Lesson 1: Projecting professional body language

1.1. What does your body language say?

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then body language in business transactions is worth at least a thousand dollars!

That may sound a little corny, but the bottom line is that people do business with people they like -- and people with whom they feel comfortable.

In business communications, over half (about 55 percent) of our total communicated message is sent through our body language. Twenty-two percent is the tone of voice we use, and only 7 percent is portrayed through the actual words we use.

Seven seconds to a positive impression

Have you ever met someone and instantly said to yourself, "I don't know why, but I really *like* that person," or "There's something about that guy that bugs me."

You have just formed an impression of the other person. And most of our first impressions are subconscious -- we don't even know we are making them. We only know that we have an overall, general feeling about this person.

Eight subconscious impressions that happen within seven seconds

Here are eight opinions people generally make of you within the first seven seconds of meeting you:

- How much money you make
- How much education you've had
- How much you can be trusted
- Your personality style and how agreeable you are
- How confident you are
- How intelligent you are
- What your work ethic is
- How dependable and accountable you are

Wait a minute! How can someone make all these decisions about someone in the first seven seconds? Good question.

Let's talk about some tips to make a good impression in the first seven seconds.

The walk

The first thing people notice about you is your walk. If you keep three things in mind, you will be on your way to projecting a more professional image:

- **Stand upright.** Hold your head up. This shows how confident you are.
- **Don't hide your hands.** Don't put them in your pockets or hold them behind your back. Why? Because if your hands aren't showing it sends a subliminal message that you can't be trusted -- that you have something to hide.
- **Walk with a purpose and with enthusiasm.** This shows your personality and confidence. No one likes to see someone trudging up to them, head down, eyes diverted.

The tune-in factor

People want to know that you're interested in them. You can do that by:

- **Maintaining eye contact for four seconds.** If you don't hold the eye contact, you appear to have "shifty eyes" and, therefore, you seem non-trustworthy.
- **Smiling strategically.** But don't have a smile on your face as approach the person. As you start to shake the person's hand, look into their face, and let a smile *slowly* creep across your face. If you walk up to someone overexcited, the other person may feel as if you *want* something. In fact, you very well may want something. But you'll have a far better chance of getting it if you use the "slow creeping smile" technique. (Note: It's a slow *creeping* smile; not a slow *creepy* smile.)
- **Showing enthusiasm while greeting people.** We all like upbeat people. But there is a caveat here: you should appear enthusiastic -- not overmedicated.
- **Shaking hands with sincerity.** A handshake is a gesture of welcome: the palms interlocking signify openness and the touching signifies oneness.

The overeager handshake

Sometimes people will shake hands by grasping the other person's hand with the right hand and then cupping the other person's hand with their left hand. For two very close friends, this method of greeting is acceptable. But in business, shaking hands this way is perceived as insincere and falsely ingratiating.

Next up

How to communicate what you want to say.

1.2. How to fit the situation and communicate what you want to say

In the last section we covered some basics of professional body language. But what about specific situations? What if you want to change your body language to convey more power in meetings? Or, what if you want to get someone to feel comfortable with you before you launch into your sales pitch -- or ask the boss for a raise?

Body power plays

Think for a moment about the last time you were in a meeting with your boss or someone who was in a higher position of power than you. How were they sitting? Did they sit back from the table, or *lean in* toward the table? Did they sit with arms spread over two chairs, or hunched over slightly with the hands supporting the knees? Or did they lean back in the chair, grasp their hands behind their head, and cross their legs in a "figure-four" position?

Chances are the person in power demonstrated one of the *Body Power Plays.* The Body Power Plays are broken into two categories: Confidence Positions and Power Positions.

The confidence positions

Consider these body stances when you want to project an air of confidence.

Taking up more room than you physically need

Powerful people take up space. It's that simple. The next time you're in a meeting, try taking up a little more space than you normally do. How? Place your arm on the vacant seat next to you. Don't slouch. If the chair next to you isn't vacant, either cross your legs in a "figure four" shape or place your arms on both armrests. (Note: The figure-four posture doesn't always work well for women.)

On of the most common mistakes people make in meetings is to project an "I'm-just-a-worker-bee" image through their posture and expression. They sit almost motionless in their chairs, with little animation, little facial expression, and little indication that they are engaged in the meeting. They either cross their ankles or cross their arms and the image presented is one of complete indifference.

No hand-to-face gesturing

A confident person is likely to talk *without* hand-to-face gestures like covering the mouth and nose. Head-scratching also portrays a lack of confidence or confusion. (Think of Columbo.) A proud, erect stance is a sign of someone who knows where he or she is going, is proud of his or her accomplishments, and has a healthy, self-assured attitude.

Eye contact

You've probably already heard this before, but it bears repeating: self-confident people make more frequent eye contact than those who are unsure or trying to conceal something. Also, confident people hold the eye contact longer than their less-sure counterparts.

Leaning in

Research shows that people who *lean in* toward the other attendees get more respect and are perceived to be more "in command" during meetings. If you want to be perceived as a professional with worthwhile ideas, you have to project an image and an aura of a confident professional who is worthy of being heard. *Respect must be earned.* One of the best ways to earn it is through your posture and posturing in professional settings.

The power positions

Use these body stances when you want to dominate a situation.

Leaning back and clasping hands behind the head

Successful negotiators know this tactic and use it well. Be careful with this posture, however; in many cases you can come off as arrogant. If your intent is to subliminally intimidate the other party, this posture works well.

Sitting directly across from everyone else, or sitting at the head of the table

Just as the head of the household usually sits at the head of the dinner table, the head of the corporation typically sits at the head of the conference table. Sitting directly across from people you are dialoguing with -- rather than to the side -- presents a dominant posture.

The Confidence Positions are generally used to command respect; the Power Positions are generally reserved for debating, negotiation, or power tactics.

Rapport-building body positions

People who are in a position of power may be intimidating to others. If you are already in a position of power and want to ease those feelings of intimidation that the other party may feel, here are a few quick tips:

- Sit diagonally across from the other person.
- Maintain an open body posture (no crossed arms or crossed legs).
- Sit up straight to show interest, but do not lean in.
- Avoid all "power positions" as related to body language.

Some more body language tips

Just as the written language is spoken in sentences, body language is "spoken" in its own "sentences." You can't take one gesture in isolation and make a judgment about the person. But looking at body language patterns throughout a verbal interaction reveals the overall body language message. Each gesture is like a word in a language. Therefore, when trying to read the other person's body language, look at the whole body language sentence.

Review your notes beforehand

Before entering into a negotiation, review your talking points on your handheld PC so they are fresh in your mind and you're able to maintain eye contact and composure.

1.3. Reading other people's body language

We all know how important it is to be a good listener. But part of good listening also involves good *observation.* Pay attention to the other person's body language clues and you'll get a clearer sense of what they mean and how they feel.

How to tell if your audience is comfortable with you

When talking to someone, pay attention to their body language; it's the best indicator of how they feel about you. Some of these are:

- **Coat unbuttoned.** When your coworker, boss, or business associate unbuttons their coat, it's a sign they're becoming more comfortable with you and are more open to what you have to say.
- **Scratches top of head (or leans back and puts hands on top of head).** This usually means they are not comfortable with what you're saying.
- **Mirrors your body language.** This means they are comfortable with you. For example, if you lean back or shift your weight from one leg to the other and your conversation partner mimics this action, then this means they are comfortable with you.
- **Increased eye contact.** The more the person looks at you, the more comfortable they are with you.

How to tell if your audience is interested in what you're saying

Does this sound familiar? You're in your boss's office and you've been talking for about three minutes. Suddenly you get the feeling you've been talking to yourself. Here are some tips to find out if the other person is really listening to you, or if they are distracted by something else.

- **Increased eye blink** indicates interest.
- **Head tilted to either side** shows the other person is not only listening to what you're saying, but is actually processing the information. (If the person's head is straight, they aren't interested.)
- **Hand to chin** indicates the other person is forming opinions about what you're saying and, therefore, is interested.
- **Chin resting on knuckles** shows that the other person is not opposed to what you're saying, and is interested.
- **Touching bridge of nose**. Many times this indicates that the person you're talking to wants more information.
- **Takes glasses off and slowly places them on the table** means they are no longer interested.
- **Chin in palm of hand** shows your audience is no longer interested.

How to tell if your audience is annoyed with you

Any of the following can indicate that your conversation partner is less-than-pleased with you. Stay on the lookout for these clues:

- **Looks over top of glasses**. (Disapproves of you; doesn't believe what you're saying.)
- **Steepling of hands** indicates they feel superior to you, and don't think you are as intelligent as they are. (Steepling is placing your hands in front of you in a triangular form, with the tips of your fingers touching each other at the top.)
- **Hand to the back of the neck** shows, literally, that the other person thinks you're a pain in the neck!

After reading the lists above you might be thinking: "Hey, I sit and stand like that and it doesn't mean I'm not comfortable or not interested. It just means that that particular position is the most comfortable for me."

Ah, yes. But *why* is that position the most comfortable for you at that given moment? Subconsciously, something may be bugging you.

So, if you find yourself comfortable in one of the positions described, ask yourself "*Why* am I more comfortable in that position?" and try to be aware of your positions in times of uncomfortableness. You may discover otherwise.

How to tell if your audience is being less than truthful

Somebody may be *saying* all the right things, but there is often an involuntary body reflex of some sort that gives them away. Some of the most common signs that someone is lying to you include:

- **Touches the side of their nose with their finger.** If you remember watching Johnny Carson, you may also remember that after his monologue he would say, "We've got a great show for you this evening." Some nights he meant it, some nights he didn't. Whenever he felt his show wasn't going to be quite up to par -- while he said, "We've got a great show for you tonight, folks," he would touch the side of his nose. On nights when he truly believed he had a bang-up show, he wouldn't touch his nose. Watch today's late night comedians. See if you can pick out their body language clues that give them away. (Hint: David Letterman is one of the easier ones.)

- **Hands-to-the-face movement.** This is a gesture lawyers watch in trial witnesses to detect inconsistencies in their stories. Many lawyers coach their defendants to make sure their facial expressions are consistent with their words. They also coach their clients to not touch their face or rub their chin when asked a tough question. Candidates interviewing for jobs often make the same mistake.

- **Uses qualifiers such as** "Honestly," "To tell you the truth," etc. When you use these phrases, the impression you send is that you haven't been telling the truth up to this point.

Make body language work for you

Now that we've covered what various forms of body language mean, here's a short list of some body language tips to implement in your business meetings to get people to respond more positively to you:

- Lean forward
- Maintain eye contact
- Take up space
- Maintain an open body posture -- avoid crossing your legs or arms)
- Sit up straight
- Use facial expressions that indicate you are interested
- Arrive on time to the meeting

Moving forward

In this lesson, you took a look at the messages -- both positive and negative -- that body language can send, and hopefully learned some tips for conveying positive body language during meetings and other business interactions. Be sure to complete the quiz and assignment for this lesson, then stop by the course Message Board to meet your instructor and fellow students. Feel free to ask any questions you may have, as well as share your comments and experiences on the topic of business etiquette.

Lesson 2 covers another aspect of making a good impression -- choosing suitable attire for various business settings and situations.

1.4. Other clues

Repeatedly clearing throat? Usually indicates they need more time to think about it.

Speedy response? If you ask someone a question and their response is very quick, with little or no pause, chances are they are not telling the whole truth and just pacifying you. This applies to both business and personal conversations.

Lesson 2: Dressing for business success

2.1. Why all the fuss about dress when companies are going business casual?

As the business world changes, many of the formal office dress codes of yesteryear are becoming more relaxed. Depending on the type of business settting you work in, you may see extremely casually dressed people all around you. But don't kid yourself -- people still judge you by your clothes. It's part of that critical first impression. And first impressions are difficult to change.

Obviously, you must follow a dress code if your company has formal guidelines. But in many offices these days, the "What do I wear?" decision is a strictly personal decision. When you're dressing for the "new" business world, keeping the following two rules in mind should help simplify your decisions:

1. Dress according to your corporate culture.
2. Dress like the people with whom you are doing business.

Dress according to your corporate culture

How you dress at work depends largely upon your industry, the amount of client contact you have, and the overall culture of your company.

How do you know what your corporate culture dictates? At some companies, your employee handbook will cover the topic of appropriate office attire. If your handbook doesn't cover this or you are still unsure, you can always ask your supervisor about appropriate dress.

Dress according to the position you want in the company

If your company doesn't cover dress in its employee handbook, look around at the other people in your office. Here's a hint if you want to get ahead: dress like the people one level higher than your position. If you're a front-line employee and want to advance, dress like your supervisor. If you're a middle manager and want to move up, dress like upper management.

You'll never go wrong with this advice

Say you're shopping for business attire and while in the store, you wonder if a particular outfit will be appropriate for the office. Here are two rules you can use as a quick test:

1. People will always forgive you for being too conservative in your dress, but they may not always forgive you if you're not conservative enough. Err on the side of conservative and you'll rarely go wrong.
2. If you have to wonder or ask if an outfit is acceptable or appropriate for the office, it probably isn't.

What does "casual Friday" mean?

When selecting your apparel for casual Friday, remember this: there's a difference between casual for exercising and casual for the office. Unacceptable casual includes tattered blue jeans, sandals, T-shirts with slogans, and sweat suits. Acceptable casual usually means shirts with collars, tunics, khaki pants, and blouses.

Next up

We'll look at six key dress-for-success strategies for women.

2.2. Business dress for women

Here are some key points women should keep in mind when making decisions about appropriate business attire:

Less is more

Understatement is the hallmark of the well-dressed. Generally, five minutes after a business meeting, your associates should not be able to remember what you were wearing. They should be able to remember that you were well-dressed. If people remember your clothes, then your clothes are making the statement -- not you.

Mirror your company's image

Even if it's casual Friday, if you're expecting a client at your office, or you're going out of the office to meet clients -- keep in mind that you are a reflection of your company. Always look your best when meeting with clients and customers.

Be neat

You can wear a $600 skirt suit, but if your blouse is wrinkled or there's a grease spot on your jacket, you've just blown your professional image.

Don't be revealing

Whether intentional or not, blouses that are too low cut, slacks that are too tight, and dresses or blouses that are transparent send a strong non-verbal message: that you're not authoritative, competent, or reliable.

Dress for daytime

If you have an after-work engagement, bring a change of clothes to the office and go to the restroom and change after work. Wearing eveningwear to work is always a bad idea.

Avoid tackiness and trends

Colors that are too loud, fabrics that are non-traditional, and extremely trendy clothing send a message that you either don't care about proper business dress or you don't know what proper business attire is. Either way, you lose credibility.

The one piece of jewelry that's essential

While too much jewelry is a distraction in business, the one piece of jewelry you should never be without is a nice watch. Wearing a watch shows you have a sense of the importance of time. However, avoid cartoon-character watches and overly large sports watches. They send a message of frivolity.

Next up

Business attire tips for men.

2.3. Business dress for men

Believe it or not, there are more rules for office dress for men than there are for women. One of the most often-overlooked aspect of men's business attire is accessories.

The tie

This traditionally has been considered the most important accessory for men. Some people maintain a tie should express your individuality; others advise being safe and conservative with your tie choices for business.

The guideline here is the same as for women's business attire: people will always forgive you for being too conservative, but few people will forgive you for not being conservative enough in most business situations.

Keep your tie width in line with the width of your lapel; wear wide ties with a wider lapel, narrower ties with narrower lapels.

Hats

Hats carry more connotations than any other accessory. Choose a hat style that looks good on you. The only exception: *never* wear a baseball cap to the office.

Belts and suspenders

Coordinate belts with shoe color. The widest acceptable width for the office is one-and-a-quarter inches.

Suspenders are meant as an alternative to a belt -- not an addition. Coordinate suspenders to the tie. How wild you get with patterns and colors is dictated by your corporate culture.

Jewelry

Less is more. A wedding ring, a watch, and perhaps one other ring (such as signet or family crest) are acceptable. Bracelets and neck chains are rarely acceptable in any business setting.

Eyeglasses

Don't let your frames date you. Choose updated styles that go well with your face shape.

Umbrellas, wallets, and pens

The black umbrella is still best for business; leave the bright-colored ones for casual weekends. Wallets should be thin, of high-quality leather, and dark in color. And, don't opt for a $1 plastic ballpoint pen. Choose a writing instrument of high quality.

How much hair?

Facial hair has had a checkered past in corporate America. The clean-shaven look is still preferred in most workplaces. However, a well-trimmed beard is usually acceptable. The fad among younger workers is a Van Dyke (or goatee). The plain mustache is passe; and extreme mustache styles -- such as Fu Manchus and handlebars -- are out of place in most business environments.

Cut costs where you can

While you shouldn't cut corners with your work apparel, you should take every chance you can to save on office equipment. With specials from HP, save on computers, printers, supplies, and more.

Next up

The difference between casual, business casual, and formal business attire.

2.4. The difference between casual, business casual, and formal business attire

Many people are confused -- and rightly so -- about what is appropriate for "business casual" attire. Below are some general definitions and when to use each type of attire.

Casual attire

Casual attire usually refers to clothing worn when relaxing on weekends or your days off. This includes worn blue jeans, inappropriate shorts, sandals, sweat suits, T-shirts with slogans, tank tops, and cut-offs.

Unless you're at a company picnic, casual attire is not acceptable at the office or on so-called "casual Fridays."

Business casual

Business casual refers to clothing that portrays a professional, yet relaxed image. Clothing that falls into this category includes: dress slacks, shirts with a collar, mock turtlenecks, khakis, and loafers for men; low-heeled dress shoes, casual blouses, and casual fabrics for women. It does *not* include bare feet in shoes -- even though this has become trendy on the East Coast. (Men and women should always wear socks or hosiery -- even on casual Fridays.)

And a word about grooming on business casual days -- just because the dress code is slightly relaxed doesn't mean you can relax your hygiene or grooming.

Formal business attire

This refers to the traditional business suit for men and the skirt or pantsuit for women. Formal business attire is appropriate when meeting with customers or clients, or if you work in an industry (such as banking, finance, or law) that dictates formal business dress.

Moving forward

The next lesson covers the impression you make when you speak. You'll get helpful tips on office small talk, learn about conversing on business topics, and find out how word choice affects the way you are perceived by others.

Meanwhile, be sure to complete the quiz and assignment for this lesson, then come to the course Message Board to find out what everyone's talking about. It's a great place to ask questions and share experiences.

Say no to strong fragrances

You will do well if you pay attention to how you smell. This goes beyond bad body odor. For women, it means going easy on the perfume; for men, it means leaving the cologne behind -- the toilet waters that refresh skin after a shower are probably the best choice. Today so many people are allergic to different fragrances that it's risky to wear a powerful scent.

Lesson 3: Verbal communication and word choice

3.1. Office small talk: taboo topics and topics that build rapport

Did you know that 80 percent of your salary is based on your communication skills? That's regardless of the industry you work in or your job title. Let's face it, you can be the best software developer on the planet, but if you can't communicate effectively with other people you will always stay at a certain level.

Communication skills in action

If you're having trouble swallowing this, think for a moment about someone you work with (or have worked with in the past) who seems like an idiot when it comes to technical knowledge of the industry, but yet is in a very high position, say CEO. Now think about that person's personality. Chances are, he or she is a pretty charismatic person. That's called people skills. And that's what people skills can do for any professional -- get you noticed in a positive way and get you moving up that corporate ladder.

If you're not into moving up the corporate ladder, you may still need to take a good look at how well you communicate with others. People skills can help you get that raise, sell that product to that difficult customer, or simply help you get support from your coworkers when you need it.

Office small talk

First, there's really no such thing as office small talk. Anything you say in the office makes a statement about you, your professionalism, or your personality. Office gossip falls into this category. But we'll use the term "small talk" here to refer to light, not-strictly-business conversation conducted in a work setting.

You might be hoping to find a lengthy laundry list of taboo topics for office small talk. But no list would cover every situation. So, in lieu of the laundry list, here's a checklist you can use before you enter into any conversation topic in the office.

The three-point checklist for your small talk topics

Instead of saying whatever pops into your head, run your comments through these filters first:

Neutral and non-combative

Whatever you decide to talk about, make certain it won't offend anyone. You may want to avoid topics pertaining to religion, politics, race, sex, office gossip, and vulgar jokes. And be careful about teasing anyone you work with. To you, it might seem funny; to others, it may come across as mean-spirited or even a form of harassment.

Relevant and appropriate

Always make the first words you say relevant to the current situation or event. Small talk *faux pas* usually occurs while people are waiting for a meeting to start. If you're at a status update meeting on a major project, it's not the time to talk about your children or your hot date last night. While you don't have to talk about big business, try to keep the topic of conversation general so that others may participate.

It's not all about you

Avoid talking too much about yourself. If you do, you run the risk of becoming known as self-absorbed. Keep most of your comments and conversations focused on the *other* person.

Make introductions matter

When making introductions always present the lower-ranking person to the higher-ranking person. As an example: "Dr. Ben Bailey, this is Joe Johnson, our draftsperson." It's also standard protocol to mention the higher-ranking person's name first.

The terms "higher-ranking" and "lower-ranking" above refer to levels of title, position, or accomplishment. When introducing people of equal status, either can be presented first.

Here are a few quick tips when you have to introduce someone else:

- Introduce a younger person to an older person.
- Introduce a coworker to a client or a worker from another company.
- Introduce a layperson to an official.
- Introduce anyone at a company event to the guest of honor.

Why do we need business small talk?

If we jumped into deep business conversations in the first few minutes of meeting someone, it would be too jarring and too abrupt. People need time to warm up. Don't jump into Big Talk too soon. It'll be a big mistake.

Next up

In the next section you'll learn tips for talking intelligently about just about any business topic.

3.2. How to talk intelligently on a business topic -- even if you know little or nothing about it

Let's say it's 8 a.m. and you've just settled at your desk. You're about to get the agenda ready for you boss's upcoming meeting, when your boss passes by your desk and asks, "Did you take a bath in mutual funds? Man, the markets really crashed yesterday." If you don't play the market, have no idea what a mutual fund is, and don't follow the financial news channels, you may find yourself nervously shuffling your feet, looking down and muttering, "Ah, well, er, no."

That's a tough spot to be in, but there is a way out. Actually, there are several techniques you could use.

Immediately try to shift back to a "you" focus

When someone asks a question about a topic that you know little or nothing about, one successful strategy is to immediately shift the focus back to the other person by appealing to one of three things:

The other person's current situation as it relates to the topic

In the example above about the mutual funds, you could respond with an empathetic, "Oh, sounds as if *you* did. Did *you* have a lot invested?"

The other person's opinion about the topic

Again, from our mutual fund example you could say with a very interested tone, "It's interesting you should bring that up. I'd like *your* take on the stability of the overall market. Where do *you* think it's going?"

True, in this example you're dodging the question, and they may call you on it. Or, they may assume you took a bath and don't want to talk about it. Either way, you're keeping the conversation going.

The other person's experience or expertise

You may prefer the more direct approach such as, "I didn't invest in mutual funds, but I'd like to know more about them. What can you tell me about them?"

When you shift back to a "you" focus -- and especially when you appeal to someone's expertise (whether they have real expertise or they just think they do), you'll get them going into a commentary about their experiences, their opinions, or their involvement.

Ask questions

As you've probably already assumed, this goes hand-in-hand with shifting the focus back to the other person. The easiest way to shift that focus back is to ask a question about their situation, their opinion, or their advice.

After you have redirected back to a "you" focus, listen very closely to the terminology used and what is said. In nearly any comment you can pick out a piece of information to ask another question about. Eventually, after you ask two or three questions, you'll gain enough understanding on the topic to make an intelligent comment. That way, your conversation partner will perceive you as knowledgeable about the topic.

Tone is everything!

Remember that when talking about topics you know little about, *your tone* conveys more than your words. If your body language and tone are confident, the other person will feel 93 percent sure that you are knowledgeable on the subject. (Remember from our previous lesson that body language is 55 percent of the total communicated message and tone is 38 percent. The actual words you say only account for 7 percent of your total message.)

Next up

Fail-safe phrases to build rapport and establish goodwill.

3.3. Fail-safe phrases to win trust and goodwill in the office

Strangers, acquaintances, friends, and trusted colleagues all use different language. Unfortunately, many people in the office use "stranger" language when talking with bosses and supervisors. Your goal is to talk to everyone in your office -- whether peers or bosses -- as if they are trusted colleagues.

But how do you do that? Follow the tips below:

Use the phrases and words that trusted colleagues use

Most people in offices use language that sends a message of distance. In other words, they use words and phrases that highlight the differences between the two people. Some examples are:

Clichés

Strangers generally use clichés. Clichés are safe, non-threatening, and are usually meant as a filler.

For instance, if you were talking about the internet economy, a cliche would be "The internet is the place to be today, isn't it?"

Facts

Acquaintances usually speak in "fact-ese." Facts reinforce your mutual understanding of your topic, industry, or company.

Continuing with our internet economy example, a fact statement between acquaintances would be, "There are 1,543,333 active websites today," or "40 percent of holiday gift purchases were made online last year."

Emotional statements

Emotional statements are used between friends. They indicate a deeper bond than either strangers or acquaintances have. Friends feel safe making emotional statements to each other.

Once again with our internet example, a comment from a friend may be, "I just *love* being able to do everything online!"

"We" talk

"We" talk sets the stage for anticipated future events shared between two business colleagues. It may also refer to past events or current situations.

With the internet example, a "we" statement could be, "We'll have so much fun starting this new internet partnership, won't we?" or "Our company will really grow fast once we get our online retail outlet going."

Fast-forwarding rapport with "we" talk

Using "we" talk is an excellent technique for fast-forwarding rapport so the other person thinks of you as a colleague. It's simple to do! When you're in a conversation with a person you're meeting for the first time, look for opportunities to insert the word "we," "us," or "our" into the conversation. It will scramble the signal, and get the other person thinking you are closer than you really are. This works especially well if you are talking to a boss, the company CEO, or someone in a higher position within the company.

Some examples:

- *"We* sure are in an exciting industry!"
- "That new anti-trust law sure caught *us* by surprise, didn't it?"

- *"We're* in for an exciting ride if the industry trends continue the way they are."
- *"Our* greatest opportunities will come from support from the City Council."
- "The new Better Internet Bureau certifications will help *us* establish credibility for *our* online operations."

Don't forget to maintain your non-verbal image

Just as you can fast-forward rapport through your words, you can also fast forward rapport with your body language. The acronym PALS NOW will help you remember the body language tips that fast-forward rapport.

P = Proximity. Stand about an arm's length from the person with whom you're speaking. Research has shown this to be the most comfortable personal space area.
A = Animated. Does your body posture show animation and enthusiasm? Or, are you hunched over and slouching?
L = Lean in. If you lean in toward the person who is speaking to you, they will think you are hanging on their every word, and they will like you more quickly.
S = Smile. Remember to smile, when appropriate, while the other person is talking.
N = Nod. Nodding while the other person is speaking sends a visual cue that you are listening to and comprehending what they are saying.
O = Open body posture. Are your arms folded? Do you have your hands in your pocket? If you are seated, are your legs crossed away from the other person? Keep an open and welcoming body posture throughout the conversation.
W = Watchful eyes. Maintain eye contact throughout the conversation.

Next up

Tone and tempo tips for effective business conversations.

3.4. Tone and tempo: knowing when to slow it down and when to speed it up

The sound of your voice may be less than music to the ear, and people have a tendency to assign a personality type to you based on the sound of your voice. Have you ever "met" someone for the first time via telephone, then formed a mental picture of what the person looks like? Sure! We all have. It's natural to do so.

Your voice may sound fine to you, but not to others. Tape-record yourself -- preferably during a conversation -- to find out how you sound. You may be surprised.

Adjusting your tone to fit the person

Without completely abandoning your personality or your vocal uniqueness, it's important to adjust your tone, speed, pitch, and volume based on your listener.

In general, people like other people who are like themselves.

A subliminal way to show the other person that you're "like them" is to mirror (not mimic) their vocal patterns. For example, if the other person is speaking more slowly, with a lower voice, and you are typically a high-energy, fast-paced talker, you may want to bring your rate of speech and pitch down a few notches. Conversely, if the other person is talking quickly and you're more of a slow talker, you may want to crank it up a notch.

Sincerity counts

The most important thing to remember when mirroring someone else's tone is to be sincere. People can pick up on insincerity. The main point of this section is to bring to your attention the importance of focusing on the speech patterns of the other person. Too often we're so "me-focused" in conversations that we completely overlook the other person.

Moving forward

This lesson covered some important basics on tone, word choice, and building consensus. The next lesson will offer etiquette tips that everyone should know: voice mail and cell phone etiquette, how to answer and transfer calls, how to take messages, and more. For now, be sure to complete the assignment and quiz for this lesson, then stop by the course Message Board to share questions, tips, ideas, and experiences.

Being heard

Studies show that raising your voice in confrontational situations causes people to pay less attention to what you say, not more. On the flip side, lowering your voice in these circumstances causes people to focus on what you're saying.

Lesson 4: Telephone etiquette for the 21st century

4.1. Voice mail basics

Some people love it, some people hate it. But like it or not, voice mail has become a necessary business tool. This section covers some basic voice mail etiquette tips to help you leave and receive better phone messages.

Your outgoing message

This is the first thing the rest of the world hears when they call your extension. Your answering machine message should be brief and provide some choices -- the fewer the better. After you've identified yourself, offer some choices:

- To leave a message
- To call another extension
- To hold for a receptionist

Some other tips for your outgoing voice mail message:

- Adjust the ringer so that the machine or voice mail will pick up on the fourth ring, which seems to have become the unofficial standard in most places.
- Write out what you want your message to say and practice it once or twice.
- Give your department name first, then your name (first and last).
- Set a time expectation for when you will be able to return calls.
- Unless you're in the entertainment field, stay away from sound effects, gimmicks, and jokes.
- If you're going out of town for a convention and are expecting an extremely important call from a client, put the contact information on your voice mail. Add the hotel number and fax number where you can be reached, if appropriate. If you're carrying a laptop, let the callers know you can be reached via email.

Leaving a message

If you are the caller:

- Be prepared to speak promptly, whether a person or a machine answers the call.
- Once you hear the beep, leave a message -- even if you've dialed the wrong number. You don't have to identify yourself, just say: "My apologies. I dialed the wrong number."
- Give your full name and affiliation and your telephone number up front. Also give your name (spelling it out) and phone number at the end of the message. That way, the recipient doesn't have to replay the message to get your number.
- When leaving your number, write the number as you are saying it. This will avoid the incredibly annoying situation of listening to a voice mail message where the caller says their number so quickly that it is unintelligible.
- Briefly state why you are calling. This is especially important if the call concerns a time-sensitive matter.
- Say when and where you can be reached.
- When you've conveyed all the important information, just hang up. You don't need to say goodbye to a person you haven't spoken with. Also, don't say you are sorry you missed the person or that it's the second time you've called.
- Don't leave multiple messages. It's annoying when you leave a message at 10 a.m. and call back with the same message at noon.
- Finally, don't use voice mail as a way of avoiding speaking with someone. If you leave a message during the lunch hour or before or after working hours, the other person would have to be dense not to figure out what you're doing. If you must call after hours, say, "I know you're not in the office right now, but I'm just heading out and knew you would want this information as soon as you returned."

Next up

Answering and transferring calls professionally.

4.2. Answering, transferring, and placing a person on hold -- professionally

A lot of otherwise smart people repeatedly make basic mistakes when using the telephone. This section will run you through some telephone etiquette basics: how to properly answer a call, put a caller on hold, and transfer a call.

Answering the phone

The way you answer your telephone makes a strong impression, especially if the caller doesn't know you well. Follow these tips to make sure that impression is a good one:

- Answer by the third ring, but not before the second. Customers say that if a call is answered on the first ring, it seems too abrupt. But anything after the third ring and the caller is hanging up because the wait is too long. The most preferred time to answer a call is on the second ring.
- Use an enthusiastic tone of voice.
- Start with a welcoming statement such as "Good morning" or "Thank you for calling."
- Give your company's name.
- Give your name.
- Get the customer's name.
- Offer assistance.

A sample greeting

"Thank you for calling ABC Company, my name is Jane Janssen. May I have your name? (Joe) Thank you. Joe, how may I help you today?"

Placing a caller on hold

No one likes being put on hold, but sometimes it's necessary. Never, ever leave your phone receiver on your desk while you retrieve information, ask a question, or attend to something else. It's much more professional to use the hold feature of your phone, following these steps:

1. Explain how long the wait will be.
2. Explain the reason why you must put the person on hold, including a benefit to the customer, such as: "Laura is our expert in this area. If you can hold for a moment while I connect you -- she will be glad to answer all your questions."
3. Ask for permission.
4. Wait for an answer.
5. Place the caller on hold.
6. Check back if the wait is longer than promised.
7. Thank the customer for holding.

For example
"Mr. Anderson, I'll have to check the fax machine to see if your letter came through. If it did, we can start the confirmation process right away. The fax machine is in the other room and it'll take me about two minutes. Would you like to hold for that time, or would you prefer I call you back?"
(Mr. Anderson says he'll hold.)

"Thank you, Mr. Anderson, for holding."

Transferring a call

Follow steps 1-4 of the Hold instructions above to make sure the caller understands why the call must be transferred, then gain their permission to do so. Then follow these steps to transfer a call when you know the person you are transferring to will be in:

1. Tell the caller to whom you are transferring them.
2. Provide the caller with the number and extension number of the connectee for future reference.
3. Call the connectee and greet.
4. Give your name.
5. Give the caller's name.
6. Explain the reason for their call.
7. Ask the connectee to let you know when you may transfer the call.
8. Connect the call.

For example

"Ms. Brown, let me check to see if Mr. Green is out of his meeting. It will just take me 15 seconds to check. Would you like to hold for that time?"

(Caller agrees to hold.)

(Call Mr. Green's office. He is in.)

"Mr. Green, this is Amanda in Marketing. I have a caller -- Ms. Brown -- on the line who would like to know more about the internet promotion we're running. Can you take the call now?"

(Mr. Green says he can.)

"Let me know when you're ready to take the call."

(Mr. Green gives the go-ahead to transfer the call.)

"Ms. Brown, thank you for holding. I have Mr. Green on the line now and he will take your call."

Transferring calls when the other party isn't available

The technique above works well when the other person can take the call. But what about when the other person isn't available? Basically, you follow the same procedure as outlined above for transferring. The only difference is that when you come back to the caller (after checking if the conectee is in), you:

1. Give the caller options. "Would you like Mr. Green's voice mail, or would you like me to take a message?"
2. Thank the caller for calling. "Thank you for calling, Ms. Brown. I will give Mr. Green the message as soon as he gets in."

Next up

Tips to follow when you need to take messages and/or answer other people's phones.

4.3. Taking messages and answering other people's phones

In some office situations, employees are expected to answer the phone of absent coworkers. And despite voice mail, there are still times when it's important to know how to take and relay a message. Answering phones and taking messages can sometimes breed some resentment in the person who has to handle phone calls in the other person's absence. Unfortunately, in many cases this resentment is conveyed to the caller -- very unprofessional! This section walks you through how to answer someone else's phone, as well as how to take a message, to make the best possible impression.

Answering someone else's phone

If you have to answer someone else's phone:

1. Give your company name.
2. Give your department name.
3. Give the name of the person whose phone you're answering.
4. Explain that the person isn't in.
5. Offer to take a message.

For example
"Drexel Corporation, design department, Alex Jackson's phone."

If a receptionist has already answered the phone and identified the company before transferring the call, you can simply say, "Design department, Alex Jackson's phone."

Taking a message

This topic may seem like a no-brainer, but so many people complain about missed messages or incorrect messages in the working world that it bears mentioning in a course on business etiquette.

When taking a message for someone else:

1. Get the name and number correct. Repeat this information back to the caller. Ask for the correct spelling of the name.
2. Ask for the name of the caller's company.
3. Note the date and hour.
4. Add your initials to the message.

TIP
If you have to scramble to find a pen or paper, there's no need to announce this to your caller. You might say "Hang on while I find a pen" at home, but the same rules don't apply in the workplace!

Phone facts

Ninety-four percent of the average marketing and advertising budget is spent getting people to call a business, while only 4 percent is spent on handling them.

The average hold time is 30 to 45 seconds. A business that receives 100 calls a day for 260 business days has customers on hold 200 hours a year!

Next up

Good manners and your cell phone.

4.4. Cell phone etiquette

Can you remember the days when business phone calls only happened desk to desk? Those days are gone for good. Cell phones can be great time-saving tools, but too many cell phone users put good manners on the back burner while they tell everyone within hearing range way more than they want to know.

Cell phone backlash is on the upswing as the devices go mainstream. More and more cities across the U.S. are passing laws against cell phone usage in automobiles. And more businesses are encouraging customers to do their talking outside. One Chicago restaurant even has signs posted telling customers that the restaurant is a "Cell Phone Free Establishment." Anyone caught using a cell phone in the restaurant is politely asked to leave.

Here are some etiquette tips for cell phone usage:

- Use your cell phone in public only when absolutely necessary. Keep it off or in vibrate mode in restaurants, theaters, government buildings such as the post office, and at other social gatherings.
- If you must speak while others are around, speak softly and keep the conversation short.
- Turn off your cell phone before going into a meeting. If you must have it on, explain why in advance.
- Don't ask to borrow someone else's cell phone if a public phone is nearby.
- When driving, take the few minutes it takes to make a call and pull off to the side of the road or into a parking lot. You'll be able to concentrate more fully on your call and be a lot safer to other drivers.

Moving forward

Now that we've covered body language, business attire, and verbal communication, it's time to move on to making a great impression with the written word. Be sure to complete the quiz and assignment for this lesson, then stop by the course Message Board to ask questions, share tips and solutions, and exchange horror stories -- if you know any! -- About less-than-professional phone behavior.

More phone facts

Seven out of 10 calls are placed on hold. Approximately 90 percent of callers will hang up within 40 seconds when listening to silence.

The average businessperson spends an average of 15 minutes per day, or 60 hours per year, on hold.

Lesson 5: Written communications

5.1. The goal of any written communication: focus on your audience

The goal of written communication is the same as face-to-face or telephone communications: to focus on your audience. Specifically in written communications, your goal is to produce *reader-centered* writing. Remember: it's not all about you. It's all about your audience.

How well do you rate in writing reader-centered documents? Let's find out. Pull out your last written business communication -- a memo, email, or letter -- and answer YES or NO to the following questions about your document.

1. Does the content concentrate on the reader's needs more than your own; i.e., is it formatted in an easy-to-read style?
2. Is your main message clearly stated?
3. Are your requests for actions, next steps, or deadlines highlighted with headlines or bolding?
4. Did you design for visual impact, using headlines, sidebars, white space, or bulleted lists?
5. Is your most important message strategically placed to match the reader's needs and attitudes?
6. Does each paragraph focus on one topic?
7. Are most paragraphs a maximum of five to six lines in length?
8. Are most sentences limited to 15 words maximum?
9. Did you keep your words simple, specific, and known to your readers?
10. Did you proofread for grammar, punctuation, and spelling?

How did you do? Count the number of YES responses. Then, multiply your YES responses by 10 to get your percentile score. If you scored 70 percent or higher, congratulations! You're already a pretty effective written communicator. If you scored under 70 percent, this lesson may help you improve your writing.

Xerox Corporation found that managers spent 50 percent of their time reading and trying to decipher what was meant by employee communications such as memos and letters. The time wasters weren't caused exclusively by grammatical errors; it was more of an issue of style and sentence structure.

Keep your writing current

"Dear Sir or Madam" is outdated. "To whom it may concern" is cliche. If you are writing to a vendor, use the name of the company or the title of an individual, e.g., "Dear Human Resources Director."

Next up

A formula for writing clear, focused letters and memos.

5.2. A formula for writing clear, concise letters and memos

This lesson section won't deal with the parts of a business letter or memo. Many Web sites offer business letter template downloads and most people have little trouble with the actual *format* of a business letter. What they struggle with is the *content.* That's what this section addresses.

Four things to consider before you start writing

If you take a few moments to focus on the following points before you write, you'll be glad you did.

1. Decide on the *true purpose* of the written communication:

- Why are you writing?
- Why is the reader receiving the letter, email, or memo?
- What specific action do you want the reader to take?

2. Identify your *audience*:

- Who should be on the distribution list?
- What is the reader's role in responding to the communication?
- What is the reader's likely reaction to the communication?
- How do you want the reader to react?
- Why should the reader even bother to read this?
- How well does the reader know the subject?

3. Identify your *bottom line*:

- What is the single most important point of the communication?
- If the reader were to forget everything else, what one key point do you want them to remember?

4. identify your *strategy*:

- Are you clear about deadlines and actions requested?
- What is the best method of transmission -- letter, memo, or email?
- Should you be writing this communication now, or are you too late, or too early?
- Is someone else communicating the same information and if so, should you check with that person first?

This four-point checklist also serves as a good way to evaluate memos and letters you have already written to see if they meet all the criteria for effective business communications.

Making your written communications reader-centered

Here are some tips to consider when writing business correspondence. These tips will make it easier for your readers to understand what they are to do with the communication:

- **Start with your bottom line.** It should be the first thing you write. Remember BLT: Bottom Line at the Top. State your purpose and attach supporting evidence and data as a separate document, never part of the main message.

- **Group information under headlines.** Imagining that you are writing a news story. Use headlines and sidebars to grab the reader's eye. Using headlines also helps direct the reader to information that is most important.
- **Have an action statement.** Be very specific about the action you want the reader to take.
- **Include the next steps for you.** Let the reader know what you will be doing next.

Business writing blunders

Thank-you notes should *not* be typed. When writing thank-you letters, remember: Thank the person for the specific gift or occasion. Acknowledge the effort and thoughtfulness that went into picking out the gift. Report how you have used the gift or how you are looking forward to using it in the future.

Keep this formula available

It's a good idea to keep templates and guidelines available on your computer to review at a moment's notice when composing letters and memos. Consistency is key in office communication.

Next up

Email etiquette tips.

5.3. Email etiquette

We have so many ways of communicating now: mail, fax, voice mail, cell phones, and now -- email. But how do you know which method of communicating is preferred in which circumstances? A basic rule is this: use email for informal messages.

When not to use email:

- Don't even *think* of emailing a message of condolence to a colleague!
- Don't use email for thank-you notes or notes of congratulations to a colleague. A hand-written note is much more appropriate in these situations.
- If it's at all personal or embarrassing in any way, don't send it over the office email system.
- Don't send jokes, sound files, funny photos, or chain letters over the office email system.
- Don't use email as a substitute for a face-to-face meeting.
- Don't email serious information. It is too dangerous to rely on for truly important messages.

When to use email:

- As a supplement to other forms of communication or as a substitute for paper.
- As a follow-up to a meeting.
- When it is the best way to get time-sensitive material out.
- When exchanging computer files or data.
- When you want to send informal messages.

Use and abuse

Just because many consider email to be an informal means of communication doesn't mean that your messages have to be disheveled. Try not to fall into the trap of being quick and careless while using email -- even though the medium is quick and easy.

Some tips on style

- Use proper grammar.
- Use proper punctuation.
- Avoid writing in all lower case. It makes the message look trivial and is more difficult to read.
- Don't write in all capitals. This is like SHOUTING AT SOMEONE. Use capitals to emphasize individual words.
- Keep sentences short.
- Don't repeat.
- Use bullet points and headlines.
- If it's a long message, break it into paragraphs.
- The main message of an email should be no more than one screen in length. If it's longer than that, take most of the supporting material and put it into an attachment.
- Check for tone. (See next lesson page.)
- Use a spell checker.
- Never forward email without the original author's permission.

Extra! extra!

Don't send anything in an email that you wouldn't want to see on the office bulletin board. Legally, your company owns and has the right to read all employee email on the company computer system. And don't think that they won't! Also, remember that deleted email does not "go away." It *can* be recovered and retraced.

Computer know-how

E-mail etiquette is only the tip of the iceberg of computing expertise you are expected to know in today's business environment. Polish your skills at HP's computing expertise center, which provides technology tips and how-to guides, in addition to helping you choose the best computing products for your needs.

Next up

Tone is just as important as content. Grammar matters, too.

5.4. Watch your tone and mind your grammar

For some reason, the written word doesn't communicate sarcasm well -- nor humor, nor jokes. There's something about black-and-white that makes it more important -- more formal, more meaningful -- and more likely to come back and haunt you. After all, if it's in black and white, it's there for the world to see. When you write something there's no saying you didn't.

That's why it's more important than ever to be aware of your tone in all of your written communications. You see, when you write something, you know what *you* mean, but the recipient can't always *read* what you mean.

In any communication, your intent is irrelevant. The only thing that matters is the perception of the receiver. Perception is reality. So, here are some suggestions to help communicate the right tone:

1. Avoid phrases that irritate, like the following:

- *You'll have to* or *I need you to.* Replace with "It would be helpful if" or "Could you please?"
- *Where is your ______?* (when asking about a report, information, or a project). Replace this with "Please update me on your progress."

2. Avoid writing in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS.
3. Use the smiley icons or vocabulary symbols at the end of sentences that could be confused.
4. Have someone else read your written communication before you send it to make sure your tone is appropriate.
5. If it's not possible to have someone else read the communication -- set it aside for a few minutes, then come back and reread it.
6. Hit THINK before you hit SEND.

A quick lesson in grammar

One grammatical, spelling, or punctuation error can ruin an otherwise effective business communication. If you have access to spell-check, use it! Below are some of the most common grammatical errors:

Next up

- Leaving the apostrophe out of it's when it's a contraction for "it is."
- Using less instead of fewer. Less refers to quantity; fewer to individual things you can count.
- Using irregardless for regardless. There is no such word as irregardless, regardless of how many times you've heard it!
- Using, "I, myself" or "you, yourself." (Use only myself for emphasis.)
- Misusing imply and infer. The speaker implies; the listener infers.
- Failing to have the number of the noun agree with the verb. Some examples:

"Everyone is (not are) eligible."
"The group of writers is (not are) waiting. "
"Either Alex or Amanda is (not are) qualified."
"Both Alex and Amanda are qualified."

Moving forward

This lesson has provided you some tips for looking your best on the printed page. With writing quality on the decline overall, make yourself stand out with careful, focused, and grammatically correct business writing.

Lesson 5 will cover another important topic: meeting etiquette. Meanwhile, take the quiz and do the assignment for this lesson, then stop by the course Message Board to discuss what you've learned!

What's in a name?

In business correspondence, it's important to get a person's name and title correct. Name and title identify a person -- particularly if ego is involved -- and this shows concern on your part. The best way to do this is to call the business and ask for the correct name, spelling, and title.

Lesson 6: Meeting etiquette

6.1. Ugh, meetings

Mention an upcoming meeting to most employees and you'd think you asked them to clean the office toilets. How often have you heard variations of the following?

- "Aw, another waste of time."
- "Great. Another interruption. Now I'll have to stay late for sure."
- "They never say anything worthwhile."
- "I'll just take my work with me into the meeting."
- "Meetings are like soap operas; you can miss six months of them and still get the idea of what's going on."
- "Time to listen to the boss drone on again."

How we spend our time in meetings

According to a network MCI Conferencing White Paper, professionals who attend meetings on a regular basis admit to doing the following during meetings:

- Daydreaming (91%)
- Missing meetings (96%)
- Missing parts of meetings (95%)
- Bringing other work to meetings (73%)
- Dozing during meetings (39%)

Meetings do matter!

Meetings are a place not only to get information, but also where people make judgments about each other. Meetings are your stage to present yourself in a positive light. Don't miss out on that opportunity. It could make or break your career!

In the rest of this lesson you'll get tips for getting more from meetings, as well as making a good impression while you're there.

Meeting faux pas in the Japanese culture

Showing a serious lack of courtesy or insufficient respect to the ranking senior executive is insulting. This is especially serious when done by someone considerably junior to the executive in terms of age or status. It is also poor manners in Japan to ask for sugar or milk for your green tea or to begin sipping before being invited to do so.

6.2. Meeting behavior basics

In order to really shine in business meetings, there are some behavior basics for meetings that will serve you well.

Making your entrance

- Enter decisively.
- Don't stand in the doorway.
- While standing, shake hands, and call people by their first names.
- Introduce yourself to those you don't know.
- If you are seated and introduced to someone new, stand up, smile, and shake hands.

Where to sit

- Avoid sitting at either end of the table.
- Don't sit next to the chairperson or senior officer. That chair may be reserved for his or her aide or secretary.
- If you're not familiar with the seating arrangements, ask if it's okay to sit anywhere.

What not to do

- Don't fiddle -- leave paperclips unbent and don't bounce them.
- Don't doodle on a notepad. (People will start trying to see what you're doing. And this draws attention to the fact that you're not paying attention.)
- Don't chew gum or pop mints or candy into your mouth.
- PLEASE don't chew ice cubes!!!
- Don't ask for coffee or other refreshments unless they are being offered.
- If food and drinks are offered, clear your plate as soon as possible.
- Avoid letting your mind wander, no matter how boring the meeting may seem.

Pay attention to your body language

- Sit straight, both feet on the floor.
- Even though you're sitting straight, appear relaxed, and attentive.
- If you do cross your legs, cross them at the ankles.
- Don't cross your arms in front of you; it communicates resistance -- or even hostility.
- For men -- keep your jacket and tie on unless otherwise specified.

Speak up!

There is nothing more aggravating in a meeting that not being able to hear the person who is speaking. Speaking too softly conveys that you believe what you're saying really has no merit. If you don't think it's important, why should the rest of the group?

Some other tips for speaking at meetings:

- Don't stand up, unless people routinely stand while speaking at such meetings or unless you're asked to stand up.
- Take a second to frame your thoughts. You don't have to start blurting out something the second you're called upon to speak.
- BLT -- Put the bottom line on top. Say the most important thing first.
- Be brief.
- Don't ramble.
- Don't repeat yourself.
- Use positive language.
- Never begin with an apology, e.g., "This might not work, but. . . ."
- Avoid confrontational language such as, "That idea won't work," or "That's completely irrelevant to the issue."
- Use "we." Whenever referring to your department, company, team, or a project group, always use the pronoun "we." If things are going well, it shows you're a real team player by sharing the glory. If things are going poorly, it takes the focus off of you and spreads the responsibility around.
- Whatever you say, say it with authority. Use a confident tone.

The cost of unproductive meetings

According to a network MCI Conferencing White Paper, most professionals attend a total of 61.8 meetings per month. Research from Nelson and Economy (Better Business Meetings) indicates that over 50 percent of this meeting time is wasted. Assuming each of these meetings is one hour long, professionals lose 31 hours per month in unproductive meetings, or approximately four work days.

Upgrade your writing instrument

Invest in a high-quality pen. People do notice. It's good for your image because people tend to attach importance to symbols. Plus, it will be fun to use!

Taking notes

Taking notes at your meeting on a tablet PC will not only help you to stay focused and involved, but will convey to the meeting leader that you are paying attention. The tablet PC is meant for mobile professionals needing powerful and highly-mobile computers that also offer enhanced security and reliability.

6.3. Basic rules and etiquette for business meetings

These so-called "rules" are pretty basic. But someone ignores them at nearly every meeting. So here's a quick review of meeting basics:

- Be ready. Prepare ahead of time. Arrive with all the materials you think you may need: a report, pen, paper, notebook, or laptop computer.
- Keep the materials you need handy so people won't have to wait while you fish around for things.
- Always put your briefcase or purse on the floor next to you. NEVER put these on the conference table.
- Show up on time or a little early.
- If you do have to be late, let the meeting organizer know ahead of time so a seat can be reserved for you in an area that won't cause too much disturbance when you do arrive.
- If you are late, apologize and give a reason. If you don't give a good reason, you'll generate resentment from the people who did arrive on time. Plus, if you fail to give a good reason, you're basically saying the meeting isn't important enough for you to show up on time.
- Decide ahead of time what you have to say about the issue at hand and prepare your remarks. Practice mentally a few times before you arrive at the meeting.
- Get a copy of Roberts Rules of Order and become familiar with it. You can find a summary version at http://www.robertsrules.org or find a copy at any library. Only the most formal meetings abide by these rules, but you may someday find yourself in such a meeting.

A royal affair

The custom of giving the honored guest or the top aide the chair to the right of the boss began when kings always had the most trusted ally at their right. This meant that no enemy could control the king's sword hand. Because the sword was customarily carried on the right side, the same strategy was used while walking and on horseback. This is how the term "right-hand man" came into play.

6.4. Handling conflict and objections during a meeting

Whether it's resistance to your proposal or a heckler in the back of the room, conflict will inevitably arise if you attend enough meetings.

Some common meeting robbers and how to handle each type

Every meeting seems to contain at least one of the following:

Side talkers

These are the people who just can't seem to stop having side conversations with the other people at the table. To handle a side-talker:

- Complete your thought, look at the person, and pause until they stop talking.

Ramblers

Good grief! We've all been in meetings where the speaker just can't seem to get to the point. To move them along:

- Acknowledge the question, then use a CLOSED-ENDED (can only be answered with a yes or no) question to refocus the participant to the topic at hand.

EXAMPLE: "I liked your question about how this new marketing plan will impact the workload of the telesales center. Are you concerned about increased call volume or the added paperwork that the center will have to process with the anticipated increase in orders?"

Hecklers

Simply put, these are the rude people at the meeting. There's no other way to say it. You have several choices when managing a heckler:

- Ignore them.
- Redirect them by asking a question appropriate to the topic.
- Defer the problem to the group ("What does everyone else think about this?").
- Invite the person to a hallway discussion.

Challengers

There's one in every crowd. You know who they are. They're usually sitting in the back of the room, arms folded, hanging on your every word. Then, when the moment is right, they fire their verbal salvos at you. They'll raise their hand, and in their most authoritative voice say something like, "Isn't it true that . . . "

Challengers could have several purposes: (1) to reduce your credibility or (2) to increase their prestige in the eyes of the group. Either way, a challenger usually has a pretty fragile ego, so handle with care.

One option to handle a challenger is to say one of the following:

- "Help me understand what you mean, or where, specifically, you think this program will fail."
- "That's certainly one option. It's not the one we're recommending now, and I would be interested in hearing the benefits to your option. Could you write that up for me and put it on my desk? Then, I'll put that on the agenda for the next meeting."

Non-participants

These are the people who sit there and say nothing. You don't know if they're on your side, if they think everything you're saying is bogus, or if they're just sleep-deprived.

To get a non-participant to participate, the best strategy is to ask them a question to get them involved. A simple "What do you think?" may be enough to initiate an interaction.

Nearly half of the work week in meetings!

A poll from GM Consultants surveying people in supervisory positions found that 30 percent spent an estimated 16 hours a week in meetings. The survey also uncovered some interesting facts about respondents, who reported they always did the following:

- Allow all attendees to participate (88%)
- Define a meeting's purposes (66%)
- Address each item on the agenda (62%)
- Assign follow-up action (59%)
- Record discussion (47%)
- Invite only essential personnel (46%)
- Write an agenda, with time frames (36%)
- Specify questions for each issue (12%)

71 percent of respondents were working in companies with annual sales of less than $10 million.

Moving forward

Now that you've learned a little about how to handle yourself in a meeting conducted by someone else, it's time to look at how to manage your own meeting. We'll cover that in the next lesson.

For now, be sure to take the quiz and do the assignment for this lesson. Then stop by the course Message Board to share questions, concerns, and experiences with your instructor and classmates.

Etiquette faux pas in Muslim countries

Do not use your left hand to receive or offer anything; the left hand is considered unsanitary. When seated in a chair, keep both feet planted on the ground; showing the soles of your feet is considered offensive. Never touch someone's head; it is regarded as sacred. Refrain from giving gifts of pictures of animals or people; Islam disapproves of realistic images of living creatures.

Lesson 7: Running your own meeting

7.1. Who to invite and how to write a proper meeting announcement

Schedule the meeting

According to Creighton and Adams (1998) in *CyberMeetings*, typical meeting agenda items are covered only about half the time (53 percent). In this lesson, you'll learn get tips on how to plan, announce, run, and follow up on an effective meeting.

How long should the meeting last?

The biggest mistake most people make when scheduling a meeting is miscalculating the amount of time needed for a successful meeting. Here are some tips when deciding on the length:

- Don't try to cram too many agenda topics into a 30-minute meeting. A good rule of thumb is no more than two topics per meeting. Adult education statistics show that it's not possible to keep an adult's attention for more than 30 minutes at a time. That's not to say the meeting shouldn't go longer than 30 minutes. But if it does, it had better be fast-paced and interesting.
- Don't get caught up in the 30-or-60 mindset. Many people will automatically allocate either 30 minutes or a full hour when scheduling a meeting simply because these quantities of time are common and expected. Don't feel pressured to fill an hour if you don't have an hour of issues to cover. If your meeting only needs 40 minutes, then only schedule 40 minutes.

Who should attend the meeting?

In most meetings in corporate America, 20 percent of the people who are asked to attend have no real need to be present. That wastes the person's time and the company's resources.

- Only invite individuals whose attendance is absolutely necessary.
- If there's someone who should know what happened in the meeting, but whose attendance isn't absolutely necessary, send them a quick email outlining the outcomes of the meeting.

Deciding the agenda

- The best way to guarantee active and interested participation at a meeting is to include agenda items that are of great concern to the meeting attendees.
- When you send out the meeting invitation, ask attendees if they have any agenda item requests. That will allow you to include those items on the agenda.
- If someone has an agenda item that isn't directly related to the meeting topic, ask the attendee if you can hold a separate meeting in the future on that specific topic.

When and how to send meeting invitations

- The nature of your meeting will dictate how you send the meeting invitation. For small, informal meetings the telephone will work fine. For larger meetings, you may want to consider email or a memo.
- Send meeting invitations for in-house meetings at least one week in advance, when possible.
- Send meeting invitations for formal meetings two to four weeks in advance.

Note: If you must call a meeting sooner than a week's notice, follow up your email or memo announcement with a phone call so the attendee can be informed as soon as possible.

Writing the meeting announcement

The meeting announcement should include several components:

- Place, date, and time of the meeting
- Meeting initiator -- your name
- Invited attendee -- your guest
- The SINGLE purpose of the meeting
- Each agenda item and time frames designated for each item

- Advanced preparation required by the attendees

Every meeting purpose statement should include a benefit to the attendees. People who receive meeting invitations should always be able to answer the question, "What's the benefit to me, personally, of attending?" If they can answer this question, you've done a good job of identifying who should attend and what the meeting will entail.

When participants have the agenda and access to background information before the meeting, it gives them sufficient time to prepare for any discussions or decisions that will occur during the meeting. When distributing the agenda, remind participants that it's their responsibility to come prepared to the meeting.

Who sits where?

- In most meetings today, it's acceptable to allow participants to sit where they want. However, you may want to reserve the seat next to you for your assistant. Also, if others will be contributing to the meeting, make sure they are seated close to the front of the room.
- Leave a few seats open near the exit to accommodate latecomers and those who need to leave a few minutes early.

A company that takes its meetings seriously

Intel Corporation is an example of an organization that takes its meetings very seriously. Walk into any conference room at any Intel factory or office anywhere in the world and you will see a poster on the wall with a series of simple questions about the meetings that take place there:

- Do you know the purpose of this meeting?
- Do you have an agenda?
- Do you know your role?

Every new employee, from the most junior production worker to the highest-ranking executive, is required to take the company's course on effective meetings. For years, the course was taught by CEO Andy Grove, who believed that good meetings were such an important part of Intel's culture that it was worth his time to train all employees.

Next up

How to handle interruptions.

7.2. Handling interruptions

When leading a meeting, there are basically four types of individuals who can spoil your meeting by incessant interruptions. Here is a list of each type and how to recognize them:

Monopolizers

- **How to recognize them:** They interrupt, often. They ramble and repeat. They do this because they enjoy hearing themselves speak.
- **Tips for dealing with Monopolizers:** Don't argue with them, but don't hesitate to confront them. Wait until they come up for air and interrupt them by name. Note the point they've made and immediately invite someone else to comment on the topic.

Distracters

- **How to recognize them:** They seek attention. To get it, they'll often bring up irrelevant topics that waste time.
- **Tips for dealing with Distracters:** Firmly halt Distracters, restate the meeting purpose, and ask them to answer a specific question to get them to focus on the main topic.

Snipers

- **How to recognize them:** They resort to stage-whispered, snide comments to challenge your authority by switching attention from you to them.
- **Tips for dealing with Snipers:** Shine the spotlight on them and bluntly ask them to share their comments with everyone. Most will be so embarrassed that they'll decline. This may sound like we are in school, but it works.

Skeptics

- **How to recognize them:** They criticize everything you or others say.
- **Tips for dealing with Skeptics:** If they become negative or critical during the meeting, let them know that you're looking for solutions, not criticism. Then ask them to contribute.

Next up

Leadership tips for keeping a meeting on topic and on track.

7.3. Demonstrating true leadership in meetings

Think about the group dynamics before and during the meeting. As a leader you need to recognize the various roles group members are taking, as well as about the kind of roles you are taking.

- **Work for a balance between businesslike and a fun, casual environment.** If you are perceived as too businesslike and task-oriented by others, you may have difficulty being accepted as a group member as well as a leader. Remember, what's important in a group setting is not what you think you are doing, but how others perceive and interpret what you are doing.
- **Be responsible for limiting discussions and setting time parameters for various activities.** When deciding how much time to spend on a certain issue, think about how complex the task should be, and how important it is to the group.
- **Clarifying for others where the group is in terms of solving a problem or working through an issue.** Leaders need to be *reality testers* -- they need to bring up points such as: "Are we spending too much time setting this schedule?" or "This is a major decision; perhaps we should

spend more time thinking about it before we reach a consensus," and "Is the color of the poster really that important?"

TIP
When challenging the importance of a point or argument, think about respecting the person who is presenting the point. While their idea may not be worthwhile, they themselves, as members of the group, are certainly worthwhile. Also, be willing to put the group's needs above your own needs. For example, if you are totally bored but the group seems to be accomplishing something by further discussion, it's best to let it continue.

- **Keep in mind that different types of meetings call for different styles of leadership.** Meetings held just so members of a group can get together and *catch up* with each other can be much less formal and task-oriented than meetings called to handle a specific problem.
- **Interrupt when you have to, but be nice about it.** When you believe it's necessary to interrupt someone, wait until they have finished the sentence. Try to be considerate of that person's feelings; acknowledge that you are interrupting and explain the reason why, if possible.
- **Good leaders are not monopolizers in meetings.** Effective leaders are facilitators who allow others to participate as much as possible. You can accomplish this by encouraging others to offer input or ideas and by supporting them when they do, even if their ideas are not seen as excellent by the group. For example: "That doesn't look like a realistic option right now, Jack, but I appreciate you suggesting it."
- **Be consistent in enforcing procedures and limiting discussions, or be able to explain why exceptions are being made.** Always think about the reasons for what you are doing; an effective leader is not arbitrary or capricious unless really necessary. For example, it might be okay to be arbitrary about setting a deadline for a project if the group cannot come to a consensus on it.
- **Recognize and utilize other formal and informal leaders in the group.** Respect their leadership and work with them rather than against them. In most cases, it's more important to work well as a group function than to repeated emphasize that that you're in charge. Watch out for "contrary" leaders; people who possess some leadership abilities but seem to be using these abilities against the better interests of the group.

Next up

Solutions for a common challenge: keeping meetings on time.

7.4. Keeping the meeting on time

Out of respect for the commitment and sanity of everyone who attends, meetings should never run over the time allotted -- especially regularly scheduled meetings. Here are some tips to keep your meeting on schedule:

- If the session gets bogged down with an issue, schedule it for another meeting. If the meeting must conclude by taking an action or decision, then identify this early enough or reschedule accordingly.
- Tell all the participants before the meeting starts that it will go as long as necessary to reach the stated conclusion. Don't mislead people by minimizing the amount of work involved; that kind of trickery will only come back to haunt you.
- Have a timekeeper.

Basically, if you follow all the necessary preparation steps and keep to your meeting agenda and outline, you should be able to keep your meeting running on schedule.

Moving forward

In the next lesson, you will learn how to deal with conflict among coworkers in the workplace.

After you've completed the quiz and assignment for this lesson, come say hello to your instructor and classmates on the course Message Board.

Lesson 8: Conflict management with coworkers

8.1. Why we have conflict: the personality types

In this lesson, we'll take a look at the nine primary personality types outlined by Don Richard Riso in his book, *Discovering Your Personality Type.* If you're interested in more detailed descriptions of the personality styles, or would like an assessment of your own personality style, you may want to get a copy of this book. It's available at most libraries as well as any bookstore.

Type one: the reformer

A Reformer exhibits these characteristics:

- Is a perfectionist
- Favors logic, information, and details
- Uses words such as MUST and SHOULD
- Is neat, well-organized, punctual, and exact
- Has strong control over emotions

Dominant patterns:

- Moves toward the ideal and perfection
- Likes details and facts
- Has a strong sense of right and wrong
- Loves rules and policies because they clarify right and wrong
- Compares everything to the ideal
- Notices what's wrong or what's missing
- Sees everything as black and white

Hillary Clinton is an example of a Reformer. Fictional characters include Monica from *Friends* and Murray from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*.

Type two: the helper

A Helper exhibits these characteristics:

- Puts others' needs above their own

- Is a good listener
- Can be a slow talker
- Places a lot of importance on people and relationships

Dominant patterns:

- Moves toward acceptance, freedom, and helping
- Likes people
- Can be passive or quiet
- Compares everything to the ideal
- Observes and hones in on the problems of others
- Prefers the big picture, not details
- Has a slow tempo
- Has an external frame of reference and seeks acceptance from others
- Empathizes towards others' feelings

Barbara Bush and the late Princess Diana are examples of Helpers. Fictional examples include Mary from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and Dr. Greene from *ER*.

Type three: the motivator

A Motivator exhibits these characteristics:

- Is highly motivated and success-oriented
- Tends to be well-groomed, well-attired, and attractive
- Is hard-working and image conscious
- Is a good planner and self-promoter
- Asserts oneself and is a go-getter

Dominant patterns:

- Moves toward accomplishments, success, and looking good
- Sorts according to activity (rather than people or details)
- Is goal-oriented
- Is future-oriented
- Prefers visual mediums
- Has a medium to fast tempo
- Packages oneself and does things that get attention

Bill Clinton is an example of a Motivator; Tony Robbins is perhaps the most glaringly Type Three person on the planet! Fictional examples include Jerry McGuire and George Jefferson from *The Jeffersons.*

Type four: the artist

An Artist exhibits these characteristics:

- Has a unique or outstanding style (i.e., clothing, style, manner)

- Can be dramatic, moody, sensitive, and somewhat withdrawn
- Thrives on intensity
- Can be envious of other people

Dominant patterns:

- Moves toward being unique or authentic and creative
- Responds to opinions
- Compares oneself to others
- Has a highly developed visual sense
- Is highly emotional
- Can be passive
- Focuses on the past and very little on the future

As you might expect, many real-life artists fall into this category. Madonna and Michael Jackson are two that come to mind. The best fictional examples are Ted from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and Phoebe from *Friends*.

Type five: the thinker

A Thinker exhibits these characteristics:

- Has expertise in some unique or specialized field
- Covets privacy
- Loves knowledge and is information-oriented
- Can be uneasy in social settings
- Is a minimalist and never trendy
- Has a disorganized desk

Dominant patterns:

- Moves toward knowledge and solitude
- Sorts by information
- Is often out of touch with feelings
- Has an internal frame of reference
- Takes a long time to make a decision

Bill Gates is the most striking example. The best fictional example is Frasier from *Frasier*.

Type six: the loyalist

A Loyalist exhibits these characteristics:

- Prefers established rules, guidelines, or philosophies
- Focuses on worst-case scenarios
- Is indecisive and frequently flip-flops
- Can be contradictory in nature

- Places a high priority on loyalty and trust

Dominant patterns:

- Moves toward security and loyalty
- Moves away from conflict
- Sorts by information and scans for "danger signs"
- Can be passive
- Has an external frame of reference and prefers to align oneself with someone stable and seemingly greater

The late Richard Nixon is an example of a Type Six, or the character of Cliff from *Cheers*.

Type seven: the generalist

A Generalist exhibits these characteristics:

- Is optimistic, full of life, and fun-loving
- Tends to be outgoing, spontaneous, and aggressive
- Is witty, charming, and charismatic
- Is multi-talented, knowledgeable about many things, and has many interests
- Loves attention and hates boredom

Dominant patterns:

- Moves toward pleasure and choice
- Moves away from commitment
- Sorts by activity and searches for new or exciting experiences
- Looks at the big picture
- Has a medium to fast tempo
- Is proactive and aggressive about getting their own way
- Has an internal frame of reference and internally decides if something is worth their attention

Bill Maher, the late John F. Kennedy, and George Clooney are examples of Generalists. From the fictional world, an example is Dharma from *Dharma and Greg*.

Type eight: the leader

A Leader exhibits these characteristics:

- Is strong-willed, confident, dominant, bossy, or a leader
- Prefers straight talk and getting to the bottom line
- Has a short fuse and is quick to anger
- Can be intense and may love a good fight
- Is very aggressive and persuasive about getting their own way

Dominant patterns:

- Is in control, power-focused, and fears losing power
- Is proactive
- Has a strongly developed internal frame of reference
- Sorts by people, information, and activity
- Moves toward desires

Donald Trump and Elizabeth Taylor are typical Type Eights. Fictional examples include Bobby from *The Practice* and Dirty Harry.

Type nine: the peacemaker

A Peacemaker exhibits these characteristics:

- Has a gentle attitude and a soothing quality
- Is very agreeable
- Can be a slow talker
- Is optimistic and always sees the good in people or situations
- Can be somewhat withdrawn or has trouble asserting oneself or addressing their own needs

Dominant patterns:

- Moves toward union, peace, and harmony and away from conflict
- Sorts by people
- Is kinesthetic and emotional
- Has an external frame of reference and lets others' opinions supercede their own

Jimmy Carter is a good example of a Peacemaker. Edith from *All in the Family* and Woody from *Cheers* are good fictional examples.

The source

The personality types described in this lesson are from the book *Discovering Your Personality Type: The NEW Enneagram Questionnaire* by Don Richard Riso (ISBN 0395710928). You might enjoy using this book to take the test and learn more about your own personality type and communication style.

We're a mixed bag!

Very few people fall completely into one personality type. Most of us exhibit characteristics and tendencies that make us dominant in one type. But we also have what are called *personality wings;* these are our secondary personality styles. Think of yourself like a motorcycle with a sidecar; your dominant personality style is the motorcycle itself, and the sidecar is your secondary style.

Next up

Tips for interacting with various personality types.

8.2. How to interact most effectively with the various personality types

Type one: the reformer

If you want to get along with a Reformer, you should:

- Be punctual
- Let Type Ones do things the way they want to do them
- Be practical and straightforward, since Reformers are generally forward and reserved and prefer objective facts to subjective opinions
- Get down to business right away
- Emphasize logic and practicality
- Speak at a slow to medium pace
- Be factual
- Keep small talk short (around 30 seconds)

Don't:

- Criticize
- Question their integrity
- Display inconsistent behavior or immoral behavior
- Talk too quickly
- Make broad, general statements
- Place tight deadlines on a decision
- Apply time pressure in any way

Type two: the helper

If you want to get along with a Helper, you should:

- Take time to "small talk" before getting down to business. This is the person where your small talk may run up to the full two-minute mark.
- Spend time developing a relationship with a Helper. When you let business come second, your chances of doing business at all increases significantly.
- Do something nice for them (pay them a compliment).
- Emphasize the benefits to people over the *bottom line.*
- Place more emphasis on the general, rather than specifics.

Don't:

- Talk fast or impersonally
- Forget to thank them

Type three: the motivator

These tips will help you get along with a Motivator:

- Praise their accomplishments
- Give them room to open up and express their true feelings
- Present them with opportunities that allow them to excel
- Show how your plan will help make them stand out and be recognized
- Be future-focused

Don't:

- Ignore them
- Focus on their defeats
- Focus on anything negative
- Talk about the past or refer to past successes -- they want to know what your future plans are

Type four: the artist

Artists can be temperamental. To get along with them, you should:

- Make them feel unique or special
- Give them room to open up and express their true feelings
- Present them with opportunities that allow them to excel
- Show how your plan will help make them stand out and be recognized
- Sell the *uniqueness* of your proposal, idea, or product

Don't:

- Ignore them
- Focus on their defeats
- Focus on anything negative
- Talk about specifics
- Spend too much time on one topic

Type five: the thinker

To get along well with a Thinker, keep these tips in mind:

- Be logical in your presentation
- Provide detailed supporting facts for any claims
- Give them plenty of time to make a decision

Don't:

- Question their competency
- Rush them
- Pressure them

- Intrude their space
- Spend a lot of time on the warm-up, unless it's business-related

Type six: the loyalist

To make a good impression on a Loyalist:

- Be positive
- Make decision-making as easy as possible for them: don't overload them with too many options, and start off by asking them to make small, relatively easy decisions
- Stay grounded and reassuring

Don't:

- Take an unfamiliar point of view
- Be evasive
- Pressure them
- Shift gears
- Argue with them -- Loyalists take seemingly forever to make up their mind and once they do, good luck trying to change it

Type seven: the generalist
Do:
A Generalist appreciates it when you:

- Match their enthusiasm and energy levels
- Are optimistic
- Give them plenty of room (they hate being boxed in)
- Make the presentation exciting
- React to what they are saying

Don't

- Limit their choices or restrict their freedom
- Demonstrate pessimism or any type of negativity

Type eight: leader

These tips will help you get along with a Leader:

- Be straightforward with them (they hate indirectness)
- Match their intensity
- Let them feel as if they are in charge
- Keep warm-ups to a minimum and make it straight talk (in other words, don't small-talk to these folks about the weather)
- Speak at a fast pace

Don't

- Tell them what they can and cannot do
- Try to con or take advantage of them
- Be indecisive or wimpy
- Be soft-spoken

Type nine: peacemaker

To get along with a Peacemaker:

- Focus on the positive
- Speak slowly
- Stick with the familiar (they are creatures of habit and comfort)
- Spend more time on small talk -- perhaps up to the full two-minute mark

Don't:

- Pressure them
- Put them in positions that will force them to be confrontational
- Push them aside

Next up

What to do when departments don't get along.

8.3 . What to do about conflict between departments

Two types of conflict

In the workplace there are *substantive conflicts* and *personalized conflicts.* Substantive conflicts can be good because they deal with disagreements about the substance of issues such as decisions, ideas, directions, and actions.

Substantive conflict

Substantive conflict can occur on just about any issue, but its moving force is that the two parties simply *disagree about an issue.* Handled correctly, parties in conflict can create, for themselves and those around them, the ability to resolve an issue with something creative -- something better than the original position of either party.

The primary caveats of substantive conflict management are:

1. Discussions are entered into with a goal of solving the problem, not winning.
2. Substantive conflict is fueled by a desire to reach a win/win solution.

3. Substantive conflict takes into account the needs of each party, as well as the overall good of the company.

Personalized conflict

The second form, *personalized conflict*, is often called a personality conflict. In this type of conflict, the two parties simply don't like each other much.

While substantive conflict, if handled correctly, can be very productive, personalized conflict is almost never a good thing. Here are several reasons:

1. Personalized conflict is fueled primarily by emotion (usually anger, frustration) and perceptions about someone else's personality, character, or motives. When conflict is personalized and extreme, each party acts as if the other is suspect as a person.
2. Because personalized conflict is about emotions and not issues, problem-solving almost never works. Neither party is really interested in solving a problem. In fact, in extreme cases, the parties go out of their ways to create new ones -- imagined or real.
3. Personalized conflicts almost always get worse over time, if they cannot be converted to substantive conflict. That's because each person expects problems, looks for them, finds them, and gets angrier.

A process to handle conflict
Step one: identify which type of conflict you're in

When involved in a conflict situation, it is important that you are aware of whether you and the other party are dealing with a substantive conflict or a personalized one. It isn't always easy to tell them apart, and it is difficult to look honestly at oneself. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I dislike the other person or get frustrated with them?
2. Do I see the other person as untrustworthy and undeserving of respect?
3. Is my emotional reaction to the conflict appropriate to its seriousness or lack thereof?
4. Do I really want to "win"?

If the answer to any of these questions is *yes*, you may be setting yourself up for a personalized conflict that nobody can win in the long term.

Step two: move to substantive issues

Even in situations where both you and the other party have personalized the conflict, you can work to focus on specific issues. You do not have direct control over another person, but you do have control over yourself. By moving to the issues, and staying there, you will also encourage the other person to do so.

It isn't easy, of course. The trick is to try to put aside your negative perceptions about the other person, and not to dwell on them. That's an internal thing. Every time you think to yourself "What an idiot!"(or all the other negative things), you make it more difficult to stay focused on problem-solving, rather than winning or getting your own way.

Step three: work to prevent personalization

It is rare that personalization occurs just on the basis of two incompatible personalities. Usually, personalization occurs because conflict on substantive issues is handled badly. That is, one or both parties behave in non-cooperative ways.

Step four: find the common points of agreement

In almost any conflict, it's possible to find areas where you can agree. This is a process called *Priority Matrixing.*

In any conflict there will be things that are a high priority for you. But those things are probably a low priority for the other person.

If the two of you continue to focus only on your individual high-priority issues, what are the chances that you'll reach an agreeable solution? ZERO! The best starting place for resolving substantive conflict is to start with the issues that *match.* These are the issues that are a high priority for both of you.

Next up

Tips for managing conflicts before they escalate.

Conflict in the workplace: survey results

According to a *Workplace Today* online survey, a large majority of readers say that conflict is causing a lot of disruptions in their workplaces. On a scale of 1-10, 68 percent rate the damage a 7 or higher.

When asked, "Is conflict disrupting your workplace?" 11 percent rated it a 10, 34 percent gave it an 8, and 23 percent gave it a 7.

8.4. Managing disagreements before they erupt into conflict

The best way to handle conflicts is to catch them before they erupt into actual conflicts. But how can you do that? Following these steps can help you identify and resolve conflict before it begins.

Identify the types of questions the other person is asking.

Questions in the workplace basically fall into two categories: *challenge* and *information-seeking.*

Information-seeking questions are productive; they are an honest attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.

The challenge question, on the other hand, is one intended to cast doubt on your suggestion or idea. Skeptics most often use challenge questions. An example of a challenge question would be, "Are you sure that won't interfere with productivity in my department?"

If the question is a challenge question -- project confidence, then supply supporting facts.

Your goal is to reassure the person that what you are suggesting is reasonable. Then, ask the person if the facts you just mentioned seem reasonable. This will open a productive dialogue that is aimed at substantive conflict resolution.

If the other person still refuses to see your point of view, identify "match" areas in the priority matrix.

You may even want to list where your matches lie, i.e., both of your high-priority interests. This gives you a starting point for rational discussion and will prevent escalation into conflict.

Goodbye and good luck

Thanks for taking this course! We hope you've learned a lot about how to present yourself professionally in a variety of situations, and that you now know some valuable business etiquette tips to help you get along in today's workplace. After you take the quiz and do the assignment for this course, be sure to stop by the course Message Board with any final comments, questions, tips, or business etiquette stories (cautionary or otherwise.)

It's common sense

Managing and avoiding conflict in the workplace really boils down to one simple idea: respecting other people and treating them with dignity.

