Effective communication

Over time, everyone can enhance their communication skills in the workplace. It’s never too late to try out some new techniques for improving the clarity, sensitivity and effectiveness of our interactions.

• **Keep things polite and respectful.** Follow the golden rule while at work: Treat others with respect, just as you would like to be treated.

• **Let others make their points.** When someone is asserting an idea or solution to you, don’t interrupt. Listen actively, and allow that person to complete his or her thought before you react.

• **Show your interest through body language.** Sit or stand up straight, maintain direct eye contact with the person speaking and nod your head to acknowledge their statements. This makes it clear to the other person that you’re interested in what they’re saying.

• **Tailor your communication format.** Before you communicate a message, think about whether to do it in person, via phone or through a text or email message. Texts and emails can be easily misunderstood or misconstrued. Deliver sensitive information in a face-to-face format so the tone of voice and context can be grasped.

• **Ask questions.** When in conversation, ask as many questions as possible so you can be sure to understand the whole picture. Asking for clarification shows your interest and helps to avoid misunderstandings.

• **Steer things positively.** While there are plenty of difficult challenges in the workplace, don’t dwell on the negatives; shift gears as soon as possible into active problem solving.

• **Stay neutral.** Avoid controversial or personal topics such as politics and religion. This helps avoid offending others and creating unnecessary division.

• **Avoid gossip.** Gossiping about others in the office doesn’t help anyone’s long-term credibility. If you see it happening, politely excuse yourself.

• **Depersonalize conflicts.** When a conflict occurs, avoid crowning a winner and a loser. Instead, adopt a “team versus the problem” approach. If emotions get high, defuse the situation by having everyone step back and cool off. This can preserve relationships.

Team building tips

Having a strategy for continuously building your group’s teamwork will boost productivity and morale.

• **Organize occasional team-building activities.** This can promote better communication, cooperation and understanding between team members.

• **Remind employees about the importance of good teamwork by making it a part of the performance management system.**

• **If team members go the extra mile to contribute, be sure to praise them throughout the department and beyond.**

Could you use an expert perspective on how to communicate better with your team? Call your ParTNers EAP for confidential workplace support any time at 1.855.Here4TN (1.855.437.3486). Additional management resources are available to you online at www.here4TN.com.
The importance of employee gratitude

Showing gratitude to others helps increase team culture and may encourage others to show gratitude towards each other. In today’s work environment many may feel that their work effort goes unnoticed and is simply expected. Feeling appreciated lifts people up. Here are some practical steps that a leader can do to show appreciation to employees.

- **Appreciate yourself**—If you find it difficult to show appreciation, it’s likely you also find it difficult to appreciate yourself. Take a few moments at the end of the day and ask yourself a few simple questions: “What can I feel proud of today?” and “What can I do better tomorrow?” This will help you identify areas of strength and improvement.

- **Make it a priority to recognize others**—It’s easy to forget about the importance of recognizing good work and although it’s usually “part of the job”, complementing a job well-done offers positive reinforcement. Make sure you take a moment to recognize those who deserve it.

- **Be appreciative**—Take the time to show your appreciation through a handwritten note or thanking someone for going the extra mile on an assignment. Showing your appreciation will foster a positive work environment and encourage others to do the same.

- **Keep it simple**—Gratitude can be shown in many different forms. The simplest forms of gratitude can show the largest appreciation. Avoid purchasing gifts as this can be distracting. Telling someone you appreciate their hard work or writing out a thank you note can go a long way.

Seven ways you can show gratitude towards others

- Show praise for a job well done.
- Remember to use your manners where appropriate. Saying please and thank you goes a long way.
- Ask how someone is doing and be genuine when speaking to others.
- Ask about hobbies and interests.
- Create fun team traditions. Encourage others to participate.
- Bring in breakfast or other treats for the team. Bake cookies or offer candy as a great alternative.
- Say thank you. The simplest form of gratitude is to say thank you.

Get ready to share your “thanks” during the months of November. Take a picture of you or something that is meaningful to you and post it on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or Pinterest using the hashtag #my4thanks. This is a great way to engage your team and build awareness about the importance of showing gratitude towards each other.
Pursuing those end-of-year goals

The calendar is closing up for 2014 and with the holidays arriving, there will be limited time to achieve what you and/or your organization had planned for 2014. Here are some ideas on how to get it all done.

• **Review and tweak your goals.** Go back to your plan for 2014 and examine the goals you set out for your team and yourself. Are they still realistic and achievable? Make any refinements necessary to ensure that crossing the finish line is within reach before the end of the year.

• **Mark the milestones.** Once you’ve identified what needs to be done, create a timeline or schedule for the rest of the year. List by date the interim milestones that are individual components of the larger end-of-year goal, and have the team start tackling them in manageable chunks.

• **Delegate carefully.** Review your project timeline and make sure there is a reasonably equitable distribution of tasks on your staff so that no one will end up stuck or swamped over the holidays.

• **Energize your meetings.** With time being limited, keep your meetings concise, with structured agendas that emphasize getting key tasks done to meet your group’s end-of-year goals. When appropriate, encourage staff to visualize attaining their close-out objectives. Do whatever you need to do to motivate staff to finish the year strong and hit their targets.

• **Celebrate, but don’t drop the ball.** If holiday celebrations are scheduled during work hours, be reasonable about their duration, and remind staff about the remaining work deadlines. Also, don’t let certain staff members get overloaded with organizing the holiday activities.

• **Set a strong example of attendance and commitment.** Take the time off to which you’re entitled to during the holidays, but don’t overdo it or let work slide. Allow your direct reports to contact you after-hours as needed to close out projects.

• **Reward your team, and look forward.** Regardless of exactly where your team ends up in goal attainment, show your appreciation for their efforts in 2014. If certain objectives within the larger goals need to be rescheduled for completion in 2015, do that. Then, move forward with fresh resolve to be successful in reaching your 2015 goals.

Seek balance during the holidays

The holidays can bring big changes in your schedule, diet, sleep patterns and range of activities. To keep yourself healthy and balanced at this time of year, consider these tips.

• **Be realistic about what you can do prior to and during the holidays.** Avoid taking on too many commitments. Fit in time for breaks.

• **Don’t try to do it all.** Brainstorm for shortcuts to getting your to-do list completed. Delegate some tasks to family members.

• **Keep control of eating and drinking.** You can start by having a snack before your holiday gatherings. Then stick to smaller portions, alternate drinks of water with other beverages and take a walk outside after big meals.

• **Stay with your workout plan over the holidays.** This will help keep stress in check and burn some of those extra calories.

• **Set aside time to see a movie, read a book, get back to that fun creative project or schedule an alternative health session (e.g., massage or acupuncture) over the holidays.** Or, just take some quiet meditative time and slow down.