

## Quick Guide: Interpersonal Communication

The most effective communicators do so in a style that can change on each occasion and be adapted for each individual. This brings out the best in everyone, especially if you are a manager or team leader. These skills need continual practice and fine tuning until they become a natural response which is seen by others as appropriate across a wide range of situations. So here are the **top ten tips** to help you:

- 1. Be aware of your thinking** – your inner dialogue. Talk to yourself positively and objectively. Remind yourself of what you want to achieve from the conversation, not what might go wrong!
- 2. Be aware of your presence** – behave assertively. For example, make eye contact; sit/stand/walk upright; be conscious of your hand gestures; use a facial expression that conveys acceptance, congruence, competence. Remember you are a role model for others.
- 3. Speak for yourself.** Own what you say and start with “I” instead of “you” when talking about yourself.
- 4. Invite disclosure** by using open, not closed, questions. Open questions are more productive and usually start with ‘how’, ‘where’, ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘in what way’.
- 5. Avoid asking “why” questions** as they are often interpreted as blaming, or can lead to longwinded explanations.
- 6. Use silence and pausing more.** Sometimes just by being silent, the other person will open up more. And if you pause, it gives the other person a chance to absorb what you have said.
- 7. Ensure mutual understanding** by recapping or using reflecting statements, for example “Let’s see if I’ve got it right” or “Do you mean... ?”
- 8. Prompt the other person** if they seem stuck for words or have lost their way, for example “You were talking about ...”.
- 9. Watch for stresses on words.** Sometimes you may notice a particular word or phrase has been used or accented and this may seem significant. Explore this further and repeat the word or phrase, with a question mark in your tone.
- 10. Don’t worry about making mistakes** – nobody’s perfect. Even the best communicators have made mistakes, so they can correct them for the future.

**Compiled by Des Whitehorn**