

Introduction

The **Worldwide Center for Organizational Development LLC** (WCOD) is an international provider of management and leadership programmes and is accredited by the **Institute of Leadership and Management** (ILM) to offer the full range of their core qualifications for Team Leaders, Middle and Senior Managers.

This module has been produced in an *open-learning* format. As you work through this workbook you will find that the practical management guidance and principles are followed by **activities** and **reflection exercises** to support your personal development. Activities and reflection exercises are clearly marked in this workbook with specific icons.

Reflection exercises are designed to help you apply the learning to your own world and work situation (but are not formally assessed in any way and are thus discretionary to complete). **Activities**, on the other hand, help you to test your own knowledge and understanding of key management and leadership principles and theory and apply that learning within your current or future management and leadership roles. These form part of the formal evidence of learning path that is assessed by WCOD and the qualification accrediting body, ILM. Such application of good practice at work will not only benefit you, but will also result in many benefits to your organization.

On the page overleaf is a one page description of what is contained in this module. This briefly outlines the **overall content**, the **learning objectives** for the module and the core competencies that underpin the material. Finally, at the end of the booklet you will find the **target behaviours** that relate to each of the competencies that are relevant to this module. In this section, each appropriate competency is defined and is then followed by corresponding target behaviours. These target behaviours are appropriate for the level of the 20/20 MDS™ system to which this module applies.

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Module Description and Objectives

Handling Poor Performance (Level A)

It would be an ideal world (and a naive expectation of managers) to have all employees arrive at work on time every day, with a positive attitude, a strong willingness to work, and a commitment to earn their keep.

Unfortunately, in the real world, there are always employees (even if they are in the minority) who are undisciplined, incompetent or committed to getting the most and giving the least. This happens despite our best efforts in selecting and training employees.

Hence, it is sometimes necessary for a manager to intervene when performance standards have not been met. This module deals with how to counsel and (wherever necessary) discipline employees in a positive, constructive manner.

Objectives

At the end of this module you will be able to:

- recognise your strengths and weaknesses relating to Counselling and disciplining others
- apply transactional analysis as a way of understanding and influencing communications
- apply questioning and listening skills to handle poor performance positively
- manage conflict and angry people
- communicate assertively
- describe the main issues and risks when initiating disciplinary and dismissal procedures.
- Apply formal disciplinary processes reasonably and fairly

Underpinning Competencies

Directional Clarity
 Giving Clear Information
 Getting Unbiased Information
 Counselling and Disciplining

Linked Assessments (where applicable)

Influencing Style Clock

Handling Poor Performance 1

It would be an ideal world (and a naive expectation of managers) to have all employees arrive at work on time every day, with a positive attitude, a strong willingness to work, and a commitment to earn their keep.

Unfortunately, in the real world, there are always employees (even if they are in the minority) who are undisciplined, incompetent or committed to getting the most and giving the least. This happens despite our best efforts in selecting and training employees.

And of course most people suffer lapses in job performance from time to time or fail to achieve or maintain targets. Sometimes change presents new challenges to performance, sometimes personal issues cause distraction. Whatever the cause or circumstance, managers and supervisors are responsible for monitoring and responding to such lapses or problems.

Hence, it is sometimes necessary for a manager to intervene when performance standards have not been met. This module deals with how to counsel and (wherever necessary) provide discipline to employees in a positive, constructive manner (although disciplinary processes will not be the focus of this module).

Counselling or Disciplining?

Let us begin by defining these two terms.

Counselling

The process of helping a person to solve a problem or reach a decision on their own, e.g., counselling an employee who is often late, or who is abrupt with customers, or is experiencing a lag in productivity. Counselling is almost always initiated by the supervisor or manager as soon as it becomes evident that the employee’s problem is not a slight or temporary deviation that might be made worse by discussing it. You will probably spend most of a counselling session receiving information.

Disciplining

The process of restoring a person’s behaviour from unacceptable levels to within acceptable limits. Disciplining can be viewed as an advanced stage of counselling, to be used after earlier efforts at counselling have failed.

In this module, we will spend our time in looking at counselling in the workplace (usually delivered when performance is perhaps slipping but not sufficiently poor to start to formally discipline people. We will not look at formal discipline at all in this module. However, the whole subject of discipline is a separate course at the next level in this integrated program.

Another term that we need to define before we go any further is “*client*”. If an individual had a problem of any kind outside the work environment and sought counselling to help, they would be a client of the counsellor. Rather than to refer to terms like “the employee” or “an individual”, for the most part, we have used the same term of client throughout this module, simply meaning the person towards whom our performance counselling efforts are aimed.

Why do you think that it is often better to engage in counselling when performance is slipping with a particular individual, rather than to hope the problem may just pass in time?



REFLECT

Counselling Skills

Would you Make a Good Counsellor?

How do you assess your own potential as a counsellor? Our experience is that you need to have developed certain qualities before you can successfully perform the “counsellor” part of your management role. These are as follows:

- **Judgement.** A good potential counsellor is somebody who can learn not to make judgements on behalf of the client or about the client. Counsellors have their own firm values but never let them conflict with their ability to listen to clients with different standards.
- **Patience.** Some of us are patient because we can control feelings even when we can't stand the person we're dealing with. A good potential counsellor very rarely needs to exert his or her own self-control in dealing with people.
- **Experience.** Life experience – particularly the experience of recovering from hard knocks, failure, pain, grief, by learning to grow into a more complete person – although often an intangible quality, is very important in a potential counsellor.
- **Education.** You don't need a degree in psychology! But at the same time, “common-sense” is not enough. A good potential counsellor is somebody who is equally willing to learn about himself or herself, as about other people – whatever his or her educational standard.
- **Social Skills.** To be very skilled in communication techniques seems to some of us to suggest artificiality, even hypocrisy. Yet for a potential counsellor, it is not enough to be intuitively a “good listener”. Counsellors learn in training how to “read” all aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication, and deliberately become better listeners by applying appropriate techniques during counselling.
- **Warmth.** Genuine interest in other people is often talked about and, indeed, has become something of a cliché. The kind of interest which makes for a good counsellor has been called “unconditional positive regard” for the client. If you don't really need other people in your life, then maybe you'll find this kind of spontaneous warmth to strangers something of a problem.
- **Discretion.** Finding out other people's “secrets” can be fun – and telling them can not only be enjoyable, but also act as a form of relief, particularly when your own feelings have been stirred up. Counsellors, however, give up such luxuries. What they hear they keep to themselves.
- **Training and Practice.** As with any other interviewing technique, counselling takes training, then practice, practice, and more practice. So those who stand the best chance of success are the ones whose work already involves frequent contact with clients they are expected to help. Nobody learns in a vacuum, but as your present job includes a “helping” responsibility then counselling training could suit you very well.

- **Perfection.** No – this isn't something you need. In fact, the person who has to be perfect does not usually enjoy counselling, and is almost impossible to train. A guilt-free ability to live with and even to enjoy your own lack of perfection is more likely to indicate a good potential counsellor. Such a person has usually come to terms with himself or herself – and can enable others to do so, with training.



ACTIVITY

From this framework, what do you believe are your strengths?

In what areas do you need to develop?



Checklist

You will now have a better idea of the size of the challenge that faces you to adopt the “counselling” role when dealing with poor performance at work.

Let us now look at the counselling skills that will help you with this challenge in more detail.

Counselling

Counselling in a business context is:

**NOT
A SOFT OPTION!**

Approached properly it:

- has a business objective
- takes into account individual needs in terms of the business
- seeks to move the individual forward to find their own solution, to their benefit and that of the business

for a WIN/WIN outcome

Human interaction, including the processes of counselling and disciplining, has five possible outcomes:

Win/Win	In Win/Win situations agreements and solutions are mutually beneficial, all parties feel good about the solutions. “It may not be my way, or your way, but a better way”.
Win/Lose	If I win then you lose, no co-operation.
Lose/Win	I am happy to give it to you, I will lose and you win, I am not part of this decision making process, I give up responsibility.
Lose/Lose	Some people in confrontation get so obsessed with the other person not winning they are prepared to lose themselves, so long as the other person loses as well!
Win	I win and it really doesn’t matter how, or what happens to you, I am looking after myself and no one else.

Most success can be had from Win/Win or no deal at all. This says that if we can’t find an agreement that is beneficial to both of us then we will agree to disagree... No Deal.

Counselling: Some Guidelines

Most managers have no trouble coaching people, teaching them a job, or showing them ways of working more efficiently. When it comes to counselling, managers have a tendency to avoid it (“It’s really not my business”) or to become an amateur psychologist and pry into their workers’ personal affairs (“I want to help my people with their problems”).

Either extreme is wrong. To ignore them is folly, and to invade their personal problems can threaten your relationship and the trust that is so important to manager and employee alike. Here are some guidelines and observations to help you see your counselling role in perspective.

1. Your role is not to solve employees’ problems for them. Only they can do that. You can help them gain insight and develop a plan to correct the situation.
2. An employee with a disruptive problem is likely to feel uncertain, anxious, ashamed or angry. If you cannot understand and be supportive of these feelings, then you should not counsel the person.
3. Your role is not to pass judgement or cause loss of face of the employee you are counselling. Try to remain neutral, non-moralistic, and shockproof. Employees need empathy and understanding, not sympathetic pep talks.
4. The more you listen, the more you will learn about the person you are counselling. This will enable you to assess the situation better and achieve the desired objectives.
5. The more you get employees to talk during a counselling session, the more they are likely to (a) take responsibility for their own behaviour, (b) know what to do in the future, and (c) feel better for having talked it out.
6. The immediate problem is often a symptom of something bigger. Your role is to help the employee learn how to deal with future difficulties, not just the immediate problem.
7. All counselling sessions should be conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Both of you must work toward an outcome that you each feel good about (i.e., a win-win outcome).
8. The focus of a counselling session should be on the employee’s performance and not on personality. Your role is to help them to improve their performance not to change their personality.
9. Your counselling dialogue should be conducted on an adult to adult basis, and not a parent to child basis. Avoid blame or censure or advice and remember that the employee must have “authorship” of the plan of action.
10. Make heavy use of non-directive questions that get the employee to open up and express feelings as well as facts. Use directive questions to confirm feelings.
11. Your comments during a counselling dialogue should serve to seek out more information (“searching”) and to show understanding and shared feeling (“empathic”) without being advising or critical.

- 12. Before any counselling session, answer these questions:
 - What is the situation?
 - What are my objectives?
 - What is my game plan, or strategy, for achieving these objectives?
- 13. The climate should reflect mutual respect, acceptance of each other's view of the situation, and a desire to work to an outcome that you both find acceptable.
- 14. Counselling an employee with a performance problem is usually a high stress situation for both of you. Do not put off the discussion; delay only adds to the stress. You will both be relieved once you get the problem out in the open.
- 15. Approach counselling positively, indicate that you are confident improvement will follow. When you express doubt (in words or negative non-verbal communication) that the employee will improve, you risk a self-fulfilling prophecy – they are likely to leave you with a “what’s the use?” feeling.



REFLECT

Look again at the above points and this time mark each statement with one of the following symbols to correspond to your normal approach to handling poor performance. Use the space below to note any implications/action follow ups for yourself.

Key

- OK = I do this
- * = I need to work on this
- N/A = Not applicable to me
- ? = I don't understand the statement



Activity

Consider the following situation and record how you would feel at the time, and at some future time.

Case Study

Monday – The managing director has asked you for a progress report by Friday on the two development projects your department is managing. You need a mid-term evaluation report from each team leader by Wednesday in order to complete the report on time, (you will be out of the office all day Thursday at a pre-arranged meeting with customers). You hold a meeting with John and Simon explaining the urgency and the deadlines. Both had already completed the evaluation process and only had their reports to complete.

John promised: I will get the evaluation report to you first thing in the morning (Tuesday)

Simon: I cannot work on it today, but I will get it to you first thing on Wednesday morning.

John’s response: By 11.00am on Tuesday the report had not arrived. You rang John, he apologised and said something had cropped up but he would get it to you by the afternoon. By 4.30pm it still had not arrived. You rang again and John promised it would be ready by 9.00am, after all, you had said Wednesday morning was the deadline. He delivered it by hand at 9.30am on Wednesday morning.

Simon’s response: When you arrived at your desk at 9.00am Wednesday morning the report was already on your desk.

How would you feel?	With John	With Simon
By 11.00am Tuesday		
By 5.00pm Tuesday		
At 9.00am Wednesday		
When you next wanted any information by a deadline		



Checklist

Even though you received all the information by Wednesday morning from both John and Simon, you were probably feeling very angry with John and very pleased with Simon. Although Simon had prioritised some other work on Monday, he had kept his promise and met your expectations. You are likely to believe him in the future; your trust will have been enhanced.

John, however, had made promises which he failed to meet, perhaps thinking that he would be able to make the Wednesday morning deadline and therefore it would not matter if he failed to submit the report early. However, it is likely that you would be getting worried, irritated, frustrated or angry because John had set high expectations and then failed to meet them. You may set him false deadlines next time in order to give you an extra margin. However, if he had promised Wednesday 9.30am at the outset, you would probably have been very pleased with him when he delivered on time!

You now have two main choices.

You can enter into a heated discussion and or you can try to explore how you can improve your working relationship with John.

Giving Advice

When you try to give help by offering advice it is generally more productive to involve the other person in the decision making process.

To be effective you must take care to find out all the facts and details before you use your expertise to resolve their problem. You may well come up with a range of options and you can guide your colleague through them all, allowing him or her to use his or her own judgement to make the final decision on how he or she can improve his or her performance.

This process of giving advice also has the advantage that the person usually learns something from the process and there can often be a teaching element within the process. However, if you are giving advice, then you must take care not to sway your staff through your own prejudices or preferences. This can prevent ownership and limit effectiveness.

At all times you should be seeking to encourage and develop your colleagues and attempting to share the expertise you have, so that you can achieve the best results for your organisation and your customers. However, you should not be forcing help upon people who do not want or need it. Getting the balance right is not always easy.

Sometimes dilemmas do arise because of conflicts between:

- your role
- the relationship
- your level of skill.

Uncertainty about the inter-relationship of these three dimensions can affect your behaviour and can create blocks to effective helping. Your lack of skill, confidence or awareness may lead you to intervene in a way which will damage the relationship and reduce effectiveness.

It is worth spelling out the actions which could damage the relationship.

Blocks to Effective Helping

1. **Taking over or giving unsolicited help.** In this situation you give help and support without first clarifying that it is needed and that you are the right person to give it. It means that you are not involving your colleague or customer sufficiently in deciding and managing the type, direction or pace of the support.

You are basically interfering. This can build up resistance, generate distrust, and destroy your working relationship. Some colleagues will be sufficiently assertive and confident to confront you with the discomfort they are feeling, but most will not. This may be because of fears of appearing arrogant, or ungrateful, or they may be concerned about hurting your feelings. Alternatively, they may complain to your boss or their own, or simply withdraw their commitment to the relationship and go elsewhere.

2. **Telling people what to do.** If you tell a colleague what to do, you are demonstrating that you think you know more than they do; the fact that you may do is irrelevant when you are trying to develop a constructive relationship. It sends out the message that you are more interested in the problem or the task than you are in the person and the working relationship.

At the beginning of a project or a task or the creation of a new product, telling them what to do may be precisely what your colleague or customer wants from you. They lack the confidence and the knowledge to make progress. However, as the person develops knowledge they will want to make their own decisions, perhaps with some help and advice, but they will not want to be pushed into something. If you continue to “tell”, you are demonstrating that you are not concerned with their development and may be deliberately keeping them in ignorance!

3. **Manipulating your colleague to accept help.** This can occur when you deliberately use your interpersonal skills to encourage your colleague to be open and honest with you, in order to enhance your role status, reputation or over-riding belief that you know best, rather than honestly seeking to help them meet their own needs or solve their own problems. The colleague may continue to work with you, but end up thinking: *“I wonder why I put up with this. I know more than he/she does, it’s a waste of time”*

Your manipulation may work in the short term but not in the long term.

4. **Pushing your colleague to accept your solution.** This occurs sometimes when you lack confidence in your own skills or knowledge and have found one solution, or set of practices, which work for you and you want to impose them on your colleague whether or not it will suit their particular situation.

You try to sell your solution but do not allow them to become involved in the decision making process. You do not listen to what your colleague wants or needs.

All these forms of helping strategies fail to encourage self responsibility for learning, independent thinking and increased knowledge. They nurture dependency and do not produce the long term results. They are self-defeating.

To guard against this happening you should keep asking yourself these four questions:

- Is the person able to do without my help and support?
- Will what I am doing contribute towards their increased performance?
- Did this person ask for my help and support or accept my offer of help? (Or am I imposing it on them?)
- Is there a clear understanding between us about the nature of my help? That is, the task to be achieved and the process which we will adopt.



Activity

This activity asks you to review your relationships in order to check whether you are creating any blocks. Consider an area of poor performance with one of your staff and ask yourself these questions:

Question	Yes/No	If no, how are you going to encourage self responsibility?
Is this person able to do without my help and support?		
Will what I am doing contribute towards their development or independent decision making?		
Did this person ask for my help and support or accept my offer of help? (Or has it been imposed on them?)		
Is there a clear understanding between us about the nature of my help? That is, the task to be achieved and the process which we will adopt.		

 **Checklist**

The process of moving your colleague from a state of needing a lot of help to being confident enough to solve their own problem is not always a quick or simple process. It depends on the complexity of the situation.

To be successful you should plan to vary your level of involvement and support from the beginning of the relationship.

With your staff you will find that if you are successful in offering and giving help only when it is needed, then they will feel comfortable in asking for help again.

In order to develop your co-operation skills, review this section and record your action plan.

Action Plan

I should start doing...

I should stop doing...

I should continue doing...

The Games People Play

Developing effective relationships can be hindered or helped by recognising the way in which your words and behaviour influence the nature of other people's reactions. We may have all the interpersonal skills, but if we cannot interpret others' behaviour we may not be able to develop the rapport we are seeking.

In 1964, Dr Eric Berne wrote a best seller called *The Games People Play*, in which he described a whole approach to understanding relationships called Transactional Analysis (TA). TA provides some insight into the links between states of mind and choice of style in human communications. A study of TA can also help us to see how individuals are often pushed into behaving in a particular way by the actions of others.

Berne believed that there are three different aspects to a person's behaviour which each represent a different way of thinking, feeling and acting. His theory is that everyone has three different ego states: Parent, Adult and Child, each of which creates different types of behaviour patterns. Unfortunately, people do not always adopt the appropriate state, and this is usually when difficult situations arise. Acknowledging these three states can help you manage a situation, or relationship, more effectively.

Each of us is capable of assuming any of these states in our relations with other people. However, we may have a tendency to adopt one more than another, or certain situations or people may drive us into a particular state.

Parent, Adult or Child

Berne makes the point that we need each of the three types within us to be whole.

The **parent** wants everything to be under control. They define, set limits, take care of set standards, discipline, give advice, protect, teach, keep traditions, nurture and criticise; the paternalistic manager.

This state was subdivided by Berne into two patterns which he called:

- the critical parent who tends to be judgmental and opinionated, a behaviour pattern which is often seen in autocratic managers or didactic trainers
- the nurturing parent who understands, nurtures and protects. This is the state of mind which might be most often associated with the traditional role of the teacher or tutor.

The **adult** in us is mature, rational, thoughtful, questioning, direct and analytical. An adult is able to reflect on a given set of circumstances, to identify problems, identify the best options and make rational judgements based on the available information. This state of mind is the one which you will need to be able to adopt if you are to establish and develop effective relationships with colleagues, customers and staff.

The **child** can be fun-loving, creative, defiant, or compliant. This state is subdivided into three patterns:

- the natural child who is uninhibited, spontaneous and vivacious
- the adapted child who can be eager to please, apologetic, whinging, rebellious and negative
- the manipulative child who is selfish, hesitant and cunning.

It is important to realise that the different states of mind should be in balance. Too much parent and you will lose the spontaneity and fun of the child; too much adaptive child will stop you developing your full potential. The ideal person will have some parent, adult and child within them.

Using Transactional Analysis to Manage Relationships

The important application of this analysis is the development of awareness of which ego state you are behaving in, and which ego state you should be behaving in. Therefore, you have to be aware of the ego state the other person is in.

The process of describing behaviours in terms of states of mind is called transactional analysis because it involves analysing the transactions between people in terms of whether they are:

- parent – child
- child – child
- adult – adult
- adult – child

Very often the ideal transaction for achieving effective communication at work would be **adult to adult** because:

- this relationship is open and based on mutual respect
- the parties in the relationship value logical argument and discussion.

But there may be times when the colleague or customer (as an adapted child) needs a nurturing parent (when things go wrong for instance) or when he/she or she needs to let off steam.

The important point is that people will feel comfortable if the transaction is matched and each person recognises the style and responds appropriately.

You can use your knowledge of TA to resolve some problems which can arise in poor performance with your staff. Problems can occur when a person is locked into a particular style or when the transaction is crossed, for example:

A staff member at a meeting says:

“I’m afraid I didn’t quite understand the last point; could you go over it again please?”

You reply:

“Oh you’re always slowing things down by asking questions, see me later if you must and I’ll go through it all again.”

Here the staff member spoke as adult to adult, but your reply was critical parent to child. Barriers will have been raised because you will have hurt their feelings. The situation will not resolve itself until you are ready to communicate as an adult.

You can also use TA to avoid problems. Problems will arise if the style adopted by one person during a transaction forces another into taking on a particular role. For example, if you talk to someone as an adult and they reply as a child, then you can be forced into responding as a parent.

You say: *“Last time we agreed that you would spend three hours a week trying to improve your computer skills. How has that plan been working?”*

The person replies: *“Yes I’ve learned about bugs, bytes, megabytes, nibbles, pixels, peaks, pokes, sprites and strings. That good enough for you?”*

You say: *“Really I haven’t got time for all your silly jokes. Can we please get back to the business of finding out what you’ve actually done during the past month?”*

What you need to be able to do is resist the temptation to react as a critical parent and continue to act as the adult. This transaction will then be a crossed transaction and it will feel uncomfortable until eventually they leave their child state and join you in the adult state.

“It would be nice to think that we all, as grown up people, use the adult bit of us in every transaction and get an adult response in reply. But, of course, it does not work out like that. An adult approach may trigger a child response, and vice versa, as one transacts with a different part of someone else.”

Charles Handy – Inside Organisations

When working with others you will encounter problems if you allow yourself to be ruled by a particular style. For example:

- if you are dominated by **nurturing parent** you will not be able to get on with the task in hand because you are too wrapped up in rescue work
- if you are in the grip of **adult** you may be too task oriented. Adults often move into critical parent when others don’t see things their way
- if you are **child** dominated person you may find it difficult to act as manager. However, you are probably fun to work with and very creative at times!

In reality, few people behave or speak in a particular style all the time, they subconsciously slip from one mode to another and back again. This is fine as long as each ego state is drawn upon appropriately given the circumstances



Activity

Ego Grams

Using the Transactional Analysis model, this exercise will help you to analyse the relationship between the different parts of your personality.

Put a tick against any of the words, gestures, tones of voice, etc., listed below which you identify with. Make your decisions quickly, do not spend too much time deciding.

Total the number of tick marks in each of the vertical columns.

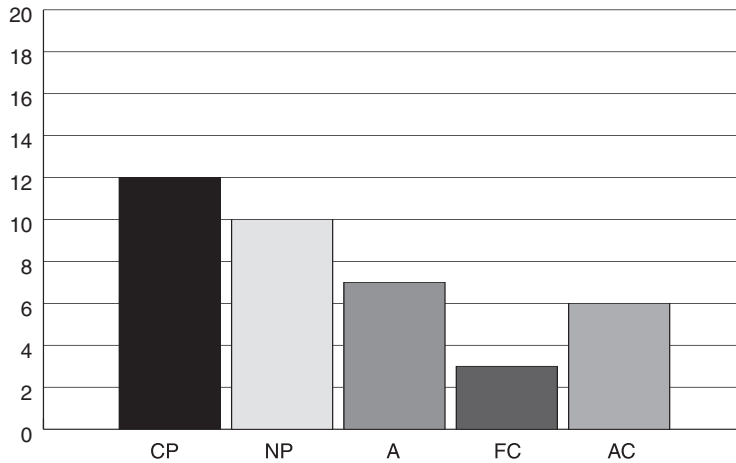
Words and phrases	should had ought always insist demand can't good ridiculous control good	good support protect splendid care let me help don't worry teach watch relax	correct how who why results data alternative practical test decide options	fun wow want scared magic natural ouch hi spontaneous creative love	please adapt wish hope try if only rebel manipulate comply thank you obey
Tones of voice	stern harsh commanding judgmental critical	encouraging caring concerned supportive sympathetic	confident clear calm enquiring even	free loud excited chuckling energetic	appealing placating protesting whining submissive
Gestures and postures	points finger frowns angry rigid	open arms smiling accepting nodding	thoughtful alert listening erect	uninhibited loose bright eyed exaggerated	pouting helpless sad dejected
Total					

Source: Super Confidence, Gael Lindenfield



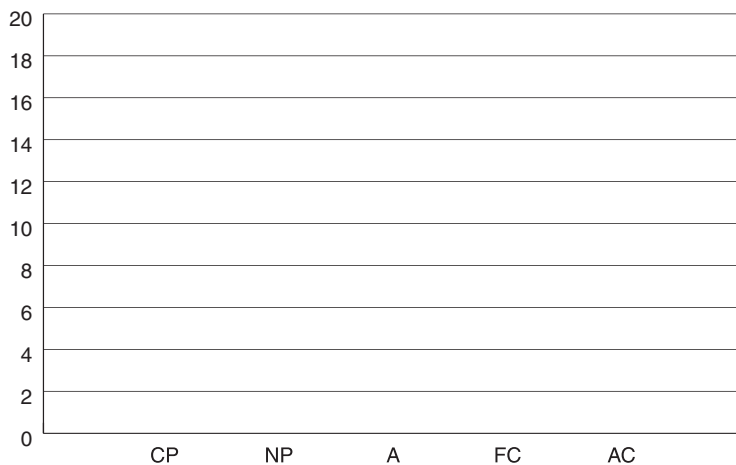
Activity

The scores from this kind of activity can be shown graphically in an “ego gram”. In the example below we can see the various aspects of the person’s personality in relation to each other.



Now create your own ego gram from your scores in each column.

- Column 1 = Critical Parent (CP)
- Column 2 = Nurturing Parent (NP)
- Column 3 = Adult (A)
- Column 4 = Free Child (FC)
- Column 5 = Adapted Child (AC)





Checklist

Examine your ego gram and check whether you are happy with the relative proportions of each part. For example you may note that your Critical Parent (CP) is overshadowing the other parts. If you happen to be in a job which tends to demand that you be authoritative and judgmental (e.g., you have a volunteer reserve job in the armed services for example), then you may be satisfied with this relationship, but if you feel that the major roles you have in life do not ask for this kind of behaviour, then you may want to change. Similarly, a part-time actress or painter may be happy as a highly developed Free Child (FC), but a manager might be in danger of losing his or her job with the same kind of ego gram. There are no intrinsically ‘good’ or ‘bad’ ego grams; you have to decide whether the balance is right for your values and your lifestyle.

If you have noticed that there is one part of your personality that you would like to develop, now is the time to start setting yourself some realistic goals. For example, if you wish to build up your Adult, then you could set yourself the task of developing your assertive skills (see later section in this module). If you wish to develop your Free Child, then you may want to develop your creative thinking skills. If you wish to develop your Nurturing Parent, you could begin to delegate and coach more or start taking better care of yourself!

Remember that an ego gram can only be a rough guide and can only indicate the state of current play within your personality. Each time you carry out this exercise, the result can be different. Sometimes it feels as though you are making healthy progress with your personal development, while at other times you might see that you have begun to let old habits get the upper hand. Unlearning the patterns of childhood behaviour is a long struggle, and when you are under pressure it is easy to slip backwards. Using this exercise from time to time will allow you to check your progress.

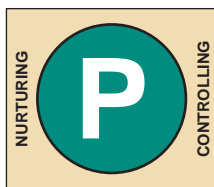
Transactional analysis is useful because it can provide you, your colleagues and your staff with a useful language for describing your relationships. It can also give you a shared understanding of the kinds of transactions that you should aim for, usually adult to adult relationships.

Read the summary TA Theory page overleaf and think about its implications in terms of how you relate to people in general and how you deal with mediocre or poor performance in particular. What sort of adjustments to your approach could you make immediately?

Transactional Analysis Ego States

According to Transactional Analysis we can observe quite distinct types of behaviour which seem to come from different sources within ourselves. These three “Ego States” are as follows:

PARENT EGO STATES (Taught)



This state contains the attitudes, feelings and behaviour incorporated from external sources, primarily parents. In outward behaviour it is divided into two parts:

- **nurturing parent:** concerned with caring, loving, helping
- **controlling parent:** criticising, censoring, punishing

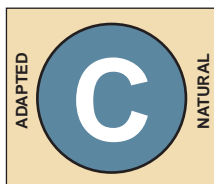
When in your parent state, you respond automatically, almost as if you had a tape recording playing in your head. Everyone has Parent tapes. Some are helpful, enabling us to carry out routine tasks automatically without having to think too much about them. Other tapes can create problems, for example if a Parent tape is triggered automatically in an inappropriate situation.

ADULT EGO STATES (Thought)



Your Adult Ego State is you thinking, feeling and behaving in the here and now, responding appropriately to any stimulus. The state has nothing to do with the person's age. It contains those behaviours concerned with collecting information, organising and analysing. It operates dispassionately and without emotion.

CHILD EGO STATES (Felt)



This state contains all the impulses that come naturally to an infant. But just as the Parent has different aspects, so does the Child. The Child develops into two parts – the Natural Child and the Adapted Child

Natural Child: Is spontaneous, energetic, curious, loving and uninhibited, the part of you that feels free and loves pleasure. Many adults repress their natural child and exaggerate the parent.

Adapted Child: Your Adapted Child developed when you learned to change (adapt) your feelings and behaviour in response to the world around you. Learned feelings of guilt, fear, depression, anxiety, envy and pride are all characteristic of the Adapted Child. The Adapted Child can become the most troublesome part of our personality.

Questioning and Listening Skills

An individual comes into an interview with you regarding something that they feel is a problem. The initial task of the interviewer is to stay out of the interviewee's way so as to find out how he or she sees their situation. Most useful in determining this is the technique of providing limited structure through the use of an "open invitation to talk"

Open Invitation to Talk

An open invitation to talk may be best understood when compared with a closed approach to interviewing. For example:

Open: *Could you tell me a little bit about your working relationship with Phil? How do you feel about that?*

Closed: *Are you getting along with Phil?*

It may be observed that the open questions provide room for the individual to express their real self without the imposed categories of the interviewer. An open question allows the person an opportunity to explore an issue for themselves with the support of the interviewer. A closed invitation to talk, on the other hand, often emphasises factual content as opposed to feelings, demonstrates a lack of interest in what the person has to say, and frequently attacks or puts the individual in their place. Closed questions can usually be answered in a few words or with a yes or no.

Crucial to open-ended questions is the concept of who is to lead the interview. While the interviewer does ask questions while using this skill, the questions are centred around concerns of the client rather than around concerns of the interviewer for the client. Questions should be designed to help the client clarify their problems, rather than provide information for the interviewer. A typical problem with closed questions is that the interviewer leads the client to topics of interest to the interviewer only. Too often an interviewer projects their own theoretical orientation onto the information they are trying to gather or imposes artificial structure too early. If the interviewer relies on closed questions to structure the interview, they are often forced to concentrate so hard on thinking up the next questions, that they fail to listen to and attend to the client.

Open invitations to talk are extremely useful in a number of different situations. The following are some examples:

1. **They help begin an interview.** (What would you like to talk about today? How have things been since the last time we talked together?).
2. **They help get the interviewee to elaborate on a point.** (Could you tell me more about that? How did you feel when that happened?).
3. **They help elicit examples of specific behaviour so that the interviewer is better able to understand what the interviewee is describing.** (Will you give me a specific example? What do you do when you get "depressed?" What do you mean when you say your boss is acting strangely?).
4. **They help focus the client's attention on his/her feelings.** (What are you feeling as you're telling me this? How did you feel then?).

Minimal Encouragement To Talk

Once the client has been helped by the counsellor's attention and open-ended questions to begin telling his/her story, the counsellor's task is to facilitate his/her continuing to talk. The counsellor really needs to say very little in order to encourage a client to continue talking, elaborating and explaining.

Simple "um-hmm's", repetitions of one or two words from what he/she just said, one word questions, such as "Then"? are often sufficient. The word "minimal" refers both to how much the counsellor says, which can be very little, and to the amount of direction or intervention he/she imposes on the content and flow of the interview.

This technique presupposes that the counsellor has tuned in to what the client is discussing. Minimal encouragement to talk should follow directly from what the client has just said. When used correctly, the client, although maintaining control of the discussion in that they are talking about what he/she wants to, is forced to elaborate, explain, and to take a more in-depth look at his/her problem.

Often the counsellor will want and need to talk more and to more actively direct or focus the content of what the client is saying. However, this is an extremely useful technique whether it is used as an adjunct to other techniques or relied on primarily by itself.

More examples of the type of comments described by the title "minimal encouragement to talk" are the following:

1. "Oh?" "So?" "Then?" "And?"
2. The repetition of one or two key words
3. "Tell me more"
4. "How did you feel about that?"
5. "Give me an example"
6. "What does that mean to you?"
7. "Umm-hmm"
8. If I understand you correctly you would ...?
9. So are you saying that ...?
10. And that made you feel ...?

Too many counsellors are unaware of the power and importance of minimal encouragement. As such, they are unaware of how they may unconsciously influence the direction of counselling sessions. An understanding of minimal encouragement should lead to more self-awareness on the part of the client.

Guidelines for Effective Minimal Encouragement:

1. Listen to what the client is talking about.
2. Aim to facilitate his/her continuing to talk.
3. Aim to say as little as possible, using very simple questions.
4. Give the client clues that you are following what is being said.
5. Allow pauses before, after, and during interviewee statements.
6. Allow the client to dictate the speed of the discussion.

Converting Statements to Questions

Another skill that encourages the other person to speak is to adopt questions, wherever possible, instead of statements.



Activity

Convert the following statements to questions.

Statement	Question
<p>I don't think you realise that when you come in late, it disrupts the entire work flow of the department, especially Joanne and Tom who depend on you.</p>	
<p>Wearing your safety gear is not optional; it's required by company policy and by law.</p>	
<p>You've simply got to reduce the time you spend on personal telephone calls, even if they are on your lunch hour.</p>	
<p>This is a professional organisation and we expect you to dress accordingly.</p>	
<p>We can't have you continuously leaving the office without telling the receptionist when you'll be back and where you can be reached.</p>	
<p>This is the second time that a business strategy shared with you in confidence has come back through the grapevine.</p>	

 **Checklist**

Statement	Question
I don't think you realise that when you come in late, it disrupts the entire work flow of the department, especially Joanne and Tom who depend on you.	How do you think your lateness affects other people in your department, especially Joanne and Tom?
Wearing your safety gear is not optional; it's required by company policy and by law.	What do you think are some of the reasons for wearing safety gear?
You've simply got to reduce the time you spend on personal telephone calls, even if they are on your lunch hour.	What problems might be caused by your spending time on personal calls over the lunch hour (ie keeping others from use of the phone, tying up incoming lines over the lunch hour etc?)
This is a professional organisation and we expect you to dress accordingly.	What role do you think a person's attire plays in their success in this organisation... and why?
We can't have you continuously leaving the office without telling the receptionist when you'll be back and where you can be reached.	Why do you think it's important for the receptionist to know where to reach you and when you'll be back?
This is the second time that a business strategy shared with you in confidence has come back through the grapevine.	Why do you suppose you are asked to keep certain aspects of your work confidential?

Non-Verbal Communication

Each of us communicates thousands of times daily – and not only when we speak. Every time we scratch our head, stroke our chin, or furrow our brow, we are communicating. Much of the information we pick up in this way is processed at a subconscious level and simply serves to illustrate or emphasise the spoken word. The hand movements of the public speaker would be an example of this.

Sometimes however, non-verbal signals become much more significant, and we process them at a conscious level. One reason for this may be the absence of speech or other signals. The plots of silent films were transmitted in this way. In the same way, we can sense the grief of a refugee by simply looking at a photograph. Non-verbal signals may also become significant if they are at variance with the spoken word. The person who talks “straight” but cannot meet our eye is labelled “insincere” or “untrustworthy” because of this conflict between signals.

Each time we communicate we interact at two levels: the verbal, and the non-verbal. Although we are aware of the verbal communication, we may not consciously attend to non-verbal signals. Although not concentrating on other people’s body language we may still react to it without knowing why.

To communicate successfully it is important for us to realise the effect of non-verbal communication. An awareness will:

1. Provide us with information on others’ thoughts and feelings.
2. Enable us to selectively transmit that same information to others.
3. Help us to illustrate and emphasise the spoken word.
4. Give us feedback on our performance as communicators.

We communicate non-verbally in five main ways.

Body Position

Body position can communicate our general state of mind. It is especially important, therefore, to be aware of posture in meetings or interviews.

In the negotiating situation, for example, important visual clues can be picked up. For example, the crossed arms and frowns of your opponents indicating their disagreement with the point you are making.

Even the way in which we arrange our chairs can affect communication. Placing our chairs alongside one another signifying “let’s work this out together”, may minimise potential conflict. The lines of chairs facing each other across an expanse of table or “no-man’s land” may be all that is needed for a “them and us” atmosphere to develop. (Try having an argument with someone sitting alongside you – invariably you will need to turn around and face each other.)

Your own posture may influence the situation. If you adopt a straight backed, “squared off” posture your colleagues will probably expect a business like meeting. If you lean back and look at the “horizon” it may be the signal for them to switch off.

Gestures

If posture communicates our state of mind, then gestures transmit the thoughts running through it.

At a simple level they are the small hand movements we make while talking. At a higher level they are the out-thrust fist of the politician making a point. At their most useful, they are the trainer counting off the points on his/her fingers as they are made. If used too much, or if they do not complement the spoken word, gestures can be distracting, but used appropriately they are a very useful tool.

Gestures also communicate information to us. They supply us with small clues about specific emotions. For example, puzzlement (head scratching), aggression (fist clenching), tension (white knuckles), etc.

Facial Expressions

The many muscles of the face make facial expressions the most subtle and comprehensive method of non-verbal communication. Unfortunately, humans have considerable control over their facial expressions and can conceal their true emotions. The “plastic smile” is an example of this duplicity. However, observing instant reactions, which are not so easily controlled, can give a lot of feedback about the effect our messages are having.

Head Nods

Head nods have two distinctive roles:

1. They are used as a form of non-verbal agreement.
2. They give permission for someone to go on talking by saying non-verbally “Yes, go on, I’m with you”. This is known as “continuity behaviour”. The danger with head nodding is that we may in fact be thinking, “Hurry up and finish speaking for goodness’ sake!” It is very easy to be refuelled when you are on your favourite subject!

Eye Contact

To look at a person is to recognise them. We tend to look at people we like, so that if we look at person A more often than person B, B will eventually feel “left out”. Most of us when sitting between two people, tend to favour one side rather than the other. This is quite unconscious, but can often give the wrong impression. We feel more comfortable if we are at a slight angle to each other so that eye contact can be made and broken at will. The “eyeball to eyeball” position forces people to look away from each other and therefore interferes with our normal gaze pattern.

Listening

Many genuinely compassionate people make poor listeners. They are so anxious to correct the problem that's causing difficulty they begin to break in with advice and solutions before they've heard the whole story.

Veteran listeners say this is bad form. It's their experience that when a person confides in you, they usually don't want advice; they want somebody to understand and care about their troubles and help them to get their performance back on track.

Sometimes – as in the case of a person who is grieving about a sad situation at home – there's really nothing you can do to “solve” the problem. Any effort to distract a friend from sadness or even grief will only make them feel more lonely because it will convince them that you really don't comprehend how they feel. Listening requires a willingness to suffer silently with the other person to some degree.

When you listen to a person's difficulties in silent sympathy, restraining the impulse to offer advice or moral counsel, you show them that you care, and that you accept them for what they are.

Carl Rogers said, “Listening rightly done, is the most significant thing you can do for a person.” To the person with the problem, the empathetic non-directive approach means that you, the listener, really care. This is something you can't fake. It's a willingness to stand in the other person's shoes, to understand deeply what they mean, without a trace of judgement. This is very rare for a person to experience.

Listening is a Skill

Listening is a very difficult thing to do. It's not something which comes naturally. It's a skill which can be learned, an art which can be developed. Listening requires training and practice. When it's done right it becomes a very effective tool.

Look at your attitude. How you feel about the person who is talking to you has a great influence upon your ability to hear what is being said. With a proper listening attitude you will be able to show that you accept them as they are, that you are not looking up or down at them, but that they are a person of worth in whom you are genuinely interested.

Attentive Listening

Be attentive. Listen for the “music between the words”, the feelings and emotions of the one who is talking to you. Take note of voice cues. Become aware of “feeling” words. The tone in which they are spoken usually conveys more than the dictionary definition of the words contained in the message itself. You must consciously discipline yourself by saying, *“I am going to listen to what this person is really saying.”*

Try not to let your mind wander. It's so easy to get lost in your own thoughts or reactions to what is being said. Listening concentration is more difficult. The problem is caused by the fact that we think much faster than we speak. This differential between thinking and speaking rates means that our brain works with hundreds of thoughts in

addition to those that we hear. To phrase it another way, we can listen and still have spare time for thinking. The use, or misuse, of this spare time holds the answer to how well a person really listens to another.

Paraphrase what you hear. When you are sure that the person has had a chance to express him/herself, test yourself for understanding by “feeding back” to them what you heard them saying and feeling. This feedback technique helps them to define the problem by confronting their own thoughts and feelings in your response. It also indicates whether or not you have really heard and understood.

Listening is a process of helpful communication. It is not a lecture, nor is it a passive grunt. It is an active involvement in the flow and intensity of real feelings. This kind of process is a skilled art which can be learned by those who are genuinely interested in being helpful to others and who are willing to spend the necessary effort in learning and practice.

Guidelines for Effective Listening

Listen for feelings. Listen to what they are saying but concentrate also on how they feel about whatever they are saying or about the situation they are describing. For example, “*My best friend at work is leaving for another job*” could be responded to with “*You’re happy or worried about that?*” or “*How do you feel about that?*” when you can’t easily tell what their reaction is. This type of response shows you are hearing more than what they are saying with words. You are really listening.

Assume nothing. Don’t assume that they know anything or that they think any type of behaviour is right or wrong, or that their goals in life are like yours, or that their feelings in a situation are yours. This will be easier if you are really concentrating on listening and understanding. With practice, you will learn to see things from the other person’s position.

Keep your language simple. Until you know the person well enough to use a bigger vocabulary, keep your statements and questions short and easy to understand. Say “talk” instead of “communicate” and “write” instead of “correspond”. If you are listening hard, you won’t have time to compose much more than simple comments or questions.

Express Listening

Express yourself quietly and slowly and with a somewhat tentative manner. Put a little lift in your voice at the end of each statement as if you are not quite sure. Put a little question into what you are saying. You will communicate a sincere desire to understand fully, without giving the impression that you are making any judgements.

Avoid letting the person think you either believe or disbelieve what they have told you. Don't agree or disagree with any of their statements. Don't point out any contradictions or inconsistencies in their statements.

Don't let them force you into giving opinions or answers. Try to turn their demands back to them. Say "You seem to think my opinion is important" or "You wish someone could give you an easy answer" or "You seem to be concerned about what I think of you" or "You had hoped I would give you a solution to this problem. Don't you think it is more important how you feel?"

If you want someone to spend more time on an idea, ask them to repeat what they said, or to explain in a different way. You could repeat their last few words questioningly. If you want someone to go back to an important idea, say "You said..." and repeat their previous statement as a question. But be sure you don't interrupt their train of thought to say this. If they stop talking, but you feel they are not really finished, don't let the silence make you nervous. They may be thinking through something really important. After a while say "You seem to be thinking hard" or, "I'm still here" or, "I'm wondering what you can be thinking". Just to remind them you are there.

Wait for the full stop. Never interrupt or break in on what they are saying. Wait until they have reached a full stop in what they are expressing before you respond.

Try to put the above "express listening" methods into practice in your next substantial conversation with an individual (whether or not it is about performance). Use the space below to note what you learned.



ACTIVITY

Barriers to Listening

Here is a list of poor listening habits based on the research of Dr Ralph Nichols, together with some suggestions as to how these habits can be corrected.

- 1. On-off listening.** Most individuals think about four times as fast as the average person speaks. Thus the average listener has about three quarters of a minute spare thinking time for each listening minute. This extra thinking time is often used to think about his/her own personal affairs, concerns and troubles instead of listening, synthesising and summarising what the speaker has to say.
- 2. Red-flag listening.** To some individuals certain words are like the proverbial red rag to a bull. When we hear them we get upset and stop listening. Words such as “slacker!”, “liberal”, “irresponsible youth”, “rising cost of living”, etc., may cause some to react almost automatically. We “turn off” the speaker, lose contact with them and fail to understand them.
- 3. Open ears/closed mind listening.** Sometimes we decide rather quickly that either the subject or the speaker is boring and what is said makes no sense. Often we jump to conclusions about what we think is going to be said. We decide that it’s not worth listening because we won’t hear anything new. It is much better to listen to find out if this is in fact the case or not.
- 4. Glass-eyed listening.** Sometimes we look at a person and seem to be listening, though our minds may be on other things. We drop back into the comfort of our own thoughts. We get glassy-eyed and a dreamy expression appears on our faces. We can tell when people look at us in this way, and they recognise it in us.
- 5. Too-deep-for-me listening.** When we are listening to ideas which we feel are too involved for us to follow, we tend to switch off. We should make a real effort to follow the discussion; we might find the subject or speaker interesting if we listen and understand what is being said.
- 6. Matter-over-mind listening.** We do not like to have our pet prejudices or points of view overturned. Many do not like to have their opinions and judgements challenged, and when this happens we may unconsciously stop listening or even become defensive and plan a counter-attack. Even if we do want to do this, it is better to listen in order to do a better job of understanding and replying to it.

Do I Listen – Really Listen?

Rapport and trust are vital for the sharing of personal feelings. An atmosphere with informality and relaxation enhances talking and listening. Check out the climate in which you are listening. Ask these questions as you practice the art of listening.

1. Do I concentrate fully and tune out all other distractions and thoughts?
2. Do I make an effort to become truly interested in what is being said? Faking attention or pretending to listen are real blocks to good communication.
3. Do I try to put myself in the other person’s shoes? Empathy means seeing the world from another person’s point of view.
4. Do I listen “between the lines” to the meaning behind the words? Listening for understanding helps decode the underlying message.
5. Do I listen actively or passively? Active listening requires keeping up with the person, asking questions, feeding back, etc.
6. Do I hear the person out completely and calmly, or do I have a “waiting to pounce” tendency? Interrupting with such comments as “Yes, but” indicates an impatient listener.
7. Do I have preconceived notions of what I am going to say? Is my mind made up in advance about my answer or do I listen well with an open mind? If I am a “case-is-closed” listener, I will be a poor communicator.
8. Am I tuned in to non-verbal communication? (On the phone this means noticing non-verbal clues such as tone of voice, speed of delivery, crying, etc.) Connecting the non-verbal and the verbal ensures a more accurate understanding.

Am I “Aware Listening”?

1. Am I aware of what emotions and feelings are stirred up in me as I listen? Are certain words and topics loaded with special meaning for me? If “trigger words” are allowed to bug me, my judgement and listening effectiveness will diminish in value.
2. Do I wait for the full stop before I respond?
3. Do I have the time needed for good listening?
4. Do I treat what is shared with me as privileged communication? This includes confidentiality, respect, and a non-judgmental attitude.

What other questions could I ask of myself to improve my listening skills?

Listening

You are **not listening** to me when:

- You do not care about me
- You say you understand before you know me well enough
- You have an answer for my problem before I have finished telling you what my problem is
- You cut me off before I've finished speaking
- You feel critical of my vocabulary, grammar or accent
- You are dying to tell me something
- You tell me about your experience, making mine seem unimportant
- You are communicating to someone else in the room
- You refuse my thanks by saying you haven't really done anything

You **are listening** to me when:

- You come quietly into my private world and let me be me
- You really try to understand me even if I am not making much sense
- You grasp my point of view even when it is against your own sincere convictions
- You realise that the hour I took from you has left you a bit tired and drained
- You allow me the dignity of making my own decisions even though you think they might be wrong
- You do not take my problem from me, but allow me to deal with it in my own way
- You hold back your desire to give me good advice
- You give me enough room to discover for myself what is really going on
- You accept my gift of gratitude by telling me how good it makes you feel to know you have been helpful

Some Quotations About Listening

"The first duty of love is to listen" – Paul Tillich

"Listening with the inner ear helps to understand the inner person"

"A good listener is the best physician for those who are ill in thought or feeling"

"We have two ears and one mouth that we may listen the more and talk the less" – Zeno

"To answer a question before you have heard it out is both stupid and insulting" – Proverbs 18:13.

"Each of you must be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to be angry" James 1:19.

"If a word burns on your tongue, let it burn" – Persian saying

"If you enjoy listening you will learn" – Ecclesiasticus 6:33.

"Be quick to listen but take time over your answer" – Ecclesiasticus 5:11.

Critical Listening

Critical listeners dry you up.

Creative listeners are those who want you to be recklessly yourself. Even at your very worst they are willing to hear all you have to say, even the dull or confused ideas and the feelings; perhaps it is only by expressing all that is inside that purer and purer streams come and the creative fountain within becomes unblocked.

In order to learn to listen, here are some suggestions: Try to learn equality, to live in the present a part of the time, every day. Sometimes say to yourself, "What is happening now? This person is talking. I am quiet. There is endless time I hear it, every word." Then suddenly you begin to hear not only what people are saying, but what they are trying to say, and you sense the whole truth about them.

Listening not talking, is the gifted and great role, and the imaginative role. And the true listener is much more beloved, more magnetic than the talker, and is more effective and learns more and does more good. So try listening. Listen to your spouse, your children, your friends, to those who love you and those who don't, to those you love, to your colleagues and team members, and to your enemies. It will work a small miracle. And perhaps a great one.

Reflection of Feeling

A selective listening skill.

How can you help another person to express the central concerns that they are experiencing? One excellent way is to listen for and respond to the feelings of the client. Try communicating "I can accurately sense the world as you are feeling and perceiving it", and you can facilitate the client's movement toward more complete self-awareness and self-understanding.

Being alert to and responding to the feeling being expressed, rather than attending solely to the content of what the person says, is the skill with which we are presently concerned. What the client is saying is the content portion of the message being communicated. One must also listen to how the client says what they do. For example, the client may speak more quickly when communicating enthusiasm, more slowly when communicating discouragement, etc. It is this feeling portion of the communication to which you are to pay particular attention.

Being alert to and responsive to the feelings being expressed is a skill which is appropriate at any time, regardless of the nature of the feeling (positive, negative or ambivalent) and regardless of the direction of expression (toward self, others, the counsellor and counselling situation, etc).

In the examples below, you will have an opportunity to select the alternative which indicates that you understand the client's attitude, the situation as it appears to the particular individual – the alternative which, if spoken to the person, would most likely evoke a response of "That's right".

Example 1

"So I'm wondering if you can help me to find a new job..." (pause) "I suppose if I did find one, I'd just bungle things again..."

1. Are you sure that it is necessary to leave the job you are in now?
2. You feel that it's pretty futile to try again.
3. What jobs have you been considering?

In the first example, responses 1 and 3 seek additional information from the client, without giving adequate recognition to client feelings. Response 2 accurately reflects the feeling being expressed.

Example 2

"What do you think I ought to do – just give up on my career?"

1. There just doesn't seem to be any way out.
2. Have you applied to other roles internally?
3. Have you thought about trying a job where it would be a little less stressful?

In this example, response 1 accurately reflects the client's feeling, whereas responses 2 and 3 provide suggestions as to what the client might do, without giving adequate recognition to the feeling of discouragement which the client is experiencing.

Example 3

"You know it's a funny thing, but when I go in for the promotion, I just feel shaky all over! It's the silliest thing! Why should I do that?"

1. Are you an anxious person in many situations?
2. How shaky do you become?
3. This reaction puzzles and concerns you?

Here, responses 1 and 2 seek additional information, whereas in response 3, the gist of the client's expression is caught and rephrased in fresh words.

Some behaviours you may want to try are the following:

- 1. Listening for feeling.** Remember that what the client is saying is only part of the message being communicated to you. How they say what they say is extremely important. A change in breathing or in the speed of speech, a sigh, a blush, a stammer, an extra emphasis upon a particular word – any of these can be important clues as to feelings of the client. Words which communicate emotions and feelings should be noted.
- 2. Timing your comments.** Do not try to respond to every comment by the client. You may simply want to smile, nod, say “Mmm-hum”, etc., until there is an occasional opportunity to reflect upon the feelings of the client.
- 3. Reflecting upon feeling.** As you listen for and find instances of client expression of feeling, reflect this feeling by restating what the client is experiencing in your own words. If the client should say, “I wish I could talk to my boss about things like this, but I never seem to have the nerve” you might respond, “you are a little bit afraid of your boss?”.

Your goal is to understand what the client is experiencing, and to communicate to the client that “I am with you – I can accurately sense the world as you are feeling and perceiving it”.

Guidelines for effective reflection of feeling:

- 1.** Read the total message – stated feelings, non-verbal body feelings and content. Listen to the client.
- 2.** Time your response; try to be in tune with the interviewee’s speed.
- 3.** Use language that is appropriate to the interviewee’s speed.
- 4.** Express in fresh words the essential feelings, stated or strongly implied.

Think about a performance related conversation that you may have had with an individual in the last few weeks or months. What might you do differently in trying to incorporate some of the advice given above?

The Counselling Stages

This model, derived from the work of Gerard Egan, pulls together these skills against the logical stages for a counselling session.

Stages	Purpose	Helps Client	Uses Skill
Establishing the contact	Agreeing ground rules, times, responsibilities, roles. Willingness of client.	Understand the nature of help offered. Responsibility of counsellor and client.	Attention, observing, asking open questions.
Establishing the relationship	Relationship building to show respect and warmth in accepting the need for the client to work through the problem or situation. To show empathy with the client by appreciating the personal significance of the problem for them. To be genuine.	To feel valued, understood and prepared to trust the counsellor.	Active listening, empathic understanding, observing open questions, paraphrasing (words).
Exploring the nature of the dilemma	Understand the implications and effects of the problem, enabling the client to gain a greater understanding of their situation.	Talk and explore their confusion and distress. To understand what they think and feel and why.	As above plus reflecting, paraphrasing (feelings), advanced empathy, focusing, timing, silence, summarising, spacing.
Exploring the options	Identifying the range of possible alternatives. Encouraging the individual to begin to move towards choosing one of the options.	Consider options and examine alternatives to see what strengths and resources they might use. Focus on what they might do more effectively.	As above plus immediacy confronting imagery.
Action	Implementing action, evaluating action, enabling individuals to take charge.	Feel support whilst working through change.	Creative thinking, problem solving and decision making, evaluate target setting.
Close			

Managing Conflict

Although the emphasis of this module has been to stress the value of achieving and maintaining positive relationships, you have to recognise that there will be occasions when your colleagues, customers or staff disagree with each other, or perhaps with you. However, this need not necessarily be a cause for concern. Indeed, in an effective organisation, people must feel that they can express their own ideas freely, and this may naturally lead on occasions to healthy and constructive conflict in a working environment where openness and trust are encouraged.

Learning to Live With Conflict

When people hold differing opinions, the conflict which ensues can, in some cases, be a positive process which reinforces the strength of working relationships by affirming and re-defining the identities of the people concerned. This is likely to happen when the organisation, or team, places a high value on participation, commitment and respect for individuals. Open co-operation helps managers and developers to capitalise on conflict and to harness it in order to help achieve the organisation's or team's targets.

In atmospheres which are less open and honest, however, arguments or failures to communicate may hold up the work of the team and sour relationships between team members. Conflict over specific issues may also spark off more deep-seated hostilities which people may have been unable to deal with in a more straightforward manner because of poor communications within the team.



ACTIVITY

What benefits do you think may be derived from individuals feeling that they can express disagreements or conflicts openly? List three suggestions in the space below.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



Checklist

Your responses may have included some of the following ideas:

- If differences of opinion are expressed openly, then it is less likely that they will simmer and cause long lasting discontent and resentment.
- When people are not afraid to state their opinions and can explore their differences, compromise may often lead to the best solution.
- Once people have stated their reservations and these have been listened to and taken into account, they may then feel able to work with the adopted strategy.
- Conflict is often a product of an energetic and creative attitude. It can also be the spur to further innovations.
- If customers feel able to complain when something, in their eyes, goes wrong, and organisations listen and respond, then they feel valued and will usually remain a loyal customer. Sometimes the complaint, if reviewed constructively, can lead to an improved service or product.

Common Causes of Conflict

Research suggests that there are four principal causes of conflict. Although, as we have seen, you should not try to repress conflict and drive it underground, you will find it useful to be aware of the kinds of issues which can cause division.

Inaccurate or Incomplete Information

People generally base their opinions and actions on the information with which they are provided. If different colleagues or customers have different sources of information, or if some have inaccurate or incomplete information, they may decide on different lines of action. And, if some feel that they are being consciously denied access to complete or accurate information, this may undermine their sense of commitment, morale and loyalty.

It is also possible for two people to put a very different interpretation on the same information. The recognition of this is, in fact, one of the strengths of the team decision making approach.

Individuals may not realise, however, that their disagreements stem from different interpretations of the same facts. In such situations conflict can be resolved by encouraging others to appreciate how, and why, their different perspectives have led them to different conclusions.

Inappropriate, or Seemingly Incompatible, Goals

This kind of apparent incompatibility tends to happen once a certain level of detail is reached. Harmony can be restored by going back to the shared values and purposes of the team and identifying the common ground on which the dissenting individuals can agree. The team can then function once again.

Ineffective or Unacceptable Methods

Kindler's third main source of conflict is the disarray which can result when the team's objectives and success criteria are confused, or when team members are given inadequate support to achieve their tasks. The team's shared sense of values and ethical unity can also come under threat if some of its members are seen to fail in putting its principles into practice.

Antagonistic or Other Negative Feelings

As we identified earlier, conflict about one, perhaps trivial, issue can trigger off longstanding resentments and hostilities. However, these may not, even then, come to the surface, and the root cause of seemingly intractable disagreements can be difficult to diagnose. This is why conflict needs to be actively confronted and resolved as and when it happens, before it has the chance to turn into permanent hostility.

With customers this can arise simply because the customer is being awkward for the sake of being awkward, or because something of a personal nature has triggered a negative response.

Resolving Conflicts

Just as there are four principal causes of conflict, there are four principles to be observed in the resolution of conflicts:

1. **Maintain respect for others and yourself.** Avoid making statements which imply a lack of respect for your colleagues, even if the argument becomes heated. Stick to the issues and don't allow yourself to be dragged into personal abuse or denigration.
2. **Empathise with the other person.** Try to listen dispassionately to the other person's point of view. You will then get a clear understanding of why you disagree, and may even find that the disagreement is simply based on a communication failure.
3. **Don't try to change the other person's identity or style of behaviour.** If you have locked horns with a particularly "difficult" person, then you will find it more productive to alter your own way of responding than to try and change the other person's. Again, concentrate on the issues and avoid raising the emotional temperature.
4. **Express your own point of view clearly.** If you genuinely disagree it is important to express it. Don't be discouraged, even if it seems that you have little or no support for your position. You should, though, understand that you may eventually have to embrace the majority point of view.

Stephen Covey uses the phrase:

“Seek first to understand, and then to be understood”

when mutual understanding is needed.

Communicating Assertively

Assertive communication can help you to build constructive relationships and resolve conflicts because it enables you to:

- know, and state clearly, what you want to take or give to a situation
- identify what messages are being sent by others
- demonstrate that you accept the other person and their views even though you may not agree with them
- respond to a situation rather than react.



Activity

When communication is not clear and direct, it is not effective. You can end up guessing, maybe wrongly, what the other person wants or you may be angry or disappointed because the other person failed to guess what you want. This activity will help you to judge how assertive you are at the moment. Tick the box which is appropriate for you as honestly as you can.

1. How do you deal with a team member who is continually late or produces sloppy work?

Do you:

- (a) Attack the person with all guns firing when he/she or she is least expecting it?
- (b) Agonise and wait for ages or turn a blind eye?
- (c) Ask someone else to deal with the matter?
- (d) Choose a suitable time and place to discuss the problem and plan a solution?

2. How would you handle a nosy colleague who always wants to know everything about your private life?

Would you:

- (a) Tell the person loudly to mind their own business?
- (b) Resentfully impart the information?
- (c) Deflect your colleague's interest with juicy gossip about someone else?
- (d) Explain calmly and directly that there are some aspects of your life that you prefer to keep private?

3. How do you respond if someone has done a good piece of work or has put in extra time and effort?

Do you:

- (a) Take credit for the work yourself?
- (b) Not notice?
- (c) Send a memo to everyone praising aspects of good performance?
- (d) Take the time to give specific verbal credit to the person concerned?

4. What happens if someone else praises your work?

Do you:

- (a) Tell them at length about all the other wonderful things you have accomplished recently?
- (b) Squirm self-consciously and say it was really nothing to do with you?
- (c) Mention that your good efforts have been noticed by others too?
- (d) Agree with them.

5. How do you respond to legitimate criticism from a superior?

Do you:

- (a) Fly off the handle?
- (b) Shift uncomfortably from one foot to another?
- (c) Reach around for someone else to blame?
- (d) Thank the person for pointing out your mistake, say you will analyse what went wrong and plan to learn from it?

Now analyse your responses by counting the number of times you ticked:

Statement (a) _____ Statement (b) _____

Statement (c) _____ Statement (d) _____



Checklist

These examples illustrate that there are, in general, four ways to react in a difficult situation.

1. If most of your ticks were for the **(a)** responses, this may mean that you have a tendency to respond aggressively in a difficult situation. Such reactions can indicate a competitive attitude and a need to prove superiority by putting others down. Sometimes aggressive people resort to verbal violence and leave a trail of hurt or humiliated feelings in their wake. Underneath this loud and forceful exterior, however, there often lurks a rather low self esteem.
2. A predominance of ticks in the **(b)** boxes may point to a certain passivity in your response to others. Passive managers often find it difficult to make decisions and take responsibility for choices. They may see themselves as victims of unfairness or injustice, and frequently look around for others to blame. This type of manager tends to avoid confrontations.
3. Many **(c)** responses could mean that you tend to react in an indirectly aggressive or manipulative manner. This type of behaviour, like aggressive behaviour, often stems from low self esteem. Manipulative people are skilled at deceiving both themselves and others. Although they appear to think highly of you, there may also be an undercurrent of disapproval. They often get what they want by making others feel guilty and engineering the situation in order to achieve their own ends.
4. If you put many ticks in the **(d)** boxes, then you should already be reaping the benefits of behaving assertively. Assertive managers are able to accept both their positive and their negative qualities, and are thus able to be more authentic in their relationships with others. They acknowledge responsibility for decisions and actions and do not need to put others down in order to feel comfortable with themselves. Their self esteem is anchored within themselves and they are not dependent on the approval of those around them.

Some people will identify most strongly with one of these four stereotypes, while others will recognise that they may display different characteristics on different occasions. You may be able to identify a pattern in your own life. For example, some people are very assertive at work but passive in their personal lives.

The key point to recognise is that the assertive option is one which can be consciously selected. The skills of assertiveness can be learned and applied, and many people have found that the associated positive personal attributes begin to emerge with practice. Assertiveness allows people to communicate clearly their thoughts, feelings and needs; not passively, aggressively or manipulatively but assertively.

Ground Rules for Assertive Behaviour

The rules which follow are general and comprehensive. You will not need to follow all of them in every situation, nor will they have the same order of importance in all cases. They are, therefore, given in no significant order.

- **Be clear about what you want.** If you don't know what you want, then you will find it difficult to communicate your wishes and needs to others. For example, do you want to improve the quality of letters which go out to customers or do you want to encourage the typist to spend less time talking to friends? Or you may want to do both, in which case which one is more important?
- **Choose your time and place.** Choose the most appropriate place to communicate and a time when the other person can listen. If necessary, delay the discussion (even if only for a few seconds) until you can give the matter your full attention.
- **Make a clear statement.** Doing this can be more difficult than it seems, especially if you are under stress. It may help to rehearse your statement. Don't allow yourself to become upset or to lose track of what you want to say.
- **Be specific.** Get straight to the point and identify clearly, and directly, what you want or what you want to convey.
- **Express what you feel.** It sometimes helps to say that you feel anxious, happy or angry when making a statement, request or a response. But say it only once and then return to the point.
- **Do not be sidetracked.** If the person you are talking to tries to sidetrack, listen to what is said and then repeat your own point. Do this again if necessary. This technique is known as the "broken record".
- **Give reasons, not excuses.** It is better to give reasons rather than excuses for what you want to do, or don't want to do.
- **Be prepared to compromise.** Think about your "fallback position" before you start to communicate. When you have expressed your feelings, be prepared to agree to an outcome which everyone can accept.



Activity

This activity will enable you to consider how you might apply some of these rules for assertive behaviour. Select two situations in which you would like to be more assertive, then say how you currently behave in each situation: **aggressively**, **passively** or **manipulatively**. Finally, state which of the ground rules might help you to improve the way you deal with each situation.

Situation	Current Response	Which rules could you apply to make your behaviour more assertive?

How to Behave Assertively

Some people believe that being assertive means getting what you want all the time. This is not only unrealistic, but also implies that every interaction is seen as a question of winning or losing. This competitive, aggressive attitude may be appropriate in some situations, but it is very different from being assertive and will often provoke conflict. Choosing to behave assertively may sometimes mean not getting what you want but having to negotiate a compromise instead.

We are so used to just two positions, the powerful and the powerless, that we forget there can be a middle path. The tension and the effort needed for you to win does not allow you to develop a respect for the needs and rights of others.

The principle of equality is one of the most important characteristics of assertive behaviour.

Here are some tips which will help you to be more assertive:

- **Take responsibility for what you say:** use “I”, “me” and “my”, rather than “she/he says” or “everyone says”.
- **Repeat what the other person says or requests before you respond:** this shows that you understand the message and helps you to check that you have understood correctly. It does not mean you have to agree.
- **Be prepared to ask for more details:** asking someone to give more details or to give an example of what they mean can help to avoid unnecessary conflict.
- **Ask for time to think, if necessary:** there is nothing wrong with admitting that you need time to make a decision or to gather more information. You should, however, agree to make a decision by a certain date and stick to it.
- **Acknowledge the other person’s feelings:** this demonstrates that you understand the situation and empathise with the other person.
- **Tell the other person how you feel:** this helps you to feel less stressful and ensures that the other person has to acknowledge your feelings as well as your actions.
- **Don’t apologise unless there is a good reason to do so:** don’t say “sorry” merely because the other person is unlikely to be pleased, for unnecessary apologies compromise your position. Apologise only when you have said, or done, something which you genuinely regret.



Activity

Now use the above points to help you to make each of the following statements more assertive:

Non-assertive Statement	Assertive Statement
Everyone thinks your attitude is generally very negative.	
You want to take time off next month? I'm a bit rushed now... yes I suppose that will be all right.	
I'm sorry, I don't agree.	
Management is really pushing me to cut back on overtime, so we'll have to stop it this week.	

 **Checklist**

Although there are no right or wrong answers here, your assertive statements might read something like these:

Non-assertive Statement	Assertive Statement
Everyone thinks your attitude is generally very negative.	I think your attitude is very negative, particularly in meetings.
You want to take time off next month? I'm a bit rushed now... yes I suppose that will be all right.	You want to take time off next month? I need some time to look at the leave schedules, let's have a chat about that on Monday.
I'm sorry, I don't agree.	I don't agree.
Management is really pushing me to cut back on overtime, so we'll have to stop it this week.	I am calling a halt to all overtime from this week. The order book is not looking very promising and it's better to cut down on overtime than to lose staff.

Assertiveness and Human Rights

The assumption behind assertiveness is that everyone has a number of basic human rights. These are:

- **The right to take decisions for themselves:** taking responsibility also means that you cannot blame outside events or other people.
- **The right to make mistakes:** it is important to see that you can do something stupid without it implying in essence that you are stupid. Making a wrong move or doing a bad job does not indicate some intrinsic flaw in your character.
- **The right to say no:** it may be appropriate to give reasons for saying “no”, but there is no need to justify this response.
- **The right to decline responsibility for other people’s problems:** this involves setting your own limits and choosing whose needs to put before your own. Other people’s problems are essentially their responsibility, no-one else’s.
- **The right to express feelings and opinions:** this means that you have the right to stand up for your own values, even if they are in disagreement with those in the majority.

As you practice and develop the techniques and skills of assertiveness you will find that this results in:

- improved relationships both at work and in your private life
- greater control over your own life and behaviour
- increased independence and responsibility
- more effective communication.

Using Assertiveness to Deal With Angry Colleagues or Staff

Nobody has to listen to abuse passively. However, you should not fall into the trap of reacting and matching angry behaviour so that a heated argument ensues.

Using the following guide will help you to tackle angry people:

- **Do not take the anger personally.** Usually it is the organisation, the product, the system or maybe your behaviour which is the root of their concern. All of these can usually be modified, replaced or put right.
- **Allow them space to let off steam** before you try and discuss the facts or issues involved. Strong feelings always inhibit people’s ability to think logically or rationally. Accept that they have the right to feel angry.
- **Take notes and check** these with the person to show that you are paying attention and taking them seriously.
- **Keep a calm tone of voice**, if necessary call someone else in to witness what is happening, and /or to take over if you are unable to deal with the person or the situation.
- **Respond promptly.** If you need to find out further information from other staff then promise to get back to them and keep your promise in as short a time as possible, keep them updated whilst they are waiting. Waiting in ignorance of your activity only fuels their anger.



Activity

Consider any recent occasion when you had to deal with an angry customer, colleague or staff member. This activity will help you to review what happened and how you could improve your behaviour.

Record the key points of what happened and why they were angry in the space below:

What happened?

Why were they angry?

What did you do?	Yes/No/Partly	What could you do to improve next time?
Take the anger personally?		
Allow them space to let off steam?		
Take notes and check these back?		
Keep a calm tone of voice?		
Respond promptly?		

Summary

This module has focused on the counselling part of your managerial role. It has also emphasised the skills and strategies for dealing positively with poor performance at work including the use of questions and listening skills..

It has explored different ways in which you can deal constructively with those difficult situations that will arise and with those staff who are under-performing.

Developing your ability to handle poor performance will enable you to improve the quality of your own working life and that of those with whom you come into contact.

Hopefully, others will learn from you, and you may create a ripple effect, or perhaps a tidal wave, of good practice.

Management Competencies

Giving Clear Information

Giving Clear Information refers to an individual's ability to assess a situation, determine the objectives and give clear, concise, well-organised and convincing messages that will best meet the objective. This competency examines an individual's ability to overcome physical, psychological and semantic barriers in interaction with others; keep on target and avoid digressions; use persuasion effectively and maintain a climate of mutual benefit and trust.

Target Behaviour Level A

- Assesses work issues and challenges quickly; assimilates information well
- Is adept at providing assistance to new team members; is recognised by team members as a skilled communicator and a good team player.
- Contributes to an open and honest environment in which people constructively and frequently provide feedback to one another.
- Takes time to craft a message to others to get it across credibly and effectively.
- Understands the importance of creating an open and positive climate of communicative feedback; is highly approachable.
- Offers clear and concise messages about goals and challenges to be tackled
- Enjoys talking and listening to people; information flows to and from this person freely.
- Gives others feedback in a way that minimises defensiveness.
- Adjusts communication pace and style to suit the occasion.

Getting Unbiased Information

Getting Unbiased Information refers to an individual's ability to use questions, probes and interviewing techniques to obtain unbiased information and then interpret it appropriately. This competency examines an individual's ability to use directive, non-directive and reflective questions effectively; use probes to elicit additional information; recognise latent and manifest meaning; confirm understanding and obtain agreement.

Target Behaviour Level A

- Uses frequent summaries of what is being said when communications are long and/or complicated.
- Asks good questions when required
- Accepts coaching willingly and applies what he/she learns on the job.
- Does not become defensive when corrected; pays close attention to information offered by others to improve his/her own performance
- Accepts direct feedback from others without losing his/her "cool".
- Views constructive criticism as a positive opportunity to improve.
- Is tolerant of blunt communications from others; isn't easily offended by curt or cutting remarks.
- Avoids retaliating with curt or rude remarks when others are blunt or difficult to please.
- Asks others for feedback in order to learn and improve his/her own performance.
- Makes others feel comfortable sharing information with him/her; is good at putting others at ease so they will open up and offer helpful feedback.
- Is more inclined to seek advice than give it.
- Listens for overall messages or themes.

Counselling and Disciplining

Counselling and Disciplining refers to an individual's ability to apply counselling and discipline in a positive manner in order to restore the employee's performance to an accepted standard or norm without any loss of face (respect, trust). This competency examines an individual's ability to get an employee to accept responsibility for correcting the deviation within an agreed upon time frame, and reinforce the employee's behaviour when it results in improved performance (or taking the appropriate action if no improvement occurs).

Target Behaviour Level A

- Demonstrates an active intolerance for performance mediocrity
- Is always fair and consistent about performance standards when dealing with colleagues.
- Sets challenging goals for his/herself; carefully monitors his/her own performance.
- Demonstrates commitment to exceeding expectations.
- Is skilled at soliciting guidance, direction and feedback to improve performance.
- Sets and keeps commitments to customers and others.
- Accepts criticism non-defensively; seeks and accepts feedback to increase personal effectiveness to stay on track.
- Doesn't place blame, just seeks to fix the problem; doesn't point the finger at others... tries to solve the issue at hand.
- Takes on difficult work willingly; doesn't get wrapped up with the blame/fault game; stays solution-focused.
- Firmly but gently and fairly coaches/counsels people when performances is starting to slip

Leadership Competencies

Directional Clarity

Directional Clarity looks at the ability to identify a credible destination and indicate how to get there in a straightforward and simple way. This competency category asks the question “ How clearly, credibly and unequivocally do you point the way for people to want to travel with you and to stay on track?”

Target Behaviour Level A

- Sets stretching but achievable personal objectives/targets.
- Invests time and effort to understand overall organisational vision and direction as a context for his/her own work and role.
- Understands how the organisation functions and can get things done through formal as well as informal networks.
- Communicates effectively across organisational functions and departments.
- Sees ahead clearly; anticipates future consequences and trends accurately.
- Takes workable plans and makes them happen piece-by-piece; identifies and solves problems continuously.
- Regularly sets clear and easy to understand short and medium term goals and targets for colleagues to pursue.
- Communicates organisational, functional or department direction clearly to others.
- Writes clear and concise goal and objectives that need little in the way of explanation when they are read by others.

Further Reading

Super Confidence

Gael Lindenfield, Thorsons Publishing Group

Inside Organisations

Charles Handy, BBC Books

Customer Care Management

Andrew Brown, 1989 Heinemann Professional Publishing

Mentoring: The Definitive Workbook

1994 Development Processes (Publications) Ltd

Body Language in Business

Dr Joseph Braysich

Man Watching

Desmond Morris

Games People Play

Eric Berne

Performance Management – The New Realities

Michael Armstrong and Angela Baron

Performance Improvement: Making It Happen

Darryl D. Enos

I'd Lke a Word With You

Tina Tietjen