

5 Tips to Immediately Improve Your Interactions at Work

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Put "can do" in your corner

A GUIDE

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Introduction

Imagine problems walking into your office. As a former HR manager, it often went like this for me.

People would describe a problem with someone.

Eventually I would ask, “Have you talked with them about it?” Inevitable answer: “No.”

We can't read each other's minds. We make assumptions and ascribe intentions.

What we don't do is talk. It can be intimidating. What do you do with what you hear back?

Communication. We do it all the time, but shut down at some of the most important moments.

You CAN get beyond that. Use these tips to invite responses and reduce misunderstanding – all to get work done better and faster!



1. When someone disagrees with you...

Ask, “What makes you come to that conclusion?”

You could use this when someone is being, well, disagreeable. When you use this question, muster as much **genuine curiosity** as you can. If they can't give you a good answer, they will let their point go or you will conclude their point holds no weight. If they give a good answer, it may advance the discussion.

Use can this when you are getting feedback that doesn't make sense. When my boss gave me feedback that perplexed me I'd use this question. You can follow up with questions like:

- Can you give me an example?
- How do you see this impacting how I'm meeting my objectives?
- Can you help me see how doing this (describe their way) will change the outcome?

Questions are good. You don't need to make it an interrogation. Sincere questions can take the pressure off to justify yourself or make your case, and learn more about their concerns.



2. When you're set back on your heels...

When don't know what to say, ask, "When you use the word ____, what do you mean? This informs you and buys you time.

When I was an HR manager, employees with questions or complaints often approached me. Let's say a decision was announced, and Diane comes to me with, "Mary, I can't believe that decision. It's so unfair."

I could tell Diane how it IS fair. I could agree that it's unfair. **Or I can ask**, "When you say the word *unfair*, what do you mean?"

Why waste your time addressing her question without finding out what she thinks is unfair?

Bonus benefit: I find that by the time a person finishes answering, they have talked themselves through the rationale. You don't have to do a thing. At a minimum, their answer gives you more to work with, to respond.

Here's another application **for you as an employee**. Your boss tells you to get better at teamwork. You ask, "When you say 'get better at teamwork,' what would that look like?"



3. If your boss is defensive because you ask a lot of questions...

Defuse the situation by saying, **“I'm asking because I want to do a good job.”**

What supervisor doesn't want to hear that his or her employee wants to do a good job?

You assume your supervisor knows this is the backdrop, right? It's easy for the boss to lose sight when they are overwhelmed or focused on other priorities.

Depending on the circumstances, start with this before launching into an idea or problem.

It's particularly useful when it might sound like you are questioning a decision or instructions.

You have to use your own discernment as to how this will be received.

Does it sound like something you would even say? And of course I'm not suggesting that you say this if you don't mean it.



4. At the end of a feedback session, ask...

As a supervisor, ask, “Based on our discussion, what are you going to do differently?”

I sat in on a feedback meeting with a manager, Jake, and his employee, Sophie. Jake talked for 18 minutes straight. Did he think she was getting it? How would he know?

He had to have taken a breath in there somewhere, but he did not pause. He did not ask Sophie one question.

Sophie was soon dismissed from the room. I stopped her and asked her what she heard Jake say. She said, “I don’t know what he’s talking about.”

You and I both know that’s probably not true, but I don’t blame her for saying it.

Ask so you know what the person is taking away. If you get a response like Sophie’s you know there is more work to do – **perhaps on your delivery.**

As an employee: If you are not asked, or you are asked, “Do you understand?” go ahead and share what you understand you are being asked to do. Clarity NEVER hurts.



5. After giving significant feedback to an employee...

Ask, **“What's your reaction to what I just said?”** and then STAY SILENT.

Several years ago, after a long talk with an employee about some behavior that was working against him, I asked, “So what do you think?” He said, “I think you think I’m an idiot.”

Beautiful. I love it when people are that clear with me. It gave me an opportunity to be clear back to him.

“I’m so glad you told me that. Now I can tell you that I don’t think that. I want to assure you that I want you to be successful in this job. Let’s talk about where we can go from here.”

This allows you to clarify and adjust your message. Earn bonus points by making them right at the same time.

Conclusion

When faced with a challenging discussion, it’s so easy to think, “What I don’t want to happen is ____.”

Instead, use tips like these to improve your odds of having the discussion you do want to have.



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About Mary Schaefer, Coach, Trainer, Speaker & Chief Encouragement Officer

I work with managers of people, professionals and people who want to learn, grow and develop their skills to navigate the world of work.

You may be new, have a long track record, or are somewhere in the middle. You may want to see better performance from your employees or yourself. You may want to explore new options. I can help.

I'm a former corporate human resources manager with over 25 years of experience in business. I have a master's in HR and am trained at coaching and facilitating. My intent is to help people at work transform to where human beings can thrive.

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