

## General Instructions:

1. Read pages 2-4, where page 2 defines the 5-Step communication model and pages 3-4 applies the model in a scenario example. Note that a description of “Telling Ourselves a Story”, which applies to step #1, is printed on page 7.
2. Think about a communication interaction that didn’t go well. Go through your real-life situation using the 5-step model framework shown on page 5.
3. Read page 6 on the definitions of Assertive, Passive, and Aggressive Communication and think about examples you’ve seen or done of each one of these approaches. As a Supervisor, your goal is to be assertive in communication. However, most of us have demonstrated ineffective communication – either aggressive or passive.

Which one do you tend to demonstrate the most?

Remember: Please bring all your pre-work assignments to the classroom training.

## Pre-Work Assignment: Communication and the 5-Step Model

One of your daily tools as a supervisor is your ability to communicate effectively. Anytime you are initiating a conversation, sharing an idea or opinion, providing coaching, mentoring others, giving feedback, clarifying expectations, and supporting others, you are communicating.

Here are 5 steps to remember when communicating:

1. **Look inward.** (Self-assessment/\*Story vs. Fact). Is this the best time for this communication? Remember HALT (Never get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired) in order to allow ample time for looking inward. Consider how much of what you think of a situation is based on true fact or the story you have created. This self-reflection can help you get in a more objective frame of mind and provide you with a better ability to listen to the other person.  
  
\*Read short excerpt from “Crucial Conversations” and the “Reality-Based Rules of the Workplace” on page 7 in this document.
2. **Share the purpose of your message.** What is the 1 sentence description of your message? If you were to bottom-line the main topic of your message – what would it be? “Joe – I would like to talk with you about our team project.”
3. **Send your message.** Pay attention to body language, voice, facial expressions and words. Anytime there is a difference between our words and our body language and tone, our listener is going to believe the message of what is seen and observed more than the actual words. Make sure that as you are sending the message, there is “congruency” – that is, your body language, facial expression, vocal tone and words are “all saying the same thing.” As you can identify the particular style of your listener, tailor your communication to the person and audience.
4. **Make sure your message was heard.** Often times we send a message and think that just because we communicated, the message was heard. When we paraphrase, ask clarifying questions, or ask the person to repeat back what we heard, we have a better chance of making sure that the message received is the message we sent. Remember that the listener is filtering what he/she hears through their own perceptions, biases, personality, and experience.
5. **Follow up.** As appropriate, negotiate a day and time to follow up to track progress. This is especially important for those more difficult conversations that relate to performance issues. For performance issues, any agreements and commitments need to be written down so as to make sure you and your direct report have the same understanding of the message. Consider following up your communication with a short summary email. Consider scheduling a follow-up meeting to keep you both on track.

These steps can be especially helpful to remember when you are preparing yourself for a difficult conversation.

## SCENARIO EXAMPLE

Over the last few weeks, you have noticed that one of your employees, Sebastian, has frequently turned in assignments late and with a number of mistakes. This assignment is a weekly report that analyzes critical customer information that is used for management decision making. He doesn't seem to care about the quality of his work or put his best effort into these reports. Due to time constraints, you have habitually corrected the mistakes yourself before turning it in senior management.

This morning, as you just came back from an especially stressful meeting with a manager from another department, you pass Sebastian's office. He is not there, but his final draft report is on his desk with your name and a note on it. The report is due in 15 minutes. As you read the report, you see grammatical errors, as well as errors in his calculations. You are frustrated that you once again have to deal with this situation and don't have much time to make all the changes to your satisfaction. As you sit down, Sebastian shows up to his office. You decide that you need to talk with Sebastian.

1. **Look inward.** Take a few moments and step back. Is this really the best time for this difficult communication? Your report is due in a few moments. This becomes the priority. In addition, what kind of mood are you in? You just came back from a stressful meeting that may have impacted your energy for this conversation. How much of this situation is based upon facts or your interpretation of the facts? Are his errors due to his lack of care for the quality of the work? Is he not putting his best effort? Or could there be other reasons for these errors? Are you sure that this report is his final report copy? What other assumptions have you made in this situation? Could there be a reason why Sebastian stepped away from his office? Perhaps he was looking for you? As you look inward, you realize that the emotions you feel may not be based on the reality of the situation. You decide to have this conversation the next day and, for now, work with Sebastian to get a corrected report turned in to management.
2. **Share the purpose of your message.** Here is an example of your 1-sentence purpose statement:

*Sebastian, I would like to talk with you about the timeliness and accuracy of your weekly management reports... How does 1 pm this afternoon work for you to talk?*

3. **Send your message.** As you reflect on what you would like to say to Sebastian, here are some of the main points of your message: You want to make sure he knows the critical nature of this report, the pattern of errors that you have been seeing, as well as the consequences that are occurring when these errors need to be corrected. This report is critically important to be correct since management is basing their decisions on the data.

As you consider your message, you also need to ask yourself – what kind of issues may be hindering Sebastian from meeting this assignment? Did he get enough training? Have you been providing the support and guidance he needs? Does Sebastian know what a finalized, corrected report even look like? Is he clear on the performance standards? And how much have you been helping him when you are correcting the mistakes yourself? Another consideration is to ask yourself, what kind of tone do you want to convey to Sebastian? A tone of frustration or anger would not be the best tone for him to hear what you are saying. In addition, what kind of communication style does Sebastian have? You'll want to adapt your style to his style to increase the chances of his gaining an understanding.

Here's an example of what you could say to Sebastian:

*I am concerned about the amount of errors I am seeing in your weekly report to management. I am not sure you have realized this, but for the last few weeks, I have been correcting your errors on these reports. It is vitally important for the success of our organization that these reports be accurate – with the correct calculations as well as clear, concise communication that explains your calculations and is grammatically correct. As you know, that report is due every Tuesday morning by 9 am. For the last 3 weeks, I have seen at least 3-4 errors per report and, in order to make deadline, I changed them myself. Can you share with me your perspective and what is the reason why you cannot get this report done in time with no errors?*

#### **4. Make sure your message was heard.**

*Sebastian, I am so glad we talked about this report. This is such a critical responsibility for your job role that I want to make sure that you heard what we discussed and also agreed to. Would you be willing to share with me your understanding of our conversation and the agreements we have both made?*

#### **5. Follow up.**

*I will be following up this conversation later on today with a short email just to make sure we have a mutual understanding. In addition, how does Friday look for us to get together and see how your progress is going?*

## Pre Work Written Assignment

Reflect upon a recent communication interaction you have had with one of your direct reports that did not go well. Review each one of the 5 steps and think about how each element could have been a factor in the success of the outcome. Then do a “reboot” and see how going through these steps could have make a more effective result. Using the example as a guide, go through each of these steps.

Step 1: Look inward.	
Step 2: Purpose of the message.	
Step 3: Send the message.	
Step 4: Make sure the message was heard.	
Step 5: Follow-up.	

Another aspect of communication relates to assertiveness. As a supervisor or manager your goal is to be respectful in communication. The most effective way to be demonstrate mutual respect is to communicate assertively. Below is a definition of assertive communication, as well as two ineffective approaches: passive communication and aggressive communication. As you read the definitions, see if you can identify situations where you have been assertive, aggressive, or passive. Identify examples of each.

### Effective Communication

**Assertive** - Behavior in which you stand up for yourself in a way that does not disrespect someone else. It is “give and take” and is based on mutual respect. You give your opinion, and you also take in or listen to the opinions of other people. It is a direct, honest, and appropriate expression of one’s feelings, opinions, and beliefs.

*The goal is to achieve win-win in communication.*

**Examples of Assertive communication:**

### Ineffective Communication

**Passive** – You avoid expressing your opinions or feelings. When you are passive, you choose to disrespect yourself.

*The goal is to avoid conflict at all costs.*

**Examples of Passive communication:**

**Aggressive** – You stand up for yourself in a manner that disrespects others. Your expression of your needs or desires does not take into account the welfare of others.

*The goal is to win at all costs.*

**Examples of Aggressive communication:**

## Telling Ourselves a Story

See/hear -> *TELL A STORY* -> Feel -> Act

Emotions just don't happen. You create your emotions.

There is an intermediate step between what others do and how we feel. When faced with the same circumstance, people may have a whole array of emotional responses. Just after we observe what others do and just before we feel some emotion about it, we tell ourselves a story. Telling ourselves a story means that we add our own interpretation, judgment or meaning to the action we observed.

Stories are our interpretation of the facts. They help explain what we see and hear. Our stories help explain the why and the how and the what.

Storytelling happens very fast – especially when we have not built a relationship with the person. Or when we don't have trust, don't feel safe or feel that we are at risk. We tell ourselves a story so quickly that we don't even know we are doing it. Since we're the ones telling ourselves a story – we can take control back of our own emotions by telling ourselves a different story.

One of the ways we can take control of our story – and our emotions – is to separate fact from story by focusing on behavior. Get back to the genuine source of your feelings. Test your ideas against this question, “Can you see or hear this thing you're calling a fact? Was it an actual behavior?” The statement “he doesn't trust me” – is a conclusion, not a fact. But “he came into the room and answered one question from the team and then left.” is a fact – multiple people watching this would make the same observation. Watch out for “hot” words such as “sarcastic” – these express judgments and attributions – not facts.

Any time you begin to experience stressful thoughts and feelings about an event or another person, PAUSE. Ask yourself:

1. What story am I telling myself right now?
2. What do I know for sure? (only the facts).
3. How do I act when I believe my story?
4. Without my story, what would I be doing to help?
5. What is the very next thing I can do to add value right now?

(Adapted from *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when the Stakes are High* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler and *The Reality-Based Rules of the Workplace* by Cy Wakeman)