. Always do your job to the best of your abilities. Don't look for the easy way out or ask a co-worker to do a part of your job. Be a problem solver and remember to seek improvement in all you do.

Respect People's Time & Priorities

We are all working under pressure and deadlines. Respect your co-workers' need for concentration. If you need to interrupt them, ask first "Is a good time?". If your request is urgent, apologize for the interruption and keep your request brief. Remember that each of us has a different style of working, so respect your co-workers' style of time management and prioritizing their workload.

Be Willing to Admit Your Mistakes and Apologize Gracefully

Co-workers understand that mistakes happen, and that we don't intentionally make them. Admit when you're wrong or have made a mistake and get on with your job.

Invest in Other Parts of Your Life

Make sure that you are taking care of you and that your non-work life is enriching. Indulge in hobbies, sports, exercise, reading, travel, or socializing. Try not to take your work problems home. Change out of your work clothes and your work mindset. Do something entirely different when you get home. Focus on your family, your hobbies, and yourself. This will refresh you, helping you give your all during the next workday.

Understand That Life on the Job Won't Always Be Perfect

You will have co-workers, bosses, and employers that you don't always like or agree with. If you find that you absolutely can't work with certain people, then it's time to look for another job. By practicing the principles outlined here, you can learn to work successfully with difficult people and flourish professionally in the process.

The above principles are based on the book *"Positive Co-worker Relationships in Health Care"*

Circle of Responsibility

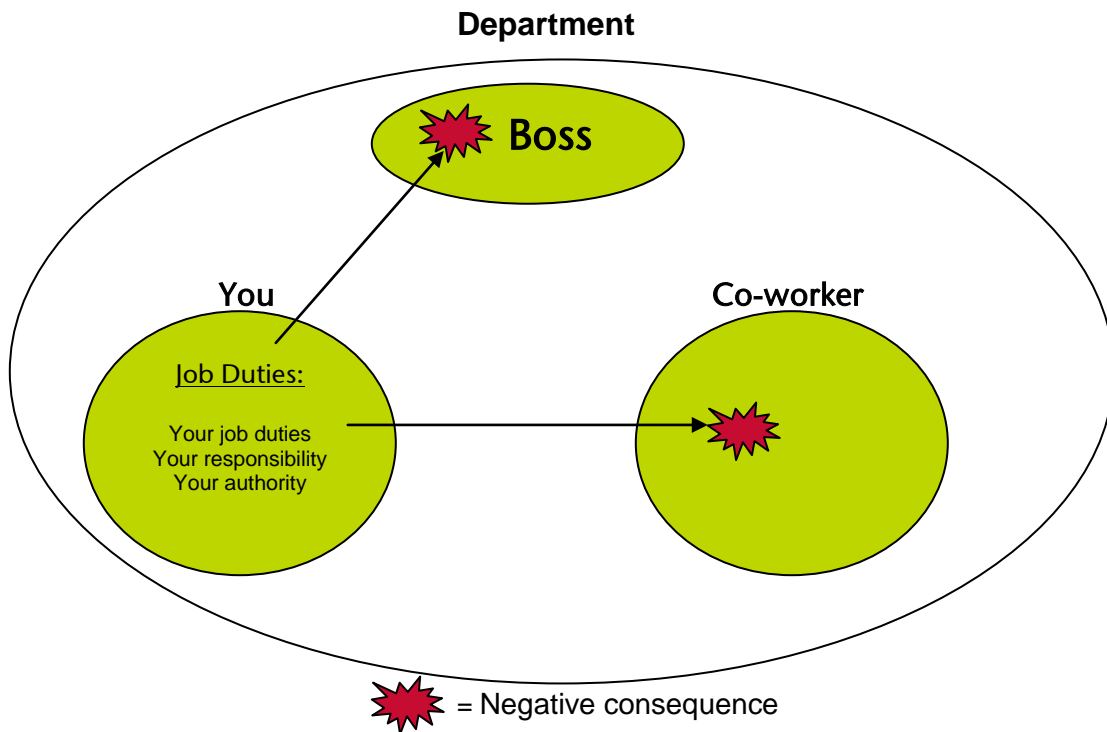
Every company, every workplace, every relationship system has circles of responsibility. As a matter of fact, each one of us as an employee has a personal circle of responsibility, which contains certain specific functions regarding control.

- **Responsibilities:** job duties and performance standards
- **Authority:** the power and right in our job role to carry out work duties
- **Protection:** a guard against negative consequences

The important question we confront on a day-to-day basis is:

“What should I control and what should I not control?”

Many times when conflict and/or communication problems occur in the workplace it is due to stepping outside of one’s Circle of Responsibility. We then have no protection, no authority, and no responsibility outside what has been given to us. We are then vulnerable to negative consequences.



Case in Point:

A supervisor referred an employee to the EAP due to complaints from her co-workers about the employee's anger and attitude in the department. This employee had been at her job for 15 yrs and was a very capable and competent worker with a good work history. She actually was an exceptionally hard worker with a very strong work ethic and concern for her customers.

The employee's problems in the workplace were described as her "emotional outbursts". She had made comments that she was the only one that worked hard and that the department couldn't run without her. The clinic had been short staffed for months. In addition to her own work duties and responsibilities she was doing extra work for other areas and not asking for help. She was not asking her supervisor for help and on occasion she would tell other coworkers what additional work they should be doing.

All of these behaviors were actually her stepping outside of her own circle of responsibility into someone else's (either a coworker's or her supervisor's). She certainly may have been right in what she did but she did not have the responsibility or authority to do so.

What did this employee do to handle the situation and decrease the stress that she was actually putting on herself?

- She started to say "no" to the receptionist when asked to take a call, unless it was urgent.
- She went to her supervisor so that the supervisor was aware of work that needed to be assigned. She gave suggestions for possible solutions versus going directly to her coworkers and telling them what they should be doing. The supervisor took her suggestion and delegated the work.
- She actually accepted her supervisor's offer of help.

The employee found that the biggest lesson to be learned was to keep within her circle of responsibility. When she tried to help too much or go beyond her authority, she experienced a negative consequence. Keeping within her circle of responsibility, the employee made it possible for her supervisor become aware of the problem and to address the workload issues with the department.

What she learned:

- Clearly define what is in your circle of responsibility and what is not.
- Assume appropriate responsibilities but stop taking on responsibilities that are not yours.
- Inform the person who does have the authority and responsibility of any problems or needs.

Tips for Working with Difficult People

Most workplaces have at least one or more difficult people. It helps to know about difficult types and how to best work with them.

Aggressives are determined to have their way. They may attack verbally.

Don't attack back.

Listen without returning anger. Ask them to explain in a calm manner.

Experts are people who feel they know it all and don't want to hear other people's thoughts.

Don't be intimidated or let them take over a meeting.

Begin by listening to them, acknowledge what they've said and then offer your thoughts.

Victims complain frequently and feel that they are being treated unfairly.

Don't try to protect them or offer sympathy too readily.

Ask them for their ideas for improving the situation, focusing on their past successes and positive ideas for resolution.

Sarcastics often try to pass off negative personal or general comments as a joke, even though they often mean what they've said. They can be poor team players.

Don't let them get away with this behavior. Let them know that sarcasm is unacceptable.

Compliment them when they say something positive or contribute in a positive way.

Negatives have nothing good to say about the ideas of others.

Invite them to offer alternatives and resolutions.

Avoid joining their negative talk.

Agreeables will go along with anything to gain approval and acceptance.

Make sure they follow through on what they agree to do.

Support any of their efforts to legitimately disagree or offer a contrary opinion.

Passives are reluctant to offer their ideas and are difficult to engage.

Ask open-ended questions that require them to participate.

Be patient when waiting for an answer, acknowledge participation.

Dealing with Difficult Behavior

Here are some options to deal with difficult behavior. Choose option(s) that are most suited to your situation.

1. Leave the situation.
2. Ignore the behavior.
3. Focus on the person's good behavior and let it go. Say to yourself, "Tomorrow will be a better day".
4. Confront the behavior assertively.
"When you give me the silent treatment, our problems don't get solved".
"I don't appreciate name calling".
"Please stop slamming doors".
5. Ask for a change in behavior or for the behavior to stop.
"I want to listen to your concerns, but I need you to stop yelling".
"Please stop snapping your gum".
"If you have a problem with me, please talk to my face, not behind my back".
6. De-escalate angry outbursts by remaining calm and listen carefully. Listen for what may be the real cause of the person's anger by:
Showing empathy: "I can see how upsetting this is for you". "That must have been difficult for you". Asking open-ended questions: "What can I do to help resolve this issue?" "How can I make this right?" or "How can I help?"
7. Try to identify a time or pattern to the behavior. You can then be more cautious in approaching the person during those times.
8. Don't purposely do things that escalate defensive behaviors in others.
Examples include: pointing, yelling, teasing, bullying, or annoying.
9. If the person's behavior affects your ability to do your job, speak with your supervisor.
10. Remember – you are not perfect. There are times where you may act in a way that is difficult for others to deal with.

Session 2 – Communication/ Conflict Resolution Module

The Art of Communication

Communication is the process by which people exchange information or share ideas. There are three types of communication: speaking, listening and non-verbal communication.

Non-verbal Communication:

Your actions speak louder than words.

Studies report that the majority of communication is transmitted non-verbally. 60% of communication is body language, 30% is voice tone and inflection, and only 10% is your spoken words.¹ The goal is to have your non-verbal message match your verbal message.

1. Tips for Body Language:

- Mirror the other person's body language to convey understanding.
- Respect personal space.
Most people need a "Bubble Area" which is equal to about 3 feet or arm's length away from another person. The goal is to be close enough to be attentive but be far enough for comfort.
- To create a positive message, think SOLER.
S – Smile
O – Openness
L – Lean Forward
E – Eye contact
R – Relax

2. Voice Tone and Inflection:

Vocal sighs, groans, coughs, tone of voice, volume, intensity, speech patterns (slow or fast), and emphasis on words can affect how you communicate your message or how your message is received by others.

More Tips to Consider:

- Feelings are communicated nonverbally. It is *impossible* NOT to send a non-verbal message.
- Non-verbal communication can leave your message open to interpretation – i.e. it may reinforce or contradict your spoken message.
- Non-verbal communication can send a double message and can distract from the other person understanding what you are trying to communicate.
- Use the other person's non-verbal communication as a tool to ask more questions. When you ask questions, you can often find the true meaning of the communication.

Speaking:

*Be aware that the words you choose will be heard **and** interpreted.*

When you speak:

- Be honest and specific.
Requests for a change of behavior should be direct, honest and to the point.
Examples: "I prefer..., I want..., I like..., I do not want..., I would appreciate..., Please...."
- Be sensitive to the other person's reactions and their non-verbal communication.
- Use a positive, moderate tone of voice.
- Match your facial expression to your message.
- Use "I" statements versus "you" statements.
"You" messages send criticism, complaint, threat or put-downs.
"I" messages describe another's behavior, the effect that action has on you, the feelings you have about the action, and what the person can do to continue to modify the behavior.

Listening:

Receiving the message

We can listen at about twice the speed the average person talks. That means we can speak at a rate of 125 to 150 words per minute, but we can hear, process, and analyze at a rate of 400 to 800 words per minute.

The extra time between what you say and what is heard can be used positively or negatively in the communication process.

Positive Uses:

- Actively focus attention on speaker and avoid distractions.
- Think about questions you can ask to get clarification.
- Be aware of the non-verbal communication and consider it's meaning.
- Think about how the speaker may feel.
- Take notes, if appropriate.

Negative Uses:

- Making assumptions.
- Being defensive.
- Daydreaming/Being distracted/Acting impatient.
- Interrupting.
- Looking away.
- Doing another activity while listening.

¹ Birdwhistell, R.L., Kinesics and Context, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970.

Elements of Communication

There are three parts of communication: Word Choice (what is said), Tone of Voice (how it is said), and Body Language. All three of these elements are expressed when delivering a message. However, each part influences understanding of the message differently.

Directions: Draw a line to match the percent of influence each part provides during face-to-face communication.

38%

55%

7%

WORD CHOICE



-tone OF VOICE



BODY LANGUAGE



References

- Mehrabian, Albert; Wiener, Morton (1967). "Decoding of Inconsistent Communications." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 6 (1): 109–114.
- Mehrabian, Albert; Ferris, Susan R. (1967). "Inference of Attitudes from Nonverbal Communication in Two Channels." *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 31 (3): 248–252.

Conflict Resolution – Ground Rules

1. No threats, name-calling, intimidation, or any other behavior that may cause defensiveness and escalate the situation.

2. Use “I” statements

I feel

_____ (State a feeling: glad/mad/sad/scared)

When you

_____ (Describe the exact behavior)

Because I need

_____ (State the need that relates to that feeling and any related thought or belief)

What I want is

_____ (Describe the exact behavior that would meet your need)

EXAMPLE:

I felt scared when you did not call me yesterday to let me know that you would be home late *because I need* to know that you are safe and I believe that it could be dangerous to walk in that area after dark. *What I want is* to understand is your plan for keeping yourself safe and I want you to contact me whenever you are going to get home more than a half hour late.

Helpful Hints:

1. Take the time to think through your response before you confront.
 2. Use a sincere voice that expresses caring.
 3. Be concrete and use specific examples.
 4. Use only the primary feelings listed in the “I feel” line of the example above.
 5. Make eye contact.
3. Focus on *your* part of the problem and *your* wants or needs.
 4. Attempt to come up with a “win-win” situation.

Respect in the Workplace Worksheet

Treating Others As You Would Like To Be Treated

1. When someone points out a mistake I've made, I would like them to:
2. When someone asks me to do something for them I would like them to:
3. It bothers me when people refer to me as:
4. I feel respected by my supervisor when they:
5. I feel respected by my co-workers when they:
6. I feel disrespected when people:
7. It bothers me when people treat me like:
8. If a person is angry with me, I would like them to:
9. The most disrespectful behavior I have ever witnessed in the workplace was:
10. The most courteous and respectful behavior I have witnessed in the workplace was:
11. I demonstrate respect for my co-workers by:

Using Positive Communication Techniques with Your Boss

Communicating with your boss can be stressful. Preparation, practice and positive communication techniques can help you get your ideas across in an effective way.

1. Before you meet with your boss to discuss your concerns, make a list of the issues that you hope to communicate.
2. In private, rehearse what you want to say to your boss.
3. When presenting your ideas, use qualifying words, such as “perhaps” and “maybe” rather than absolute words, such as “always”, “never”, “every”. Using absolutes can sound negative and raise a person’s defenses.
4. Make “I” statements such as “I need guidance” instead of “you” statements, such as “You haven’t given me guidance”.
5. Give yourself time to cool off, to collect your thoughts, and compose yourself before going to your boss. It is difficult to communicate effectively when you are emotional.
6. Give concrete examples when discussing a difficulty. Using objective examples will help to clarify your concerns.
7. Speak for yourself when stating concerns. Trying to include others not present may weaken your case rather than strengthen it. Avoid spreading gossip or rumors.
8. Listen carefully to what your boss says during the meeting. If you missed something or didn’t understand it, ask your boss to repeat or clarify it.
9. During your conversation with your boss, try to repeat and rephrase the points he or she makes to show that you are listening and understanding.
10. During your conversation, maintain good eye contact with your boss and lean into the conversation.
11. Keep an open mind and be open to compromise.
12. Have a positive attitude.
13. Bosses appreciate good feedback too. Offer praise and recognition when it is due.
14. Communicate regularly with your boss. Remember to acknowledge positive examples of work issues as well as your concerns.

Session 3 – Communication/ Conflict Resolution Module

Conflict: Crisis or Opportunity?

Conflict can develop into a crisis but it can be also be an opportunity for positive change. It's often hard to see the opportunity, especially when you're in the middle of a conflict. This exercise can help you think through the conflicts that you handled well so that you can improve your skills when the next conflict that comes along.

Exercise:

Think of a situation when you had a conflict with another person at home, at work or in the community. The conflict could be big or small, but should be one that you feel you handled well.

Ask yourself these questions:

1. What was the issue? What happened?
2. What was your side of the story?
3. What did you do to address the issue with the other person?
4. How were you able to break down any barriers to communication? What did you do to better understand the other person's point of view?
5. How did you find common ground between yourself and the other person? How did you encourage cooperation?
6. Did you feel satisfied with the end result of the conflict? Was the other person satisfied?
7. What would you do differently now based on your experience and thinking through this issue?

Tips for Healthy Communication

Acknowledge your feelings

- Be honest about your feelings – to yourself and with others.
- Discuss your feelings when they are small to keep resentments from building up.
- Take responsibility for your own feelings by using “I” statements.

Dig a Little Deeper

- Ask yourself “what about this is so upsetting to me?” so that you can be clear with yourself and others.
- Check to see if there are any old hurts or experiences that may be affecting how you feel about the problem.
- Take responsibility for your feelings and ask that others respect your feelings too.

Use Clear Communication Techniques

- Discuss vs. using the ‘silent treatment’ to solve problems.
- Do not use name-calling or “below the belt” statements.
- Stay focused on the issue.
- Check to make sure your non-verbal communication (body language and facial expressions) is consistent with your message.

Take Time Out

- Ask for a “time out” to cool down and get less emotional.
- Time outs usually last 30 minutes to 2 hours.
- Always come back to the discussion at the agreed upon time.

Listen to Understand

- Avoid being defensive.
- Use reflective listening to make sure you understand what the other person is saying.
- Rephrase or repeat to make sure you understand what the other person is saying. Keep going until you have a good understanding of the other person’s point of view.

Stay Healthy

- Recognize what is not in your power to change or beyond your scope of responsibility.
- Find a variety of people that can provide friendship, laughter and be a support system for you.
- Discover interests that provide satisfaction and a healthy way to vent your emotions.

Points to Remember

1. The only way you can consistently meet your co-workers needs is by always striving to earn their respect.
2. Respect is a two way street, and sometimes, despite our best efforts to earn the respect of others, we sometimes fail.
3. You have the right and obligation to put your own emotional and physical safety first.
4. No one benefits from aggressive behavior. Not you, your co-worker or the organization.
5. If you initiate the aggressive behavior, you are the person responsible for not continuing the aggressive behavior.
6. We are all responsible for helping co-workers get past their anger or frustration, but only to a certain point.
7. There may be times when you are required to politely remove yourself from an encounter and to get another person to help you (a supervisor or another co-worker).
8. Caring about your co-workers means having respect for their feelings and also for your own.