



Collaboration and Communication: Essential Skills for Today's Workplace

Collaboration is no longer a luxury or option; it is now a vital skill for success in the 21st century workplace. In order to cultivate collaboration skills or to enhance your existing skill set, consider practicing the following communication skills which are at the heart of a collaborative work style.

What You Can Do

- Collaboration occurs when two or more people work together to achieve common goals, often focusing on problems that an individual could not resolve alone.
- Healthy, respectful, and effective communication skills are essential in working collaboratively with others. It is beneficial in tackling challenging issues when expectations and stress may be high. Having the ability to communicate effectively allows for productive discussion when attempting to manage the different styles individuals might naturally use to deal with a problem on their own. Respectful communication and effective collaboration skills are also key when team members are located in different cities, states, or even countries.

Communication Do's and Don'ts

- **Active listening** - Effective verbal communication is more than talking; it's a two-way process. A critical component, careful listening, leads to understanding the speaker's message, perspective and feelings behind the message.
 - Do pay attention to the speaker; *don't* check your emails or engage in other multi-tasking.
 - *Don't* carry on cross talk with others or interrupt the speaker.
 - *Don't* distract yourself with thoughts of what you want to say; *do* make a mental or physical note of them for possible follow-up at a later time.
- **Paraphrasing** - To clarify and to show your interest in the message, do reflect back your understanding with "What I heard you saying is..." or "Sounds like you're suggesting..." or "Did you mean... when you said...?"
- **Active participation** - If you tend to feel shy in groups, participating in a collaborative team most likely will challenge you. However, with an effective leader, you can have a positive experience that will encourage pushing your boundaries again.
 - Do speak up to share an opinion or an idea, even if you're nervous. Take several deep breaths and direct that nervousness to positive action.
 - Do stay focused on topic; *don't* go off track.
- **Self-awareness and self-discipline** - Emotions can surface while working closely with others. After meetings, evaluate your behavior and determine if you added to the tension and need to change or take action.
 - Do apologize to anyone you may have inadvertently hurt.
 - *Don't* let unresolved issues affect your good standing or the team's effectiveness.
 - Do resist reacting defensively, behavior that repels people. *Don't* blame, shame, use sarcasm or withdraw during team interactions.

Collaboration and Communication Resources

Whether you're fairly new to the workplace, have difficulty speaking in a new group of people, or are used to doing things your way or on your own, you may find participating in a collaborative team to be extremely uncomfortable. That's understandable.

Consider turning to a family member or friend you trust to talk about your concerns and to seek support. In addition, you can use the confidential services of your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for free consultation about communication issues.



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