
Communication Nightmares
Solutions to Your Top
Communication Problems

T r a i n i n g L e a d e r ' s G u i d e

AMI AMERICAN MEDIA
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HOW-TO TRAINING PRODUCTS & SERVICES

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Communication Nightmares

P r e p a r a t i o n M a t e r i a l s

Icon Key



Read or
Paraphrase



Worksheet



Video



Flipchart



Ask and
Discuss

Introduction

Dealing with communication breakdowns in the workplace can sometimes be...well, a nightmare! It may seem easier to live with a communication problem than to confront it. Unfortunately, that doesn't make the situation any easier to deal with. The situation compounds itself, and then you've got an even bigger problem.

Communication Nightmares: Solutions to Your Top Communication Problems is a video-based training program that provides participants with practical skills to effectively deal with the following communication nightmares:

- How do I get my message across to someone who just doesn't get it?
- How do I get someone to listen to me?
- How do I confront someone who dominates the conversation?
- How do I communicate something the other party doesn't want to hear?

At the end of this training session participants will understand two key principles for dealing with difficult situations. First, you must choose to deal with the situation—no matter how complicated or emotional it might be. Second, you need to stick with the situation until the message you're communicating is understood by the other party. After all, communication only happens when you've got shared understanding.

After completing the session, participants should be able to:

- Focus on the issues, not the emotions.
- Communicate how they see the situation.
- Ask how the other person sees the situation.
- Ask questions and listen in order to create a shared understanding of the problem.
- Get agreement on what we are trying to communicate.

About This Program

There are several ways this material can be used:

- Facilitator-Led Program
- Lunch and Learn Program
- Self-Study Program

Facilitator-Led Program

This program provides session leaders with a one- or two-hour focused training session agenda. We realize that your time is valuable and have made every effort to develop a short and concise way to communicate the information to your participants. This will allow for the greatest amount of learning transfer in the time allowed.

There are two different ways to use the video in this session. The video can be used in its entirety or as a stop-and-discuss tool. If used in its entirety, the video will run approximately 25 minutes. If used as a stop-and-discuss tool, time will vary depending on the discussion of training points with your participants.

Lunch and Learn Program

If a lunch and learn program is the chosen means of delivery, then the one-hour session agenda can be utilized. See page 9. After a brief introduction, show the video in its entirety. Allow for discussion following the video. Distribute copies of the action plan to each participant and conclude your session.

Self-Study Program

The self-study program allows organizations to train employees who missed the actual training session, creates an alternative to having a training session, or allows employees to take responsibility for their own learning. Self-Study Workbooks that include the exercises and action plan are available.

Training Session Checklist

Use this checklist to help you gather all necessary materials for the training session.

Meeting Preparation

- Determine your training objectives.
- Measure the current status of your participants using the Pretraining Survey.
- Choose different ways to train to ensure transfer of information.

Location

- Create a relaxed environment.
- Make sure all seats have a good view of the visuals.
- Make sure there is enough light to take notes when participants view the video.
- Provide an adequate writing surface for participants.
- Check for good acoustics.
- Verify that your room is accessible and equipped for participants with disabilities.

Video Equipment

- Make sure the VCR is properly connected to the monitor.
- Test the VCR, and check monitor for proper picture, color, and volume.
- Make sure the tape is rewound and ready to play before beginning your session.
- Check all other equipment for proper operations.

Materials

- Training Leader's Guide*
- Videotape *Communication Nightmares*
- Paper and Pencil
- Participant Materials

Possible Session Agendas

Two session agendas have been provided to help guide you through your *Communication Nightmares* training session. You may modify these agendas to meet the needs of your participants.

2-Hour Session

Activity	Time	Page
Introducing the Session to Participants	10 minutes	13
Show and Review the Video	30 – 45 minutes	15
Focus on the Issue	20 minutes	16
Break	10 minutes	
Ask Questions Exercise	15 minutes	19
Action Plan Exercise	10 minutes	21
Posttraining Assessment and Session Evaluation	10 minutes	22

1-Hour Session

Activity	Time	Page
Introducing the Session to Participants	10 minutes	13
Show and Review the Video	30 minutes	15
Action Plan Exercise	10 minutes	21
Posttraining Assessment and Session Evaluation	10 minutes	22

Trainer's Instructions for Pretraining Assessment, Posttraining Assessment, and Action Plan

1. Use the Pretraining Survey to evaluate the needs of your participants. This survey will allow you to design the training session to emphasize areas or topics of importance to your participant.
2. A Posttraining Survey is also provided for use at the end of the training session. It will help you determine if your training goals have been met or if further education and training are necessary.
3. The Action Plan has been provided to help participants determine how they are going to use the newly acquired skills once they are back in their work environment. If you like, you could have the participants send you a copy of the action plan after they have used these communication skills on the job. Please note: If you decide to have them submit their action plans, confidentiality about the situation is important.

Communication Nightmares

T r a i n i n g M a t e r i a l s

Introducing the Session to Participants

**Trainer's
Instructions:**



Time Required:

- 10 minutes

Materials Needed:

- *Flipchart for Key Training Points*

Objective:

- To introduce participants to each other and create an environment conducive to training.
-

1. Read or paraphrase the following:

Today we are going to explore some of the most difficult communication situations in the workplace and how to handle them. I'm sure you've run across situations that you wish would just go away. Unfortunately, they don't. They usually get worse.

Today we are going to give you some tangible ways to deal with some of the most difficult communication nightmares. These tools should help you confront a difficult communication problem right when it occurs so that the situation can be alleviated and not escalate out of control.

2. Refer to key training points on a flipchart and read or paraphrase the following:

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- Focus on the issues, not the emotions.
- Communicate how you see the situation.
- Get the other person's perspective of the situation.
- Ask questions and listen in order to create a shared understanding of the problem.
- Get agreement on what you are trying to communicate.



**Trainer's
Instructions:**



Introducing the Session to Participants, continued

3. Have participants introduce themselves and share with the group a difficult communication situation they have faced. You may wish to write these on a flipchart and review them at the end of the session. You may not have the opportunity to explore each situation, but you can comment on how the key training points apply to the participant's situation.

Show and Review the Video

Time Required:

- 30-45 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Video, *Communication Nightmares*
- Copy of the *Video Discussion Questions* for each participant

Objective:

- To introduce the key training points of the video to the participants.
-

**Trainer's
Instructions:**



1. Read or paraphrase the following:

One reason that communication breaks down is because when a situation develops it is easier to close our eyes and hope it goes away. No one wants to dwell on negative situations.

Unfortunately, those situations usually don't go away. The video you're about to watch takes a look at four of the most common communication nightmares. As you view the video, think about the key training points and how you can use the information in specific situations you face in the workplace.



2. Before viewing the video, distribute copies of the Video Discussion Questions and have participants quickly review the questions so they are familiar with them. Encourage them to take notes and answer the questions as the video is playing.



3. View the video, *Communication Nightmares: Solutions to Your Top Communication Problems*.



4. After the video is complete, review the discussion questions with participants. You may wish to break them into small groups for discussion prior to answering the questions in a large group format.



Video Discussion Questions Trainer's Copy

Instructions:

The following questions are based on the video *Communication Nightmares*. Answer each question and be prepared to share your answers with the group.

1. **What two principles must you keep in mind when dealing with a difficult communication situation?**
 1. *Make up your mind to deal with the situation, no matter how complicated or emotional the situation might be.*
 2. *Stick with the situation until you've got understanding on the message you're communicating.*
2. **Complete the following sentence: Communication only happens when you've got shared understanding.**
3. **Why is it important to try to see the other person's perspective?**
 - *When you take the time to understand the other person's perspective, and they realize that you understand where he or she is coming from—he or she is more willing to take a rational look at the situation. Then you can focus on getting agreement on the message you are communicating.*
4. **When dealing with someone who just doesn't listen, what can you do to break through?**
 - *Pick a time and place without distractions.*
 - *Try to speak the language that fits the person's personality.*
 - *Use feedback to make sure that you are understood.*
5. **Why is it important to keep your words, body language, and tone of voice consistent?**
 - *When your words, body language, and tone of voice are inconsistent, others will have difficulty understanding and believing in your message. On the other hand, when words, body language, and tone of voice are consistent, our chances of creating shared understanding and the level of trust we have with the other person increase.*
6. **When a conversation starts to heat up, what can you do to cool it down?**
 - *Say something totally unexpected.*
 - *Catch the person off guard.*
 - *Put a little humor into the situation.*
 - *Do something to change the mood of the conversation.*

Focus on the Issue Exercise

Time Required:

- 20 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Copy of *Focus on the Issue* worksheet for each participant

Objective:

- To help participants keep emotions in control and identify the real source of the communication problem.
-

Trainer's Instructions:



1. Read or paraphrase the following:

If you remember, the two overriding principles of the video we just watched were that to deal with a difficult communication situation you must decide first to deal with it until it is solved, and secondly to stick with it until there is shared understanding regarding the message you are communicating.

We are going to take a look at how we can keep focused on the issue with the four difficult communication nightmares.



2. Distribute the *Focus on the Issue* worksheet. Allow participants five minutes to review the situations and identify what they think is the real communication issue of each situation.



3. Ask participants to break into small groups. Assign a situation to each group and explain that they have five minutes to discuss the situation and come up with action steps to help focus on the issue.
4. Ask each group to choose one person to communicate their action plans to the rest of the participants. Possible answers to the situations are provided on the next page. Remember, however, that there are many ways to approach these difficult situations. Be open to ideas that participants can share from their own experiences.



Focus on the Issue (Trainer's Copy)

Instructions: Review each scenario and determine how you stay focused on the real issue.

1. **Your job is to call on past-due clients and find out why they are late on their payment, and help them get their payment sent in on time. You just got off the phone with a very angry customer. This customer has just spent the last 20 minutes yelling at you because he or she claims not only has the invoice been paid, but also your company has already cashed the check. The customer was even able to give you a check number and date the check cleared the bank. You have to go back over to accounting and clear this mess up. Carol, the accounts receivable clerk, is new to the company. This is Carol's third week on the job. She is a very detailed person, and doesn't like to be rushed. Carol often tells you that she doesn't have time to deal with your issues when you come over to her cubicle.**

What is the real issue? The real issue is that the computer is not acknowledging the payment of the paid invoice.

How are you going to help Carol focus on the real issue? First, since you know Carol doesn't like to be rushed, call her in advance and set up an appointment to discuss your client's problem. When you have her full attention, focus first on the facts of the situation. Explain the situation as you understand it and let Carol describe how she sees the issue. Once you have identified the problem, work on a solution together.

2. **You are the project manager for the A2S900 product line. You need to go and discuss the timeline of the project with your boss because there are some unrealistic deadlines set. You had no say in the timeline. It was handed down to you from your boss. Your boss is unaware of the issues surrounding this new product line. You are having a difficult time getting materials from your vendors and your machinery is old and falling apart. When you arrive for your meeting, your boss is on the phone, editing a memo to the staff, and talking to you about your timeline at the same time. Your boss has a habit of not really listening to what you have to say.**

What is the real issue? *The timeline can't be met due to vendor and machine problems.*

How are you going to help your boss focus on the real issue? *Don't talk with your boss while he or she is on the phone and editing a memo—wait until you have your boss's full attention. Then, get right to the point and tailor your communication style to mirror the style of your boss. This will help create shared understanding. If you are still having trouble getting your boss to listen, then ask him or her for feedback. This usually gets the nonlistener refocused.*



Focus on the Issue, Continued

(Trainer's Copy)

3. You just had a customer complain to you about how poorly he or she was treated by Karen, one of your coworkers. The customer claims that Karen was not the slightest bit helpful on solving the problem. The customer also said that Karen was short and abrupt when the customer tried to ask questions. You are in a self-directed team and Karen is a part of your team. You need to talk to Karen about the customer's complaint and try to mend the relationship between the customer and the organization. When you speak to Karen, she starts to dominate the conversation. You are having a hard time even participating in the conversation because every time you try to speak she interrupts you again. You have the desire to give up and walk away.

What is the real issue? *The customer has a problem that was not solved and feels as though he or she were treated poorly. Therefore, you may lose his or her business in the future.*

How are you going to help Karen focus on the real issue? *First, be assertive and call Karen on her actions. Don't allow her to continue to interrupt. Call her on her behavior every time she interrupts, even though it may be difficult—it is necessary. Make sure you are communicating your side of the situation in a respectful and caring way. Agree on what the real issue is and focus on coming to a solution together. Be persistent and don't give up. Stick to your commitment to get the situation resolved.*

4. Your coworker, Bob, has a habit of leaving his workstation in disarray. In fact, it is getting so out of control that it is starting to affect your area. You feel that Bob is a slob. You have lost an important document because Bob's stuff is in your way. You know that Bob is under an incredible amount of stress because of an upcoming deadline, but the mess is starting to cause you to lose things, which causes you stress. When you go to talk to Bob, he doesn't want to hear what you have to say. You start getting into a pretty heated argument. He tells you to mind your own business.

What is the real issue? *You need to find your lost document and have your coworker keep his materials in his space.*

How are you going to help your coworker focus on the real issue? *Remember, how you look and sound sends a message stronger than your words. Make sure your words, tone of voice, and body language are sending a consistent message. This will help Bob focus on the problem and not feel that you are manipulating him. When the situation heats up, you might want to say something totally unexpected. By catching Bob off guard or putting a little humor into the situation, you can often help defuse the emotion of the situation. You need to focus on the situation, not the person.*

Ask Questions Exercise

Time Required:

- 15 minutes

Materials Needed:

- One copy of the *Ask Questions* worksheet for each participant

Objective:

To provide participants with some practice in asking questions during a difficult communication situation in order to increase shared understanding.

Trainer's Instructions:



1. Read or paraphrase the following:

Asking questions seems like a logical thing to do when you are having a communication breakdown with someone. When situations become difficult or heated, it is often difficult to put things into perspective and ask instead of tell. One way to prepare for difficult situations is to practice identifying what questions you could ask that will help you see things from another point of view.



2. Distribute the *Asking Questions* worksheet to participants.
3. Have participants respond to the statements with questions that will help them better understand the other person's perspective.
4. Give participants five minutes to respond and then discuss answers as a group. Sample answers are provided for you on the next page. Remember, these are just suggestions; many answers are possible. This exercise will help participants understand that there are many different ways to respond in a difficult situation.
5. If you have time, you may want to have participants role-play some of the examples. Actually asking the questions is beneficial for retention.





Ask Questions Worksheet

(Trainer's Copy)

Instructions: Read the following responses and decide what questions you would ask to learn more about the other person's perspective.

- 1. Carol: "Look, I don't have time to try to figure out your problems right now. I have a report that is due and it can't be late. You will just have to deal with this yourself."**

What questions would you ask to help understand Carol's situation?

When is your report due? Could we meet as soon as your report is done? Is there anyone else that can help me with this situation?

- 2. Your Boss: "Listen, the timeline is nonnegotiable. It is what we promised the sales department, and we are just going to have to find a way to make it happen. I know you can do it."**

What questions would you ask to help understand your Boss's situation? *Who promised this to the sales department? Why is the deadline nonnegotiable? What happens if it doesn't get done on time?*

- 3. Karen: "You know what? I don't even want to hear about what that lady had to say. She was also rude and blaming me for her problems. I had nothing to do with her problem. I don't work in shipping and receiving. Why should I have to put up with her attitude when I didn't cause her problem?"**

What questions would you ask to help understand Karen's situation? *Can you tell me more about the customer's problem? What specifically did the customer say to you? How did you respond to the customer?*

- 4. Bob: "I don't even want to hear about this mess. Do you know how many hours I have put in this week to get this project done on time? You are just going to have to deal with it. If you don't like the way it looks, clean it up yourself. I have more important things to do with my time, and having this conversation with you isn't one of them."**

What questions would you ask to help understand Bob's situation? *How many hours have you put in? When is the project due? What still needs to happen in order to get your project done on time?*

Action Plan Exercise

Time Required:

- 10 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Copy of *Action Plan Worksheet* for each participant

Objective:

- To help participants follow through and use the information they learned in the training session.
-

Trainer's Instructions:



1. Read or paraphrase the following:

Dealing with difficult communication situations starts when you take responsibility to deal with the situation. We are going to give you an opportunity to think through a situation that you are faced with back on the job. Think about how the information we covered today could help you deal with this situation.

2. Distribute the action plan worksheet to each participant.
3. Read or paraphrase the following:

Use this worksheet as a guide to help you think through your specific situation. Identify who that person is and why the situation is so difficult. Then, take a moment to identify why you want to deal with the situation, including the business reason for dealing with the situation. Make sure and put down when and how you plan on dealing with the situation and what you would like the end result to be. Once you have dealt with the situation, I'd appreciate you filling out the bottom half of the form and returning it to me so I can use the information to help me prepare future training sessions.

Posttraining Assessment and Session Evaluation

Time Required:

- 10 minutes

Materials Needed:

- *Posttraining Assessment* for each participant
- *Session Evaluation* for each participant

Objective:

- To evaluate what participants have learned in the training session and what their perception of the session is.
-

Trainer's Instructions:



1. Read or paraphrase the following:

It is important for me to not only assess what you have learned at this session, but also learn what you think about the session. Please take a few moments to fill out both the *Posttraining Assessment* and the *Session Evaluation*.

2. Distribute the *Posttraining Assessment* and the *Session Evaluation* to each participant.

Possible Answers to the Posttraining Assessment:

1. What are the two principles for dealing with a difficult communication situation?

1. *Take responsibility to deal with the situation no matter how difficult or emotional it is.*
2. *Stick with it until you get shared understanding on the message you are communicating*

2. Why is your body language so important when communicating?

How you look and sound sends a message stronger than your actual words. How you convey your message through your body language and tone of voice should be the same as the words you are using.

Possible Answers to the Posttraining Assessment—continued

3. What can you do when a situation gets emotional?
Where appropriate, try to lighten the situation by using humor or talking about something else that is not so emotional for a period of time.
4. Complete the following sentence: Communication only happens when you've got shared understanding.
5. When dealing with someone who just doesn't listen, what can you do to break through?
 - *Pick a time and place without distractions*
 - *Try to speak the language that fits the person's personality*
 - *Use feedback to make sure that you are understood*

Notes:

Communication Nightmares

P a r t i c i p a n t M a t e r i a l s

Video Discussion Questions

Instructions:

The following questions are based on the video *Communication Nightmares*. Answer each question and be prepared to share your answers with the group.

- 1. What two principles must you keep in mind when dealing with a difficult communication situation?**
- 2. Complete the following sentence: Communication only happens when you've got _____.**
- 3. Why is it important to try to see the other person's perspective?**
- 4. When dealing with someone who just doesn't listen, what can you do to break through?**
- 5. Why is it important to keep your words, body language, and tone of voice consistent?**
- 6. When a conversation starts to heat up, what can you do to cool it down?**

Focus on the Issue

Instructions: Review each scenario and determine how you stay focused on the real issue.

- 1. Your job is to call on past-due clients. You just got off the phone with a very angry customer. This customer has just spent the last 20 minutes yelling at you because he or she claims not only has the invoice been paid, but also your company has already cashed the check. The customer was even able to give you a check number and date the check cleared the bank. You have to go back over to accounting and clear this mess up. Carol, the accounts receivable clerk, is new to the company. This is Carol's third week on the job. She is a very detailed person, and doesn't like to be rushed. Carol often tells you that she doesn't have time to deal with your issues when you come over to her cubicle.**

What is the real issue?

How are you going to help Carol focus on the real issue?

- 2. You are the project manager for the A2S900 product line. You need to go and discuss the timeline of the project with your boss because there are some unrealistic deadlines set. You had no say in the timeline. It was handed down to you from your boss. Your boss is unaware of the issues surrounding this new product line. You are having a difficult time getting materials from your vendors and your machinery is old and falling apart. When you arrive for your meeting, your boss is on the phone, editing a memo to the staff, and talking to you about your timeline at the same time. Your boss has a habit of not really listening to what you have to say.**

What is the real issue?

How are you going to help your boss focus on the real issue?

- 3. You just had a customer complain to you about how poorly he or she was treated by Karen, one of your coworkers. The customer claims that Karen was not the slightest bit helpful on solving the problem. The customer also said that Karen was short and abrupt when the customer tried to ask questions. You are in a self-directed team and Karen is a part of your team. You need to go and talk to Karen about the customer's complaint and try to mend the relationship between the customer and the organization. When you speak to Karen, she starts to dominate the conversation. You are having a hard time even participating in the conversation because every time you try to speak she interrupts you again. You have the desire to give up and walk away.**

What is the real issue?

How are you going to help Karen focus on the real issue?

- 4. Your coworker, Bob, has a habit of leaving his workstation in disarray. In fact, it is getting so out of control that it is starting to affect your area. You feel that Bob is a slob. You have lost an important document because Bob's stuff is in your way. You know that Bob is under an incredible amount of stress because of an upcoming deadline, but the mess is starting to cause you to lose things, which causes you stress. When you go to talk to Bob, he doesn't want to hear what you have to say. You start getting into a pretty heated argument. He tells you to mind your own business.**

What is the real issue?

How are you going to help your coworker focus on the real issue?

Ask Questions Worksheet

Instructions: Read the following responses and decide what questions you would ask to learn more about the other person's perspective.

- 1. Carol: "Look, I don't have time to try to figure out your problems right now. I have a report that is due and it can't be late. You will just have to deal with this yourself."**

What questions would you ask to help understand Carol's situation?

- 2. Your Boss: "Listen, the timeline is nonnegotiable. It is what we promised the sales department, and we are just going to have to find a way to make it happen. I know you can do it."**

What questions would you ask to help understand your Boss's situation?

- 3. Karen: "You know what? I don't even want to hear about what that lady had to say. She was also rude and blaming me for her problems. I had nothing to do with her problem. I don't work in shipping and receiving. Why should I have to put up with her attitude when I didn't cause her problem?"**

What questions would you ask to help understand Karen's situation?

- 4. Bob: "I don't even want to hear about this mess. Do you know how many hours I have put in this week to get this project done on time? You are just going to have to deal with it. If you don't like the way it looks, clean it up yourself. I have more important things to do with my time, and having this conversation with you isn't one of them."**

What questions would you ask to help understand Bob's situation?

Action Plan

Instructions:

Think of a difficult communication situation you need to handle. Plan how you will handle it.

Name of other party: _____

What is the problem? _____

How would you like to see the situation resolved? _____

What is the real business issue? _____

How can you best communicate with the other party based on his or her communication style? _____

Please return this portion to your session facilitator after you have dealt with the above situation.

How did the person react?: _____

What was the best thing you did to help deal with the situation? _____

If you could have done one thing differently, what would it be? _____

Did you ultimately resolve the situation? _____

Session Evaluation Form

Instructions:

Please circle the number that best describes your evaluation of the training session.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This training program concentrates on difficult communication issues.	5	4	3	2	1
This training program helped me understand the importance of taking responsibility to deal with the situation.	5	4	3	2	1
As a result of this program, I am more confident in MY ability to effectively deal with difficult communication situations.	5	4	3	2	1
The objectives of the program were clearly presented.	5	4	3	2	1
Opportunities to ask questions and discuss issues were sufficient.	5	4	3	2	1
The session was well organized.	5	4	3	2	1

The best part of the program was: _____

This program could be improved by: _____

Additional comments: _____

I would recommend this session to others (circle one).

Yes

No