

Build Professional Relationships through Effective Communication in the Workplace

When starting a new co-op or full-time job, it is important to be mindful of how you communicate with your manager and co-workers. Using effective communication strategies at work can help you build lasting professional relationships and enhance your co-op experience.

Building Relationships at Work

Work relationships start with first impressions and are maintained and developed through your words and actions at work. It is important to engage in good practices right from the start.

- **Start with a positive attitude:** Showing enthusiasm for your work and curiosity about the company and your co-workers will help show your team that you are happy to be there.
- **Take initiative:** You will be given a variety of projects at work and, as your managers and co-workers learn your capacity, it is important to take charge of your own work. Do routine tasks without being prompted, update your team when you finish a task, and ask how else you can help.
- **Make sure you understand what is expected:** When getting projects and attending meetings, it is important to engage in conversation and ask for clarification when needed. Use active listening skills, take notes, and use any other strategies you have to help retain information.
- **Follow through and follow up:** When you commit to doing something or are asked to assist with a project, make sure to meet the deadlines that are asked. Be prepared to give updates at meetings and communicate your needs with a manager if you are concerned a deadline cannot be met.
- **Get to know your co-workers:** Workplaces are more multi-generational than the classroom, but don't underestimate the value of making connections with your co-workers. Ask people to connect for lunch in order to learn more about them and their roles.

Professionally Responding to Difficult Co-workers

In a perfect world, everyone would always get along with their co-workers and managers, but people have different backgrounds and their own approaches to work. With all the personalities at work, it's possible you may face some challenging situations.

- **Stay calm and professional:** It's essential to maintain your composure and act professionally when dealing with a challenging co-worker. Avoid getting into arguments or reacting emotionally. Take a deep breath and reflect on the situation before responding.
- **Evaluate the situation:** Take a step back and objectively assess the situation. Try to understand the reasons behind your co-worker's behavior. Is there a specific issue/conflict causing the difficulty? Take the time to understand the root causes of the challenge. Is it a communication issue, a difference in work styles, or a personality clash? Understanding the underlying factors can inform how you respond.
- **Choose the right time to approach:** When addressing any concerns with a co-worker or supervisor, choose an appropriate time and approach. Find a moment when they are likely to be receptive and not overwhelmed with other tasks or stressors.
- **Communicate openly:** Initiate a conversation with your co-worker to address any concerns or conflicts. Approach the conversation with respect and professionalism. Express your thoughts and feelings using "I" statements to avoid sounding accusatory. Listen to their perspective and try to find common ground.

- **Seek clarity:** If you find yourself unclear about your expectations or instructions, seek clarification. Ask for specific details and examples to ensure you have a clear understanding of their requirements. This can help minimize misunderstandings and potential conflicts.
- **Be solution-oriented:** When discussing challenges with your supervisor and co-workers, focus on finding solutions rather than problems. Come prepared with potential solutions to address the situation.
- **Focus on your work:** Not every situation requires a response. Sometimes you just have to accept differences so you can focus on your own responsibilities and tasks. Don't let their behavior distract you from your goals and performance. Concentrate on doing your best and maintaining a positive attitude.
- **Seek support:** If the situation persists or escalates, seek help. Consider reaching out to a manager or human resources (HR) department for guidance. If you're not sure whom to speak to at work, reach out to your career services coordinator in RIT Career Services and Cooperative Education.

Remember, each situation is unique and it's important to adapt these suggestions to your specific circumstances.

Importance of Assertive Communication in the Workplace

You may experience moments in your career when you feel others are not taking you seriously. This may be a common feeling for individuals who are underrepresented in their field.

- **Build confidence in your abilities:** Remind yourself of your skills, knowledge, and accomplishments. You secured this position because you are qualified for the role and have the skills needed for success.
- **Seek out allies and mentors:** You may be in the minority, but there are people like you to reach out to for support. Connecting with others in your field will help you feel less alone and they may be able to offer guidance, support, and mentorship.
- **Speak up and assert yourself:** Don't hesitate to speak up during meetings, presentations, or discussions. Share your ideas, opinions, and insights confidently. Use assertive body language to convey your expertise and ensure that your contributions are noticed and valued.
- **Set boundaries:** If a co-worker's behavior makes you uncomfortable, establish clear boundaries. Communicate what behaviors are acceptable and what are not. Be assertive in expressing your boundaries while remaining respectful.
- **Think long-term and network strategically:** Find organizations with affinity groups and seek out industry events, conferences, and seminars where you can connect with professionals in your field.
- **Document and showcase your achievements:** Keep a record of your accomplishments, including specific projects and successes. Take credit for your work and share these achievements with others.
- **Seek professional development opportunities:** Engage in activities that enhance your skills or provide you with certifications.

Handling Discrimination

- **Address instances of bias or discrimination:** If you encounter explicit instances of bias or discrimination, it's essential to address them appropriately. Review your company's employee handbook and policies and follow the process to address your concerns.
- **Document incidents:** Keep a record of any incidents or interactions that are problematic. Include dates, times, and descriptions of the behavior. This documentation will be requested by HR.

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