

Managing TIME WORK & FAMILY

FACT SHEET

Communication

It's 6:30 p.m.

You have just arrived home from a busy day at work to find the refrigerator bare, and nothing started for dinner.

"I thought you were going to bring dinner home!"

"No—you were supposed to stop by the grocery store and pick up something."

"I'm hungry, when's dinner?"

Accusations fly. Even though you make it through dinner, the relaxing evening you were looking forward to is gone—all because of communication problems.

Busy families talk with each other in a variety of ways: by phone or answering machine, written messages at work, notes left on the refrigerator or mirror, greeting cards, and sometimes even by computer.

Finding time for face-to-face conversation may require extra effort and planning. Without this important time, family members can forget how to relate to one another.

The ability to effectively communicate with other people is an important life skill. Through communication, people reach some understanding of each other, learn to like each other, influence one another, build trust, and learn more about themselves and how people perceive them.

People who communicate effectively know how to interact with others flexibly, skillfully and responsibly. They are aware of how others affect them, and recognize the impact of their behavior on others. Good communication skills are strengthened with patience, practice and a positive attitude.

Why is Communication so Important?

Effective communication is crucial in managing work and family life. By discussing our feelings with each other, we have the opportunity to sort out confusing situations. When we share our feelings sincerely, we come to realize that everyone has emotions, and that each family member may experience them in his or her own way. By sharing our feelings, we can recognize the similarities among family members, as well as their differences.

Barriers to Communication

Failures in communication happen when the receiver understands the message differently than the sender intended. Being aware of some of the barriers to communication can help you become a better listener.

Nonverbal messages

often speak louder than the spoken word. Consider the teen who comes in late from a date. The expression on the parent's face will probably prepare him or her for the unpleasant reception that follows—even before the first word is ever spoken.

Behaviors which make communication difficult include:

- Listening with “half an ear.” Often we are busy doing other things and only give part of our attention to what is being said.
- Acting as judge and jury instead of listening to the whole story. We become so intent on making a quick decision about the action that we do not hear the complete story.
- Tuning out ideas that we do not agree with. We do not allow ourselves to listen because we “know” we will not agree.
- Jumping to conclusions. We may have a preconceived idea of what someone is going to say, so we do not actually listen to what he or she is really saying.
- Not listening “between the lines.”

We also should try to understand the attitudes, needs and motives that lie behind the words. Not being aware of nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures and body movements can keep us from understanding the importance (or full meaning) of what is being communicated.

How to Communicate More Effectively

There are some specific skills which can be learned to help your family communicate more effectively. As a receiver, one can learn to listen accurately, and reflect back to the sender the message that is heard. As a sender, one can improve skills in sending clear, accurate messages.

Feedback

As a listener, it is important to make sure that the message you are receiving has the same meaning as the speaker intended. To do this, you can use a technique called feedback.

Feedback is nothing more than repeating a message that was heard. In turn, other family members can say whether or not you heard right. Responsive feedback can lead to clarification, understanding and solutions. Failing to give feedback leads to misunderstandings and sometimes to bad feelings and frustration.

Open Responses

You can enhance your communication even further by understanding the difference between closed and open responses. A *closed response* indicates that a person either has not heard or understood, or chooses to ignore the other person's conversation. In other words, it cuts off communication.

An *open response* indicates that you have heard the person and you are interested in what they have to say. Open responses

Effective listening

requires a willingness to make an effort, and to invest a little of oneself into the process. It takes patience, hard work, concern and practice. It can serve as a bridge to successful family relationships.

encourage the person to continue talking. A statement as simple as, "tell me more" lets the speaker know that you really want to hear what he or she has to say.

"I" Messages

Another technique to help improve communication is the use of "I" messages. An "I" message can help you relate what you are feeling to another person without blaming the person for the problem. "I" messages are one way of providing feedback to the speaker.

There are three steps to constructing "I" messages:

1. State the behavior: "When . . . "
2. State your feelings: "I feel . . . "
3. State the consequences of the behavior: "Because . . . "

Consider the example of a mother who is continually arguing with her daughter over helping out with the laundry. Instead of saying, "You make me mad when you don't help with the laundry!" the mother might try saying, "When I have to do all of the laundry by myself I feel frustrated because I don't have any time left to spend with you."

The mother gets her point across without directly blaming the situation on her daughter. Using, "When . . .," "I feel . . .," and "Because . . ." statements will help family members learn to communicate more effectively.

Tips for Improving Communication

Here are some specific suggestions for you to practice if you sincerely want to improve your listening skills. As with speaking, singing, bowling, golfing, etc., to read about it in advance may help you, but it is the actual practice that will perfect your skill.

- Listen as though the success of your family life depends upon what every member has to say. And remember, it may!
- Be available and approachable for any family member to share his or her feelings, needs and interests. "After a while," "In a few minutes," or "When I have time" may be too late. Many treasures of life are lost quickly if not shared at the moment.
- Have patience to hear the whole story in its uncondensed version. It is essential to building continuous bridges among the generations. Even though the plot, conclusion or problems can often be anticipated with accuracy, let the individual give his or her punchline.
- Stop talking. You can not listen when you talk.
- Do not jump to conclusions. When you do, you tune yourself out from the rest of what the speaker has to say. You will

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begin thinking to yourself, “Hurry up and finish. I’ve got your point,” or “Yes, yes. I know what you mean.”

- Listen to what is *not* said. Sometimes you can learn just as much by determining what the other person leaves out or avoids saying as you can by listening to what he or she actually says.
- Listen to *how* something is said. We frequently concentrate so hard on the words that we miss the importance of the emotional reactions and attitudes related to what is said.
- Know when to leave the individual within his or her own silences and when to interrupt. A person may need times of silence in order to collect his or her thoughts for continuing the communication.
- Respect the opinions and rights of others. Build on their self-esteem and avoid techniques that damage self-concept.
- Help others find their own answers and make their own decisions whenever possible. Do not be the giver of all current wisdom, and the one to hand out easy solutions.
- Accept with an open mind what others have to say. You do not need to agree, but it is important to give others the courtesy of respecting their right to say what they believe.
- Use warm, friendly tones of voice. Politeness is especially important within the family.
- Share the responsibility for communication. Only part of the responsibility for effective communication rests with the speaker. You, as the listener, have an equal responsibility. Try to understand, and if you don’t, ask for clarifications.

Conclusion

Effective communication is crucial in managing work and family life. As senders, we need to transmit clear, accurate messages. As receivers, we need to listen accurately and reflect the message we heard back to the sender.

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