



The Center for Organizational Cultural Competence

NAVIGATING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCES.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Setting Workplace Standards

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www.CulturalCompetence.ca and www.CivilityExperts.com



The Center for Organizational
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NAVIGATING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCES.

Introduction

Most professionals achieve success in business based on their ability to perform a skill, or to make some contribution, that somehow meets the needs of someone else.

The more consistently a person can exhibit the characteristics of a professional, and the extent to which a person can surpass a client's expectations for service and product quality, the greater success that individual will achieve. Making your way in today's very competitive business world is all about setting and achieving standards.

Accordingly, the civility experts at *In Good Company* in partnership with the organizational culture professionals at *The Center for Organizational Cultural Competence*, are pleased to offer a series of Business Etiquette Briefs under the Setting Workplace Standards brand.



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The "face" of the Canadian workplace is changing. Labour sources suggest that by 2012, the majority of growth in the Canadian labour pool will be New Canadians and Internationally Trained Professionals. To thrive amidst the impact of this significant change, progressive Canadian businesses are seeking to understand the needs and cultural perspectives of New Canadians and to effectively incorporate intercultural personnel into their Canadian work forces.

Accordingly, Winnipeg based Civility expert Lew Bayer is pleased to launch The Center for Organizational Cultural Competence (COCC). In an effort to meet the needs of employers who want to attract and retain qualified employees from the growing multi-cultural labour pool, the Center will offer training, presentations, and educational tools related to managing change, addressing diversity, building organizational cultural competence and leveraging differences at work. Fostering inclusiveness is good business for Canadians in every occupational sector. The team at the COCC includes experts in organizational issues, intercultural competence trainers, English as additional language instructors, cultural perspective advisors, and experienced competency and transferable skills analysts.

For the past ten years Lew, who is co-founder of The Civility Group Inc., has been nationally recognized as Canada's leading expert on civility in the workplace.

Lew is also President of the *In Good Company* Civility Experts Training Team www.CivilityExperts.com, was chosen as a member of the Citizens Equity Committee, SITAR, and MEEPA. Lew is a 6-time published author, national columnist for Canadian Living and Heart Magazines and web, a trained Intercultural Communications Facilitator, proficient writer and renowned professional speaker. ***In May 2008, Lew was chosen as Manitoba Woman Entrepreneur of the Year in the International Trade category.***



HOW TO USE THIS BUSINESS ETIQUETTE BRIEF

The content in this business brief represents key concepts related to civility in the workplace- specifically, how to communicate respect and leadership in the workplace, and to do so consistently and at a high standard. The brief is designed to be a self-study guide for individuals who wish to increase their knowledge about modern guidelines for business etiquette in North America.

The content in this brief is organized into several categories of information, each of which is indicated by an icon for easy identification:



General Information on Topic Category

This section provides basic information that you should know before presenting on this subject. An overview that summarizes how all five of the lessons presented in the topic category fit together.



Think About It

This section includes questions, ideas, or situations that you can think about in order to better understand how the content in the lesson impacts you personally.



Terms to Know

These are words that you need to know to understand the concepts being covered in the lesson. Definitions for the words you need to know are provided.



Exercises

Throughout the lessons you will find practice exercises you can complete to test your knowledge. Answer keys are provided at the end of the lessons.

Lesson K1L3: VERBAL COMMUNICATION



GENERAL INFORMATION ON TOPIC

Talk, talk, talk...how many words do you think you say in a day? And how many of those words inspire, motivate, capture, or persuade? Effective communication skills are a powerful tool. Having the ability to verbalize what you mean in a way that means something to others is an essential leadership quality.

Business leaders, public speakers, negotiators, human resource professionals, anyone who communicates with others, and anyone who needs to give direction and get action would benefit by improving verbal communication skills.

On a daily basis we are bombarded with communications: emails, couriers, the radio, the chit chat of friends, honking of car horns, buzzers and beepers, ringing telephones and so on. The number and mode of communications is unlimited. How do we choose what to listen to? Successful professionals know that if they want to connect with people, if they want to build relationships, they must communicate in such a way that people will listen. This lesson covers the basics of verbal communication.



TERMS TO KNOW:

Glossophobia is fear of public speaking. It is believed to be the single most common [phobia](#), affecting as much as 75% of all people. When ranked among fears, it generally is the number one fear, surpassing even the fear of death. Glossophobia is considered a [social phobia](#) and may be linked to, or sometimes precede, a more severe [anxiety disorder](#). Several talented and successful musicians have the fear of performing in public, including [Barbra Streisand](#) and [Dusty Springfield](#). Source: *Wikipedia*

From the moment we learn to speak, many of us take for granted that speech and communicating orally is a simple thing. The truth is that given how busy and stressed we all are, and considering the distractions, poor grammar, lack of clarity, and other situational factors that impact communication, it really is a miracle that we understand each other at all.



THINK ABOUT IT: Some interesting facts and statistics about verbal communication include:

- David Crystal, in the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, suggests that there must be at least a million words in the language. www.worldwidewords.org
- The average person has a total vocabulary of 40,000 to 50,000 words. www.killdevilhill.com
- Producing speech sound requires that the vocal folds, in combination with the lips, the tongue, the lower jaw, and the palate, the lungs, windpipe, esophagus and voice centers of the brain are all in sync. www.wikipedia.com.
- As you look at the map of the continents, imagine that by some estimates there are roughly 6,800 languages spoken on this planet. 96% of them are spoken by a mere 4% of the world's population. The exact number of languages may never be determined exactly.



Communicating through speech is quite a broad and complicated endeavor. Let's review all the elements of speaking which potentially impact a listener's understanding or comprehension of your oral message. Each of the 23 elements of speech listed below (as identified by www.itstime.org) is an opportunity to either increase or decrease the effectiveness of communication. We can only control what we are aware of, so we need to remind ourselves to consider at least what, why, and how we are saying what we're saying. The point is – all too often we just talk and don't give it a second thought.

ELEMENTS OF SPEAKING:

- Body language
- Voice quality
- Intention
- Manner: directness, sincerity
- Dress and clothing (style, color, appropriateness for situation)
- Visual aids, animation
- Eye contact
- Emotional content, energy, strength
- Self-concept
- Concept of others
- Listening, hearing the underlying message
- Speaking from the heart
- Energy
- Setting, time, place, timing
- How the messenger holds the message
- Sensitivity
- Rhythm and pacing
- Attitude and confidence
- Rapport
- Agenda
- Purpose of communication - knowing what you want to communicate
- Clarity
- Silence, centering, looking

www.itstime.com



**EXERCISE #1:
RATE YOUR VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

Behaviour

How do you rank?

Not so good Okay Very good

I speak clearly

I enunciate my words

I don't speak too quickly

I do not pause too long between words

I watch that people are listening
Before I continue to speak

I wait my turn to speak

I use gestures to support what I
am saying

I communicate one complete
Idea at a time

I speak in full sentences

I use correct grammar

I use a polite tone

I try not to be opinionated

Other:

Use praise not flattery – sincere credible people know the difference

SMALL TALK: THE ART OF CONVERSATION

As a professional at any level, it is vital to recognize that every interaction and every minute spent in communication with clients and co-workers solicits a reaction. This includes dining and mixing business and social settings. Try to consistently keep in mind that the minutes count and it's often the little things, the details, which have the greatest impact. Accordingly, make every conversation count and remember that small talk often has big meaning.

In dining settings, small talk acts as an ice-breaker. Eating in public can be a stressful situation for many people, add to that having to sit with and have conversation with strangers and it's a wonder more people don't make terrible dining faux pas or put their feet in their mouth more often.

For example, a sincere greeting carries tremendous impact towards putting someone at ease. Don't forget to reinforce the greeting with a deliberate "thank you for your efforts" or "I appreciate your time" or "it was a pleasure dining with you" at the end of the event. Simple common courtesies take little time or effort and can make all the difference.

For example:

1. *Choose your words carefully and think before you speak.* Do not assume the worst, and try not to be on the defensive before you've heard all the details. You can learn a lot by listening. Just as your small talk can add value to an interaction, you have to learn to really listen and read between the lines when others are speaking to you. Don't forget, trivial conversation often sets the tone of new relationships and by watching nonverbal communication cues carefully during small talk exchanges you can learn a lot about a person.

2. *Go for clarity.* If you are unsure of someone's meaning or find your mind wandering as you listen, ask the speaker to reiterate. If it's obvious you weren't listening, you might even apologize and ask the speaker to continue. Make efforts not to criticize or give opinions unless you're asked. Professionals know that timing is everything when it comes to constructive criticism and your efforts are wasted if the timing is off. Do not point out your weaknesses or the weaknesses of others and never be afraid to say something nice. We often overlook the fact that if others come to expect negativity, they automatically shut off and soon become indifferent to the message and the messenger.

Setting Workplace Standards - Verbal Communication

3. If you're going to be the boss. *Learn to take a compliment* and to give them freely. It's going to take a lot of hard work to be the leader of the pack and you deserve to be recognized for it. Leaders who have the confidence to take credit for their accomplishments while acknowledging those of others set a good example and encourage productivity.

4. *Show your human side* now and then. Have a repertoire of great, non-work related stories about your experiences and your life. Great stories are true, based on personal experience, descriptive yet not pretentious, typically include some humor and shouldn't be too long. Telling something about yourself that others can relate to reminds them that although you may be more accomplished than they, you are still human. Don't get too personal of course; you want them to respect you in the morning...

In dining settings, try to avoid talking about the following:

- emotional issues
- health
- diets
- personal hygiene
- violent or gruesome topics



THINK ABOUT IT: Remember that it takes two to have a conversation. The best conversationalists spend more than half the time listening.

Say no to ideas not to individuals - Unknown

LISTENING SKILLS

“Why don’t people listen?” Experts suggest that some of the reasons people don’t listen include:

- They are not interested
- Speaker is boring
- They are distracted
- They cannot hear
- They shut off because they’ve made assumptions about what you’ll say next
- They do not believe you
- Short attention spans
- Language barriers
- Other _____

We’ve all heard that the best conversationalist is a good listener, right? Well, it is indeed true that one of the most respected but least practiced polite behaviors is listening. Most of us would agree that problems could be solved more quickly and a lot more could be accomplished if people would just listen. So...what constitutes a good listener?

- **Be sincere!**

HOW: If you are not really interested, or it is just not a good time, say so. Show others the respect of not wasting their time. If you do initiate a conversation or ask a question, focus on the speaker and make a sincere effort to listen to the response.

- **Speak with your body language.**

HOW: Use your body. Your body language should show interest. Make direct eye contact as you listen, and smile or nod if you agree with what is being said to encourage the speaker to go on. Don’t fold your arms across your chest or fidget as both these behaviors can signal close mindedness.

- **Ask intelligent, relevant questions.**

HOW: Don’t pretend to understand something if you don’t and don’t let a speaker go on and on about something if you haven’t the foggiest idea what they’re trying to say. It’s far more courteous to stop the speaker and ask for clarification.

*Trainer mentions that we will review types of questions later in the session.

- **Interrupt politely.**

HOW: Do not interrupt unless absolutely necessary. As in the case of seeking clarification. If you must interrupt, make eye contact and say the speaker's name and then your reason for interrupting. Make the interruption brief and do not take over the speaker's role unless the interrupted speaker indicates it's appropriate to do so. Keep in mind that inappropriate interruptions are not always verbal. Be careful not to sigh, groan, roll your eyes, shift your weight or change your posture in such a way as to indicate a nonverbal interruption.

- **Wait your turn to speak.**

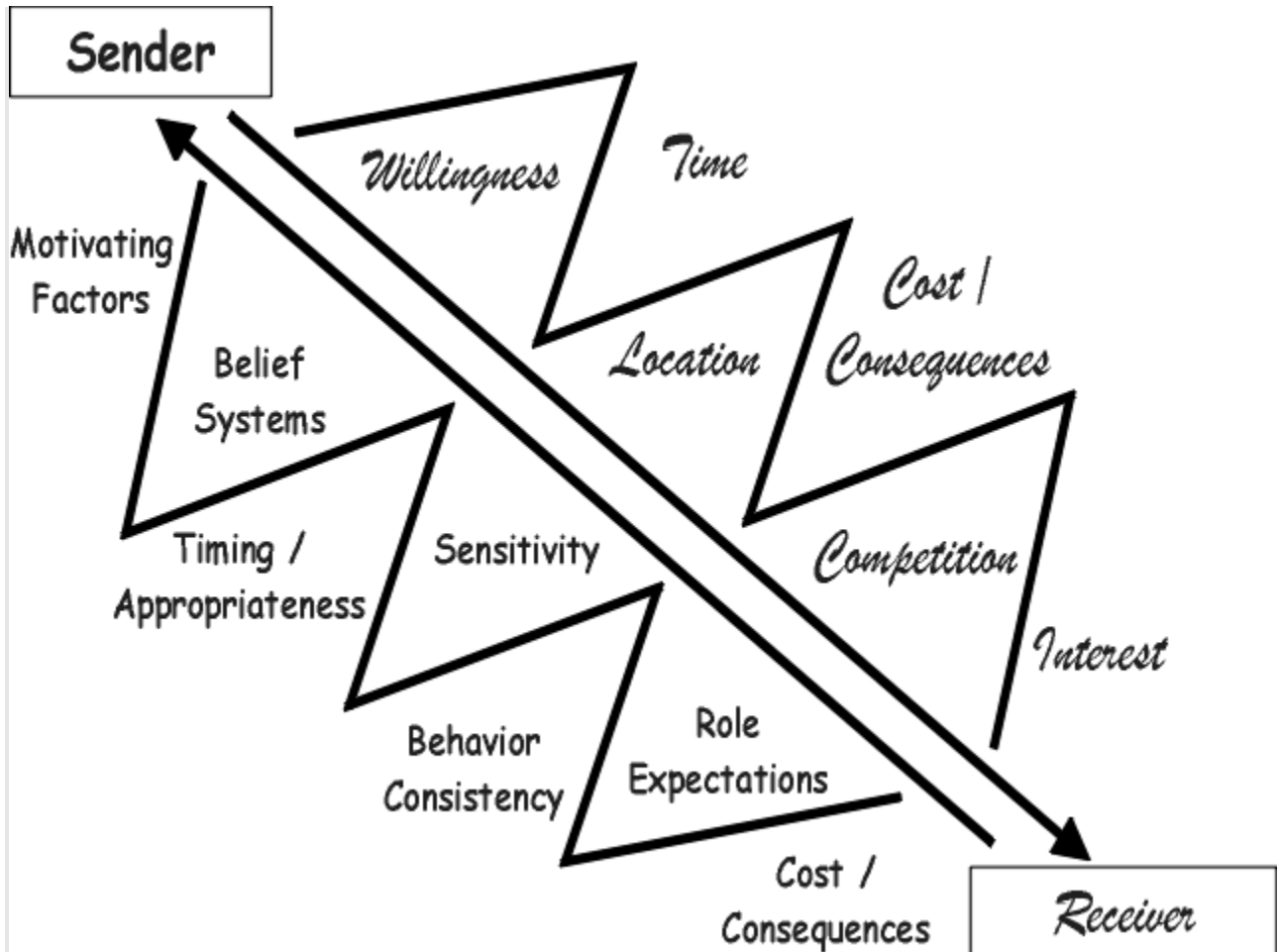
HOW: Take turns when communicating in a group discussion. Do not monopolize the speaker's role. It is not always fundamental to take a turn speaking about every topic. Show consideration for others in the group by letting everyone share the limelight. If someone who is especially shy or rarely speaks up shows interest in a topic, maybe consider letting them have your speaking turn too.

- **Pay attention.**

HOW: You are not listening if you are responding in your head while the person is speaking. Pay attention next time someone is speaking to you. If you notice you have started speaking to yourself in your head, analyzing what they've said or formulating your next comment, you're really not listening. Give yourself time to hear their complete thought and then formulate your response. This is a good way to avoid speaking in haste and saying the wrong thing too.

Even if someone who is a great speaker is engaged in conversation with someone who is a great listener, there is still a lot of room for miscommunication. This is because communication- messages- are rarely communicated in a direct/straight path. Note all the possible distortions and filters.

Distortion in Sending and Receiving Messages



Notice that between the sender and the receiver the path appears to be straight. However, this is rarely the case. There are many different ways to distort the message or to filter it (both in delivering the message and in receiving the message). All of the distortions can occur for both the listener and the receiver.

Improving verbal communications requires first that we understand that communication is rarely perfect or clear in and of itself. We must learn to listen better and speak more clearly. We must also check whether our message is delivered correctly and whether we have heard a message clearly.

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EXERCISE #2 :

IMPROVE YOUR LISTENING SKILLS

Being able to listen to a message is as important as being able to send one. Effective communication happens only when the listener receives the same message as the speaker is intending. This is sometimes difficult as we seldom receive formal training on learning how to listen.

Why We Don't Hear Others

We can think quicker than we can speak so often instead of listening we are processing information. Evaluate your skills by answering the questions below. Mark a 'Y' for Yes and 'N' for No.

While you are listening to someone speak, do you:

- rehearse your next response in your mind?
- daydream?
- think about all the reasons you either like or dislike this person?
- change the subject when the person is done?
- criticize or devalue the comments just made?
- agree with every word?
- get bored quickly?
- lose your patience?

If you answered Yes to any of these questions, you may want to consider practicing your listening skills.

References: Walker, James and Walker, Lilly, *The Human Harvest*, 1987. Vester, Nadine, *Communication Tool Kit*, Alberta Agriculture, 1982. REDA, *Improving Communications*, 1986. **Publications List: Factsheet: Communications for Farm Families Factsheet: How to Become an Effective Leader**

You can let a speaker know that you are listening by using active listening skills. Three techniques that demonstrate active listening are:

1. **Paraphrasing** - Try to understand what is being said without any judgment. Put the message in your own words and say it back to the speaker to see if you really heard what the speaker meant.
Example:
Sender: The cow has gone dry.
Listener: So you 're saying that your cow has stopped producing milk?
Use key phrases like: "do you mean...", "are you saying...", or "can you give me an example?"
2. **Perception checking** - Show concern for the person and their feelings. What was your observation of their comments? This is sometimes called reflective listening.
Example:
Sender: I work hard around here but it seems nothing I do is ever enough.
Listener: You feel discouraged; you wish somebody (I) would show some appreciation.
Use key phrases like: "I get the impression...", "you seem disappointed..."
3. **Using Eye Contact** - Looking at someone shows you are paying attention to what is being said. Show body language and eye contact that says you are interested in the message they are trying to get across.

As mentioned, active listening is crucial whenever you are communicating. The three techniques above are also very important if the speaker seems defensive or if conflict is developing. Instead of losing patience or responding quickly, step back and try to understand what the speaker is feeling and verbalize the speaker's perspective. This will help the speaker feel like they have been heard and then the real issues can be dealt with.

Listening takes time and energy but it is a skill that anyone can learn with practice. Good listening begins with a commitment to communicate more effectively with others and at first it will seem awkward and uncomfortable, but it will soon become easier.

Listeners also make good leaders. Through their talents in listening, they are able to process what is being said from many people and then provide a common direction or vision for the group to move toward. If you are a great listener, you can consider yourself a good leader.

HANDLING CONFLICT WITH CONFIDENCE

"If a person wants a place in the sun that person must live with blisters"

Unknown

The Three C' of handling crisis with confidence

COOL

Relax, take a breath, and regain your composure.

CALM

Choose to stay in control, don't over dramatize, or get caught up in the moment.

COLLECTED

Think before you act, stop and listen to the other party before you form judgments or you may begin to think the worst.



THINK ABOUT IT: The reasons miscommunication/disagreements

happen:

- Difference of opinion
- Different perception
- Difference of experience
- Poor communication skills
- Lack of listening
- No clarification
- Distractions

Can you think of any other reasons?

There are three easy steps to managing conflict:

1. Determine the real problem? When you take away the emotion and the symptoms what is really causing stress, problems or conflict?
2. Control your reaction. Prepare for the worst, listen first and then react.
3. Decide where the responsibility lies. Don't take personal responsibility for the problem or the solution if it's not your responsibility. "I think", "I meant" etc.

Setting Workplace Standards - Verbal Communication

- You can't change negative situations or negative people you can only add a positive aspect or alternative or encourage neutrality.
- Criticism is a judgmental comment- it shows disapproval and is faultfinding. Don't do it!
- Effective evaluations focus on the behavior not the individual(s) – It's not personal it's business! There is an appropriate time and place for feedback.

REMEMBER:

- Responsible people need to be keeping informed.
- Dependent people have a problem with fear not laziness.
- Independent people need agreement and sufficient resources to achieve their goals.

NOTE: It is important to remember that when you do respond to an inappropriate comment, express an opinion, or make any statement, you need to say whatever you're saying like you mean it- speak with a purpose in mind- this builds your credibility and gets, as well as keeps, the attention of others.

Public speaking training is not eliminating the butterflies; it is getting them to fly in formation.

— Toastmaster's International (www.toastmasters.org)

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

You can save a lot of time and energy by learning how to ask the right questions. It's equally important to actually listen to the answers and watch the speaker's body language so you can "read between the lines" and pick up on nonverbal cues. There are five types of questions which when properly used can help you solve most any service issues quickly and effectively.

1. General Questions-

General questions are asked when you are just "making conversation" for example when you first meet someone. This type of question is used to show basic courtesy or to fill a space of time. General questions include open-ended questions like, "How are you?" or "Isn't it a great day?" or "Aren't you glad it's

Friday?” When you don’t know someone well, asking general questions and actually listening to the answers can give some insight into a person’s mood, attitude, conversation style, and much more. Many people will disclose too much about themselves when they think they are engaging in mindless “small talk” For example this is often where the “too much information” issue arises.

2. Leading Questions-

Leading questions are asked with a specific purpose in mind, however, the asker does not want to appear rude, pushy or overly assertive so the question is asked in such a way that the person being asked does not always realize the questioner has an objective. For example, if I want to know if a client will be returning to our hotel for the holidays but I don’t want to put her on the spot, I might ask, “So Mrs. Client, are you thinking about a Florida vacation this winter?” Or if I want to get feedback about a service issue but don’t want to solicit an opinion I might ask a client, “Mrs. Brown, have you used our 24-hour emergency hotline? I want to draw a response without seeming pushy. When it comes to client complaints, leading questions can sometimes help you determine the real issues.

3. Direct Questions-

If you need to get straight to the point, ask direct questions. This saves a lot of time and energy and gives others the impression that you are interested in their issue. Direct questions also suggest that a questioner is competent; capable of solving a specific issue and that the questioner respects the person he/she is speaking to. Depending on who you are questioning, you may need to preface a direct question with a statement like, “Let’s get straight to the point...” or “I can help you with this issue if you’ll just answer some specific questions for me....” Sometimes a very direct approach can seem confrontational or aggressive so you have to be mindful of your tone of voice and keep a smile on your face. Direct questions are best for volatile situations where someone is angry and/or impatient. Ask specifics, “So, please tell me about your problem with the washing machine”, or, “I understand you had a problem with your telephone last Tuesday, please tell me what happened exactly.”

4. Clarification Questions-

Once you have asked enough specific questions to actually determine the problem, you should ask a couple of clarification questions to make sure that you and whomever you are speaking with on the same page. For example, “Okay, Mrs. Brown, just so I’m sure, what you’re saying is, is that the phone goes dead every Tuesday between 3:00 and 4:00?” or “You’re sure, Mrs. Brown that the service attendant got the message?”

It is vital that you ask clarification questions prior to determining a course of action in solving a problem. You may think that Mrs. Brown is telling you the coffee service is a silly idea from you initial questions; however, a clarification question has determined that you need only refresh the coffee more often to

keep it hot. Think about a time when you did not get clarification and you and a client got your “wires crossed”.

5. Verification Questions-

Verification questions are used to establish if a specific course of action is acceptable to someone, e.g., a customer/client, to get feedback, and/or to see if someone will be satisfied with how you have determined to solve a problem. For example, “I’ll make a point of calling the service person Mrs. Brown, would you be so kind as to let me know if it seems hotter next time you take a cup?” or “Mr. Resident, I am prepared to take this service charge off your bill, will that be satisfactory?” or “Mrs. Customer, what can I do to show you how sorry we are for this inconvenience?” Verification questions are a little like “closing the deal”. Again, make sure to smile and be sincere when you extend these questions.

NOTE: It is important to remember that when you do respond to an inappropriate comment, express an opinion, or make any statement, you need to say whatever you’re saying like you mean it- talk on purpose- this builds your credibility and gets, as well as keeps, the attention of others.

Don Gabor, in his book *Speaking Your Mind in 101 Difficult Situations* offers these tips for using TACTFUL conversations:

T = Think before you speak

A = Apologize quickly when you blunder

C = Converse, don't compete

T = Time your comments

F = Focus on behavior - not on personality

U = Uncover hidden feelings

L = Listen for feedback

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COMMUNICATING CONFIDENCE

How we talk, our tone of voice, speech style, and the vocabulary we use says a lot about who we are. Specifically, a listener can often pick up cues about how much we really know, how strongly we feel about something, how much authority we have, and how much self-confidence we have just by listening to the words we use and how we use them. It's important to master non-verbal communication cues too but understanding that we can use vocabulary to our advantage and learning how to speak more "purposefully" can be a tremendous asset in business. Here are some examples. The following words say, "I'm not entirely sure" or "I'm not too confident" or "I'm not feeling very optimistic"....

-maybe	-sorry	-no!	-that's not possible
-Huh!	-sometimes	-but....	-hmmm...
-I can't....	-\$#@(*&	-never	-always
-what?			

These words say "I'm confident", "I'm positive", "I'm confident"....

-yes!	-thank you	-I'll find out	-let's see or let's try
-I can	-If...then....	-What about...	-Please
-I will	-I want to		

When we speak to others, especially unhappy clients, we want to use language that shows concern and a willingness to help, however, we do not want to take personal responsibility for things beyond our control and we do not want to appear incompetent or wishy washy in our communications with them.

KEYS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. You should know the point you are trying to get across and state it at the beginning of communication.
2. Speak in a clear, concise manner and slowly enough that the listener can understand. Listen when it's the other person's turn to speak and watch nonverbal cues.
3. Use positive vocabulary and speak with energy.
4. Speak in full sentences but try to keep things short and simple when possible.
5. Give the listeners an opportunity to ask questions and be sure to ask them clarification questions to ensure that you are both on the same wavelength.
6. Try not to say "hmmm" or "umm" or leave long pauses between your sentences.
7. Ask questions about others. Don't always say "I" and talk about yourself.
8. Remember not to raise your voice at the end of your sentences, which makes everything sound like a question.

9. If you are speaking an opinion, say so. Don't speak as though your statements are facts or directives.
10. Use your whole body when you speak, make direct eye contact, make your body language match your verbiage and control your gestures.

HOW TO SAY NO- POLITELY

There are various situations that can you feel like shouting loudly, "Leave me out of this", or "Don't make me do this" and "Please go away". Unfortunately, simply saying "No" is not enough to get you out of those situations. Try to remember that no matter what your reason is for saying no, adding a simple "please" or "thank you" to the "No!" will help you get your point across succinctly and yet politely.

The reasons we say "No" are often different depending on the situation. And because the person hearing the "No" doesn't always understand our reasons, our declining is often considered as a personal antic, or strategy, as opposed to an answer based solely on the request or circumstance.

Here are some tips to help you to be honest and say "No" when you mean "No". Having the ability to do this will help eliminate much of the self-imposed guilt and unnecessary stress that sometimes go along with saying "No".

- Practice saying "NO". All together....No thank you!. Again please, and again. Now how hard was that? You see, a little practice may give you the courage to say "No". We often over-extend ourselves by saying yes too quickly and then we feel resentment for not helping out. Try to not over explain yourself. Letting others know that you just cannot manage whatever it is should be sufficient.
- When apologies are over-used, the words "I am sorry" lose their meaning. If you are asked to do something and you have no interest or intention of doing it, just say so. If you are not sorry because you cannot do something a simple no thank you will do.
- If you are unable to say yes to someone's request as stated, there is no reason you can't present an alternative. For example, "No, today won't work for me, but how is next week Tuesday?" Offering an alternate plan shows that you know your limits but also shows your interest, and lets your others know that you are accommodating.
- If you are unsure about why someone is asking you to do something, for example, you think a friend's interest in getting together may be more about he/she discussing a project he/she needs help with than about sharing dessert and coffee, consider asking a few questions to be sure

e.g., “Is this a catch-up coffee date or is there something you need to discuss?”

- Delaying a response because you are afraid to say “No” or trying to put off the inevitable can be as stressful to the delayer as it is to the delayed. If you know you are going to decline take a deep breath and do it. No need for long-winded excuses or made-up stories that will eventually come back to haunt you.
- No does not mean yes. If the person to whom you are saying no cannot, or will not, take no for an answer you may need to repeat your response until it is understood. If at some point the situation seems inescapable, try a little humour. For example, let a relentless coworker know that his/her behaviour is flattering but out of line or too much. Say something like, “Wow, you are very persuasive, good and I do appreciate the offer, but the answer is still no thank you”.
- If you have to decline a request because you have an honest deadline or appointment, simply provide a brief explanation. For example, consider saying, “I would enjoy having lunch with you but unfortunately I have a 2:00 pm deadline for the ABC company”.

ANSWER KEY

Exercises 1 and 2 are both self-assessment exercises. There are no correct answers. Responses will vary depending on your individual experiences.