

TOOLS FOR RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Effective communication skills are essential for project managers. Constituency based management depends on one's ability to listen effectively to others' interests and concerns. It is also important that resource managers learn to express their ideas so others can understand them.

LEARN TO SPEAK EFFECTIVELY

Good speaking skills are not innate. They need to be learned, practiced, and constantly evaluated. Project managers need to hone their speaking skills for one-on-one interactions, for speaking at meetings, and for making presentations to large groups of people.

Plan your message

The first rule for more effective speech is to think about what you want to say. What is the main idea you are trying to express? Try to state the idea in a clear, concise way using language that is understandable. Organize other supporting thoughts so they lead to this main idea. Stop once your point has been made and ask your listeners for their reactions to ensure that they have understood you accurately. Strive to talk about one thing at a time and avoid topic jumps. This keeps the conversation focused.

Be expressive

Your speaking style has a large impact on your ability to be convincing. Strive to speak with warmth, expressiveness, and enthusiasm. If you want to improve your expressiveness, record a conversation, meeting, or presentation that you participated in. Listen to the tape and evaluate the tone of your voice, your delivery speed and style, and your response to questions. Determine areas for improvement and write down some concrete steps that you can take to improve your presentation skills.

Answering questions

When responding to questions, take time to organize your answer. Paraphrase the question to be sure you are certain of the meaning. Use lead-in phrases like, "That is an interesting question," to show respect for the person and to give you time to organize your answer. In most situations, if you do not know the answer to the question, say so. Do not make up an answer.

BE AN ACTIVE LISTENER

What is effective listening?

Effective listening means that you hear the words the speaker communicates and that you process the information to understand the total message. Active listening can only happen when you avoid distractions, listen to the speaker's words, and pay attention to the speaker's non-verbal communication. Look at the speaker as you listen. Maintain eye contact, unless it makes the other person uncomfortable. Watch the speaker's facial expressions and body language to interpret non-verbal messages. Allow silence, listen more than you talk, and give people time to collect their thoughts. Nod to indicate when you agree or understand.

Be accepting of the speaker

Demonstrate an open attitude toward the speaker through body language and attentiveness. Don't fidget, frown, or stop listening to compose your own response while the speaker is still talking. The more speakers feel accepted, the more they can let down their guard and express what they really want to say. Any negative attitude, such as demonstrated impatience, on the listener's part tends to make a speaker feel defensive, insecure, and more guarded in communication.

Question skillfully

Use open-ended questions to get others more involved in the conversation. An open-ended question can not be answered with a yes or no; it allows others to talk at length. Start with, Tell me about..., How, Explain, and Describe. These questions let speakers know that you care about their thinking and they invite speakers to expand on a topic in a comprehensive way. Closed questions beginning with, Is? Are? Do? and Did? can be used to check your understanding of the information they are presenting. But don't ask too many questions. Questions shift control of the conversation to the listener.

Active listening takes work

Listening is not passive. Listeners must share responsibility for the communication and actively demonstrate that they understand what is being said. Several times during the conversation, listeners should summarize what they have heard to assure that they are on track. Listeners should end the conversation with a summary to be sure that everyone agrees on what happened and what was decided. During the conversation, whenever listeners are unclear about what a speaker is saying, they should ask the speaker to clarify what he or she intended to convey. Remember that miscommunication occurs because of errors by both the speaker and the listener.