

Session Objectives:

- Building positive relationships
- Giving praise
- Dealing with criticism
- Managing conflict
- Approaches to conflict and ways to resolve conflicts

Building Positive Relationships

Use descriptive 'I' language: In an organizational environment, it is always better to adopt the descriptive 'I' language rather than use 'you' language. When 'you language' is used, it conveys negative emotions like dislike, fault-finding, and so on. In the descriptive 'I' language, the focus is more on the speaker and it isn't judgmental.

Example: 'You' language-"Your report is full of errors. You'll have to redo it."

Descriptive 'I' language: "I am afraid I cannot submit the report you have prepared. The boss would be furious with both of us if I submit this report with so many errors. I think it will be better if you retype it once again."

Focus on solving problems, not controlling others: Rather than conveying the impression of trying to coerce or control the other person, communication should be in such a manner that the focus is on finding a solution to the problem. Messages that express an attempt to control or manipulate tend to offend others.

Example: Suppose a subordinate gives suggestions to the manager and the manager's reply is "Just do as I said." The subordinate is likely to feel disregarded by the superior. Instead if the superior's reply is – " I understand what you are saying but right now lets do it this way", it would in all likelihood evoke a positive response from the subordinate.

Be open: don't try to deceive: A defensive reaction is generated when there is a doubt of being manipulated. People will be reluctant to express their views or give suggestions, for fear of being manipulated. On the contrary, being honest helps earn the respect of co-workers, sub-ordinates as well as management. Being honest doesn't imply being blunt or cruel or volunteering more information than required. It only implies conveying messages and information to the extent required without resorting to manipulation.

Example: Managers need not tell their subordinates about all the details of their meeting with the top management, unless they have been instructed by the top management to do so.

Show empathy: Indifference and lack of concern for others affects communication by making them defensive. In contrast, expressing concern for others can work wonders. It motivates people to perform to the best of their abilities.

Example: A manager who instructs his subordinates to take on additional work and shows total indifference to the inconvenience caused to them only makes them resentful and defensive toward the work. On the other hand, if the manager understands and expresses his concern for having burdened them with additional workload, he succeeds in obtaining the cooperation of his subordinates in doing the work.

Don't put on an air of superiority: By displaying superiority, people tend to put others on the defensive. This

leads to ineffective communication because receivers tend to ignore or forget the message in their attempt to avoid appearing inferior. Conveying the message of equality while communicating not only establishes a positive communication climate but also encourages feedback.

Example: A physician who doesn't explain the nature of ailment or the proposed treatment to the patient communicates the message to the patient that he considers him as stupid and not capable of understanding anything about his ailment.

Listen with an open mind: Listening with an open mind not only helps one to know new things but also helps in building good relationships. Listening with an open mind implies a certain amount of regard and respect for the views of the speaker.

Giving praise

Make praise specific: It is important to be specific when giving any praise. Being specific makes it easier for others to understand what is being appreciated. This will help in making them continue with that behavior or approach.

Example: General: You handled that complaint very well.

Specific: The way you handled that irate customer while maintaining your cool was simply great.

Praise progress, not just perfection: If accomplishing a task perfectly is the prerequisite for praise, then you may hardly get to praise anybody. Therefore, always look for improvement in work and then praise the performers. This will encourage them to perform better.

Example: "Happy to note that there is a marked improvement in your performance over the previous evaluation." If your boss says this to you, you'll be motivated to put in your best .

Be sincere: It is better not to praise at all, rather than be untruthful. Appreciation lacking in sincerity may generate a doubt in the mind of the person being appreciated that you are being manipulative in order to get work done.

Don't overdo praise: Too much of anything is bad, this applies to praise as well. Too much of praise begins to sound insincere and becomes ineffective.

Get the timing right: It is more affective to praise a person as soon as he accomplishes a difficult task rather than praising him after a long period of time has elapsed. Praising a person at the right time encourages him to repeat desirable behavior.

Dealing with Criticism

It is not possible that a person gets praised all the time. At some point of time, a person has to face criticism and should know how to handle it in order to avoid becoming resentful. Similarly, the person who criticizes must also be able to do it tactfully so as to avoid conflicts.

Offering constructive criticism: While criticizing, taking care of certain aspects can go a long way in maintaining good working relationships and minimizing resistance from those being criticized.

- Criticism should be appropriate to the situation and constructive in nature. Prejudice, envy or self-interest should not play a role in criticism.
- It is important that you deal with the situation by viewing it from the other person's perspective. Putting yourself in the other person's shoes helps you to avoid embarrassing him.
- Criticism should not be directed towards the other person's character or traits. Instead, criticism should be specific and directed at the behavior of the person to point out what he should have or should

not have done.

- Criticism should not be judgmental and provocative. Calling the other person names only serves to worsen working relationships.
- Criticism should encourage the other person to come up with a solution to the problem on his own. Solutions and decisions made by a person on his own are more likely to be complied with.
- It is necessary to avoid criticism overload and to limit criticism to one aspect at a time. Making too many complaints at a time makes the receiver defensive and non-receptive to the criticism.

Responding to criticism: The two most common responses to criticism are: fight and flight. Fight is the typical response of putting the blame on others. The other response i.e., flight, is adopted by those who cannot defend themselves by resorting to practices such as physically avoiding the critic or not returning phone calls.

Instead of resorting to either of the above mentioned behaviors, one can respond to criticism in a more mature way by recognizing the value of constructive criticism, understanding the critic's perspective, acknowledging criticism that focuses on behavior and bring out constructive changes in one's behavior. It is also important to accurately understand the criticism and communicate clearly to the critic on how you felt about the criticism. Most important of all, one should not allow criticism to weaken one's resolve.

Managing conflict

Conflicts at workplace are inevitable and most commonly arise due to differences in the way people see, hear and interpret things. Ineffective handling of conflicts can cause frustration and stress and damage relationships while handling conflicts effectively can generate creative solutions, enhance job satisfaction and improve relationships.

Approaches to conflict

Different people respond to conflict in different ways. Some of these approaches are:

Avoiding: Avoiding is an unwillingness to discuss about the conflict, pretending that it does not exist, and attempting to smooth out differences when they arise. This approach may not be appropriate in all situations. In fact, it may also prove to be counterproductive. This approach is suitable in the following situations:

- When you require additional time to gather facts or to think over the situation.
- When it is advisable to allow the differences to be settled.
- When you believe that there is no chance of satisfying your concerns
- When damages far outweigh the benefits of resolving the conflict.

Example: An employee may avoid getting into a conflict with his superior for his unreasonable demands by keeping quiet and looking for another job.

Accommodating: This approach is adopted when you are more interested in resolving the conflict rather than fighting to prove your point. Persons with such attitude are interested in getting along with people. This is a good option under the following circumstances:

- When you know very well that you are wrong.
- When it is important to demonstrate goodwill.
- When maintaining harmony is more important.

Example: Flexible office timings in organizations can help enhance productivity levels of employees. Therefore, some organizations are more accommodative than others in allowing their

employees to work during such hours that are convenient to them.

Competing: Competing is the response, when you want to prove your point anyway. This is irrespective of the reaction that may be generated. This is most suitable when:

- The response should be spontaneous and decisive
- Unpopular decisions have to be announced
- There is a possibility of the other party taking advantage if you adopt a cooperative approach.

Example: The advertisement war between Coke and Pepsi, wherein ads are released in quick succession. This is done to counter the fierce competition between the two companies.

Collaborating: This step is to be adopted when the interests of both the parties should be safeguarded and preserving long term relationship is more important. This approach is acceptable for most situations though not for all situations.

Example: The various joint ventures between MNCs and Indian companies to exploit synergies that arise from such ventures.

Compromising: Here, both the parties forego a part of their initial demand in order to arrive at an agreeable solution. This approach is most suitable when:

- Goals of both the parties are important
- Quick decision making is required.
- Temporary solutions are needed.
- When both the parties are at par and are committed to mutually exclusive goals.

Example: During a trade union strike, both the workers as well as the management of a company need to adopt a compromising stance in order to reach an agreeable solution.

Resolving Conflict

Communication forms the core of conflict resolution. Expressions of anger, unhappiness, and disagreement, though not wrong, should however be expressed at the right time and in the right manner. This will help prevent causing animosity and would trigger a positive response. Conflicts can be defused by adopting certain strategies. These are:

Restate: Some conflicts arise due to different people hearing the same message differently. In order to mitigate a conflict, it is necessary to repeat the message or to rephrase it in another way to ensure that everyone interprets it the same way.

Agree: Conflicts can be defused by focusing on the areas of agreement rather than concentrating on the areas of disagreement. It is always advisable to begin conflict resolution on a positive note than beginning with arguments over points of disagreement.

Refocus: While defusing conflicts, managers should not get bogged down with trivialities and lose sight of the "Big Picture".

Example: While working as a team, there may be several disagreements between team members, but this should not be an excuse for falling behind on the crucial aspect of completion of the project within a certain deadline.

Dissect: In any conflict, personal feelings should not be allowed to dominate. The main issue should be examined putting aside personal feelings and prejudiced opinions.

Compliment: It is essential that both parties in a conflict acknowledge the merits of the other.

Compromise: Many times, in order to defuse a conflict, the parties involved have to compromise on their stance by foregoing a few of their demands.

Postpone: It is always advisable to allow yourself some cool-down time rather than act impulsively. Decisions taken in haste usually end in repentance.

Exit: While attempting to defuse conflicts, if there is a danger of losing temper, it is better to exit from the scene of conflict.

Summary

Interpersonal skills of a person determine the quality of his relationships with others in the organization. Developing interpersonal skills involves building positive relationships by focusing on solving problems rather than controlling others, by showing empathy and by listening with an open mind. It also involves cultivating the habit of giving praise and dealing with criticism effectively.

Despite all efforts toward building positive relationships, conflicts are inevitable in an organization. There are various responses to conflicts such as avoiding, accommodating, competing, collaborating, and compromising. When conflicts do occur, there are various ways to resolve them and establish a positive work environment.