

# Communicate Right From The Start

In addition to basic accounting knowledge and work relevant experiences, employers look to hire candidates who have the ability to learn on the job. **By Eric Marks, MPA, MBA, Director of Human Resources Marks Paneth & Shron LLP**

**U**nderstanding exactly what your employer is looking for from you, will determine how satisfied and successful you will be with your job. Good communication can quickly help set you on the course to becoming a superior performer.

## What Is Good Communication?

Communicating is not only what we say to people, but how we say it and how we receive the responses we get in return. Good communication happens when our ideas and thoughts are understood by someone else in the manner we intended.

Being a good communicator requires a high level of self-awareness. When you take the time to consider the expectations you have about yourself and others in work situations, as well as the expectations those you work with have about you, you are well on your way to becoming a good communicator.

Keeping the principles of good communication in mind as you begin to build relationships in your new firm, can lay the groundwork for a supportive work environment in which problems can be easily discussed and

positive relationships preserved.

It is important to remember, however, that good communication is a two-way street. Listening to instructions, understanding expectations, asking for clarification and being receptive to feedback provide the foundation for learning from supervisors and co-workers.

## When Communication Breaks Down

Communicating effectively with your supervisor and co-workers in a work environment driven by demanding schedules, competing deadlines and client expectations can become challenging. Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, frustration, and even anger.

For example, as a new hire, you may feel that you are not getting adequate training and support from your supervisor. Failing to discuss these concerns can build frustration, anxiety, and dissatisfaction with your job. You may even begin to feel ineffective in your new role. Remember, your supervisor can not read your mind or guess what you are thinking and feeling. Addressing issues as they arise will keep communication from breaking

down while the work continues to flow smoothly – as long as you approach areas for discussion the right way.

## Think (and Plan) Before You Speak

Speaking without thinking is one of the easiest ways you can disconnect with your supervisor. Before having an important discussion with your supervisor carefully think through and write out all the talking points you wish to address. Ask yourself a few simple questions about what you are trying to communicate:

1. Is it problem-oriented and not person-oriented?
2. Is it related to the task-at-hand, not coming from out-of-the blue?
3. Is it descriptive but succinct, not overly wordy?
4. Am I open to feedback, not locked into one-way thinking?
5. Am I being specific and taking ownership for the resolution, not blaming?

Reread your points to eliminate any “emotionally charged” language. Develop a game plan. As you review your points, anticipate the reactions you

may receive and how you will respond.

One rule of thumb to bear in mind is that “nothing is so simple that it can’t be misunderstood.” What we say and what we hear are subject to a variety of influences, beyond our control, which can cause a misunderstanding. In a diverse workplace, language of origin, cultural background, stress levels, voice tone, body language, and personal temperament impact interpersonal communications. If you take these potential obstacles into account in advance, your discussion is bound to have a more positive outcome.

### **The Finer Points of Feedback**

As you and your supervisor work through projects and issues together, you will undoubtedly be given feedback on your progress. Feedback is an effective way of gauging how you are performing and whether or not you and your supervisor are on the same page. When used correctly, feedback is direct, focused and has the ability to reduce the ambiguity inherent in communication.

Getting feedback from your supervisor is important to your growth and development as a professional. It provides direction and insights for improving your performance and adding value to the Firm. Maximizing the benefit from the feedback you receive at work requires that you:

- Listen carefully to the content of the feedback
- Try not to let your defenses build
- Paraphrase what you think you hear
- Ask clarifying questions
- Carefully evaluate what you hear
- Observe your own behavior and others’ reactions to it.



As a new hire, you may have difficulty offering feedback to more experienced co-workers, supervisors, and partners. The feedback you provide those you work with is just as critical as that which you receive from others so don’t be afraid to offer it. The key to giving feedback is to be clear, specific and focused.

It is important to be confident and own the feedback that you give. (For example, use the phrase: “I think that we should speak with the client about this problem.” versus “Perhaps it would be a good idea to speak with the client about this problem.”)

### **The Last Word**

Accounting firms today are searching for candidates who possess more than academic prowess. The work of accountants has evolved from record-keeping and financial reporting specialists to trusted professionals who can offer clients the expertise and guidance they need to grow their businesses. Whether out in the field or back home in the office you will need to rely upon the solid relationships you are able to establish with clients, supervisors and co-workers. Strong communication skills are a sure way to build rapport, demonstrate knowledge, and keep your career on the right track.