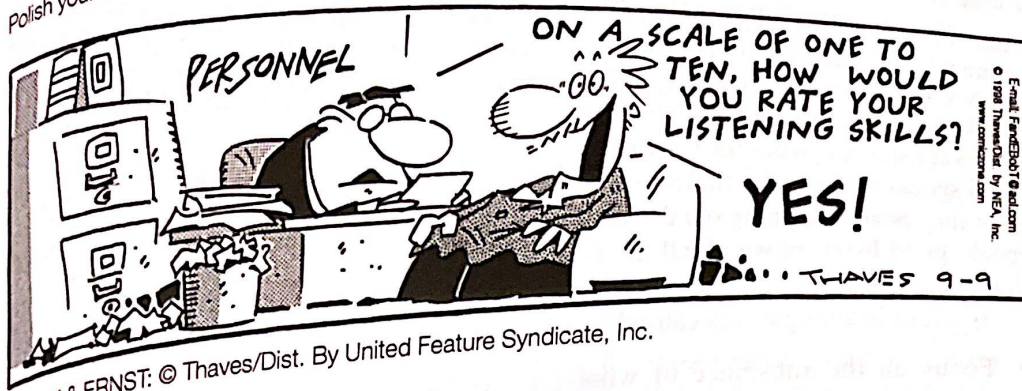


Polish your listening skills. You'll need them on the job as well as in your personal life.



FRANK & ERNST: © Thaves/Dist. By United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

- In class you're encouraged to take notes. But you can't whip out a notepad every time your boss speaks.
- Many classroom lectures are well organized, with signposts (►► Module 20) and repetition of key points to help hearers follow. But conversations usually wander. A key point about when a report is due may be sandwiched in among statements about other due dates for other projects.
- In a classroom lecture, you're listening primarily for information. In interchanges with friends and co-workers, you need to listen for feelings, too. Feelings of being rejected or overworked need to be dealt with as they arise. But you can't deal with a feeling unless you are aware of it.

As Module 2 explains (◀◀ p. 23), to receive a message, the receiver must first perceive the message, then decode it (that is, translate the symbols into meaning), and then interpret it. In interpersonal communication, **hearing** denotes perceiving sounds. **Listening** means decoding and interpreting them correctly.

## What do good listeners do? **LO 17-1**

- They consciously follow four practices.

Good listeners pay attention, focus on the other speaker(s) in a generous way rather than on themselves, avoid making assumptions, and listen for feelings as well as for facts.

### Pay Attention

Good listening requires energy. You have to resist distractions and tune out noise (◀◀ p. 24), whether the rumble of a truck going by or your own worry about whether your parking meter is expiring.

Some listening errors happen because the hearer wasn't paying enough attention to a key point. After a meeting with a client, a consultant waited for the client to send her more information that she would use to draft a formal proposal to do a job for the client. It turned out that the client thought the next move was up to the consultant. The consultant and the client had met together, but they hadn't remembered the same facts.

To avoid listening errors caused by inattention,

- Before the meeting, anticipate the answers you need to get. Make a mental or paper list of your questions. When is the project due? What resources do you have? What is the most important aspect of this project from the other person's point of view? During a conversation, listen for answers to your questions.
- At the end of the conversation, check your understanding with the other person. Especially check who does what next.
- After the conversation, write down key points that affect deadlines or how work will be evaluated.



Psychologist Susan Krauss Whitbourne wonders if technology is affecting our expectations for stimulation while listening. She notes that the average listener traditionally requires a shift in stimulation after about 20 minutes, but "with rapid-fire messages coming everywhere from Facebook to Twitter to push notifications from online games, many people require a shift in stimulation after perhaps as short as 20 seconds." There's even a name for the blank expression when not listening: screen-saver face.

Source: Susan Krauss Whitbourne, "11 Ways That Active Listening Can Help Your Relationships," *Psychology Today*, March 13, 2012, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201203/11-ways-active-listening-can-help-your-relationships>.



Listening is a vital skill in foreign language acquisition. The University of Ottawa's Larry Vandergrift found that when students learning French were taught specific listening skills, they "significantly outperformed" the other classmates in comprehension. The study's results were similar to that of one in Singapore, where Chinese students learning English reported increased motivation and confidence.

Source: Annie Murphy Paul, "The Power of Smart Listening," *Time*, December 7, 2011, <http://ideas.time.com/2011/12/07/the-power-of-smart-listening/>.



Most people speak at about 125 words per minute, even though we can think at 400–600 words per minute. This difference in rates leaves plenty of opportunity for us to be thinking when we should be listening. Some of us make matters worse by exposing ourselves to dangerous noise levels. For instance, a study shows that two out of five high school students surveyed listen to MP3 players at volumes that put them at risk for hearing loss. At the highest volume, the decibel level is comparable to that of a jet taking off.

Sources: Paul J. Meyer, "Listening for the Total Message," *Success*, March 27, 2008, downloaded at <http://www.successmagazine.com/Listening-for-the-Total-Message/PARAMS/article/158/channel/211#>; and Marianne Favro, "iPod Hearing Loss Concerns: A Budding Problem," March 20, 2006, downloaded at <http://www.nbc11.com/health/8150122/detail.html>.



### Site to See

Go to

[www.esl-lab.com](http://www.esl-lab.com)

ESL/EFL speakers can practice listening to English conversations at Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab.

## Focus on the Other Speaker(s) in a Generous Way

Some people listen looking for flaws. They may focus on factors other than the substance of the talk: "What an ugly tie." "She sounds like a little girl." "There's a typo in that slide." Or they may listen as if the discussion were a war, listening for points on which they can attack the other speaker. "Ah hah! You're wrong about *that!*"

Good listeners, in contrast, are more generous. They realize that people who are not punished speakers may nevertheless have something to say. Rather than pouncing on the first error they hear and tuning out the speaker while they wait impatiently for their own turn to speak, good listeners weigh all the evidence before they come to judgment. They realize that they can learn something even from people they do not like.

To avoid listening errors caused by self-absorption,

- Focus on the substance of what the speaker says, not his or her appearance or delivery.
- Spend your time evaluating what the speaker says, not just planning your rebuttal.
- Consciously work to learn something from every speaker.

## Avoid Making Assumptions

Many listening errors come from making faulty assumptions. In 1977, when two Boeing 747 jumbo jets ran into each other on the ground in Tenerife, the pilots seem to have heeded the control tower's instructions. The KLM pilot was told to taxi to the end of the runway, turn around, and wait for clearance. But the KLM pilot assumed he didn't need to follow the order to wait. The Pan Am pilot assumed that *his* order to turn off at the "third intersection" meant the third *unblocked* intersection. He didn't count the first blocked ramp, so he was still on the main runway when the KLM pilot ran into his plane at 186 miles an hour. The planes exploded in flames; 576 people died.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, asking questions can provide useful information. Magazine advertising account representative Beverly Jameson received a phone call from an ad agency saying that a client wanted to cancel the space it had bought. Jameson saw the problem as an opportunity: "Instead of hearing 'cancel,' I heard, 'There's a problem here—let's get to the root of it and figure out how to make the client happy.'" Jameson met with the client, asked the right questions, and discovered that the client wanted more flexibility. She changed some of the markets, kept the business, and turned the client into a repeat customer.<sup>2</sup>

To avoid listening errors caused by faulty assumptions,

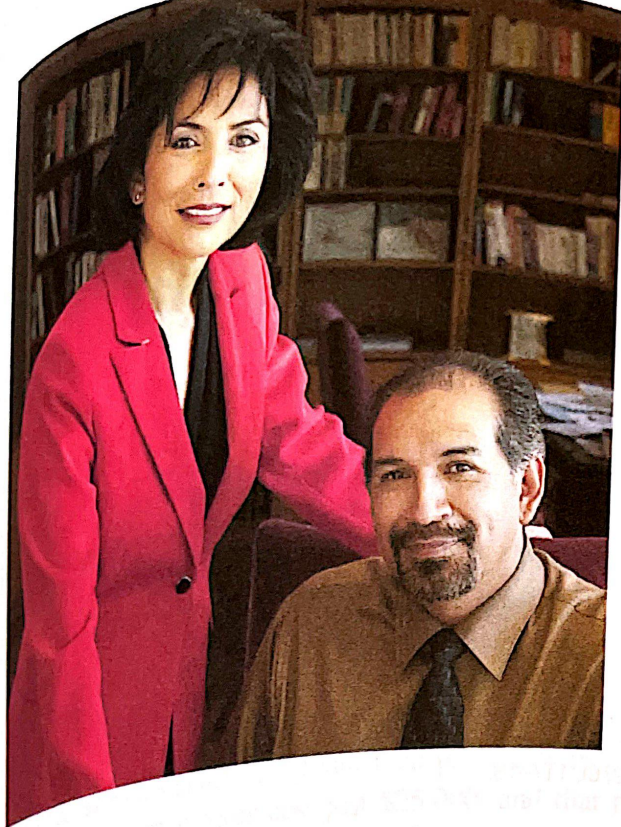
- Don't ignore instructions you think are unnecessary. Before you do something else, check with the order giver to see if in fact there is a reason for the instruction.
- Consider the other person's background and experiences. Why is this point important to the speaker? What might he or she mean by it?
- Paraphrase what the speaker has said, giving him or her a chance to correct your understanding.

## Listen for Feelings as Well as Facts

Sometimes, someone just needs to blow off steam, to vent (►► p. 302). Sometimes people just want to have a chance to fully express themselves; "winning" or "losing" may not matter. Sometimes, people may have objections that they can't quite put into words.

To avoid listening errors caused by focusing solely on facts,

- Consciously listen for feelings.
- Pay attention to tone of voice, facial expression, and body language (◄◄ p. 42).
- Don't assume that silence means consent. Invite the other person to speak.



Elizabeth Gonzalez-Gann founded Jan-Co Janitorial and routinely listens to input from family members, many of whom are employees. She is pictured here with partner and brother, Fernando Gonzalez. Said Monica Lozano, president and CEO of *La Opinion* newspaper, Latina entrepreneurs such as Gonzalez-Gann may be "more collaborative, better organized, and more strategic," which partially accounts for their growing success in traditionally male-dominated fields. Gonzalez-Gann's current pursuits include the Diet of Hope weight loss program.

Sources: Mark Fitzgerald, "Rompiendo Barreras," *American Demographics*, November 2003; and "Migrant Worker Turned National Business Leader Shares Aspects of Success, Faith, Love," downloaded on July 29, 2012, at <http://blog.beliefnet.com/palabrasquefortalecen/2011/09/migrant-worker-turned-national-business-leader-shares-aspects-of-success-faith-love.html>.



Research suggests innocent people tend to be more nervous under police questioning than guilty ones. With a rehearsed alibi in mind, liars may appear composed. In contrast, innocent people may fidget, as well as provide up to 30% more detail—even if they recall some facts incorrectly.

Source: Dina Temple-Raston, "Spotting Lies: Listen, Don't Look," NPR, August 14, 2009, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=111809280>.

## What is active listening? LO 17-2

► Feeding back the literal meaning, the emotional content, or both.

In **active listening**, receivers actively demonstrate that they've heard and understood a speaker by feeding back either the literal meaning or the emotional content or both. Other techniques in active listening are asking for more information and stating one's own feelings.

Five strategies create active responses:

- **Paraphrase the content.** Feed back the meaning in your own words.
- **Mirror the speaker's feelings.** Identify the feelings you think you hear.
- **State your own feelings.** This strategy works especially well when you are angry.
- **Ask for information or clarification.**
- **Offer to help solve the problem.**

Instead of simply mirroring what the other person says, many of us immediately respond in a way that analyzes or attempts to solve or dismiss the problem.

People with problems need first of all to know that we hear that they're having a rough time. Figure 17.1 lists some of the responses that block communication. Ordering and interrogating tell the other person that the speaker doesn't want to hear what he or she has to say. Preaching attacks the other person. Minimizing the problem suggests that the other person's concern is misplaced. Even advising shuts off discussion. Giving a quick answer minimizes the pain the person feels and puts him or her down for not seeing (what is to us) the obvious answer. Even if it is a good answer from an objective point of view, the other person may not be ready to hear it. And sometimes, the off-the-top-of-the-head solution doesn't address the real problem.

Active listening takes time and energy. Even people who are skilled active listeners can't do it all the time. Furthermore, as Thomas Gordon and Judith Gordon Sands point out, active listening works only if you genuinely accept the other person's ideas and feelings. Active listening can reduce the conflict that results from miscommunication, but it alone cannot reduce the conflict that comes when two people want apparently inconsistent things or when one person wants to change someone else.<sup>3</sup>



Instant Replay

### Hearing and Listening

**Hearing** denotes perceiving sounds. **Listening** means decoding and interpreting them correctly.



To make it clear that you're listening,

- Make eye contact with the speaker.
- Don't do unrelated paperwork.
- Avoid body language (like looking at your watch or shuffling papers) that suggests that you want the conversation to end.

Source: William G. Pagonis, "Leadership in a Combat Zone," *Harvard Business Review*, December 2001, 113.



Bernie Ferrari groups bad listeners into a variety of archetypes: Grouches, Pretenders, Opinionators, Answer Men, and so forth. One, the Preambler, prefers to use lead-ins and questions as tools to give speeches. He cites the appearance of *The Daily Show's* Jon Stewart on CNN's *Crossfire*—where he chastised the show's debate platform as theater for the two hosts to vent political views—as an outing of the Preambler method.

Source: Bernie Ferrari, "Learning to Be a Power Listener," *Fast Company*, March 1, 2012, <http://www.fastcompany.com/1810661/learning-to-be-a-power-listener>.

Figure 17.1 Blocking Responses versus Active Listening

Blocking Response	Possible Active Response
<b>Ordering, threatening</b> "I don't care how you do it. Just get that report on my desk by Friday."	<b>Paraphrasing content</b> "You're saying that you don't have time to finish the report by Friday."
<b>Preaching, criticizing</b> "You should know better than to air the department's problems in a general meeting."	<b>Mirroring feelings</b> "It sounds like the department's problems really bother you."
<b>Interrogating</b> "Why didn't you tell me that you didn't understand the instructions?"	<b>Stating one's own feelings</b> "I'm frustrated that the job isn't completed yet, and I'm worried about getting it done on time."
<b>Minimizing the problem</b> "You think that's bad. You should see what I have to do this week."	<b>Asking for information or clarification</b> "What parts of the problem seem most difficult to solve?"
<b>Advising</b> "Well, why don't you try listing everything you have to do and seeing which items are most important?"	<b>Offering to help solve the problem together</b> "Is there anything I could do that would help?"

Source: The 5 responses that block communication are based on a list of 12 in Thomas Gordon and Judith Gordon Sands, *P.E.T. in Action* (New York: Wyden, 1976), 117–18.



Instant Replay

Four Habits of Good Listeners

Good Listeners

- Pay attention.
- Focus on the other speaker(s) in a generous way.
- Avoid making assumptions.
- Listen for feelings as well as for facts.



Site to See

Go to

<http://www.taftcollege.edu/lrc/quizzes/listtest.htm>

Test your listening skills.

How do I show people that I'm listening to them? **LO 17-3**

► Acknowledge their comments in words, nonverbal symbols, and actions.

Active listening is a good way to show people that you are listening. Referring to another person's comment is another way: "I agree with Diana that. . ."

Acknowledgment responses—nods, *uh huh's*, smiles, frowns—also help carry the message that you're listening. However, listening responses vary in different cultures. Research has found that European Americans almost always respond nonverbally when they listen closely, but that African Americans respond with words rather than nonverbal cues. This difference in response patterns may explain the fact that some European Americans think that African Americans do not understand what they are saying. For example, in the mid-1970s, studies showed that white counselors repeated themselves more often to black clients than to white clients.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, black supervisors may want verbal feedback when they talk to white subordinates who only nod.

The mainstream U.S. culture shows attention and involvement by making eye contact, leaning forward, and making acknowledgment responses. However, as Module 3 shows (◀◀ p. 43), some cultures show respect by looking down. In a multicultural workforce, you won't always know whether a colleague who listens silently as you talk agrees with what you say or disagrees violently but is too polite to say so. The best thing to do is to observe the behavior, without assigning a meaning to it: "You aren't saying much." Then let the other person speak.

Of course, if you go through the motions of active listening but then act with disrespect, people will not feel as though you have heard them. Acting on what people say is necessary for people to feel completely heard.

Can I use these techniques if I really disagree with someone? **LO 17-5**

► Yes!

Most of us do our worst listening when we are in highly charged emotional situations, such as talking with someone with whom we really disagree, getting bad news,

Learn...  
D. Michael Abrashoff knows a lot about the value of listening. He now is an author and leadership development consultant, but until January 1999, Abrashoff commanded the U.S.S. *Benfold*, a \$1 billion warship in the U.S. Navy. Abrashoff practiced what he called "grassroots leadership"; seeing the ship through the eyes of the crew.

"Soon after arriving at this command . . . I realized that my job was to listen aggressively . . . I decided to interview five people a day . . . ask[ing] three simple questions: What do you like most about the *Benfold*? What do you like least? What would you change if you could? . . .

"I tackled the most demoralizing things first—like chipping and painting. Because ships sit in salt water and rust, . . . my youngest sailors—the ones I wanted most to connect with—were spending entire days sanding down rust and repainting the ship. It was a huge waste of physical effort." Abrashoff had all the metal parts replaced with stainless steel and then painted with a rust inhibitor. "The entire process cost just \$25,000, and that paint job is good for 30 years. The kids haven't picked up a paintbrush since. And they've had a lot more time to learn their jobs. . . .

"A lot of them wanted to go to college. But most of them had never had a chance to take the SAT. So I posted a sign-up sheet to see how many would take the test if I could arrange it. Forty-five sailors signed up. I then found an SAT administrator through our base in Bahrain and flew him out to the ship to give the test. That was a simple step for me to take, but it was a big deal for morale. . . .

"Most ships report several family problems during every deployment, and most of those problems result from lack of communication. I created an AOL account for the ship and set up a system for sending messages daily through a commercial satellite. That way, sailors can check in with their families, take part in important decisions, and get a little peace of mind."

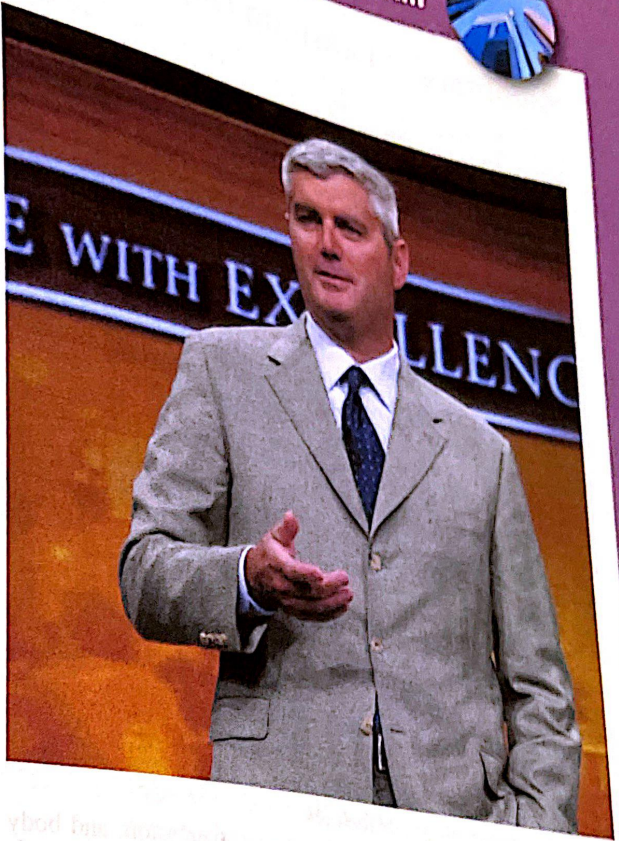
In the Navy as a whole, only 54% of sailors sign up for a third tour of duty. Under Abrashoff's command, 100% of career sailors

or being criticized. At work, you need to listen even to people with whom you have major conflicts.

At a minimum, good listening enables you to find out why your opponent objects to the programs or ideas you support. Understanding the objections to your ideas is essential if you are to overcome those objections.

Good listening is crucial when you are criticized, especially by your boss. You need to know which areas are most important and exactly what kind of improvement counts. Otherwise, you might change your behavior in a way that wasn't valued by your organization.

Listening can do even more. Listening to people is an indication that you're taking them seriously. If you really listen to the people you disagree with, you show that you respect them. And taking that step may enable them to respect you and listen to you.



signed on for an additional tour. Because recruiting and training cost the Navy at least \$100,000 a sailor, Abrashoff estimates that the *Benfold*'s retention rate saved the Navy \$1.6 million in 1998. Meanwhile, *Benfold* sailors were promoted at twice the rate of the Navy's average. Sailors were so productive that in fiscal 1998 the *Benfold* returned \$600,000 of its \$2.4 million maintenance budget and \$800,000 of its \$3 million repair budget to the Navy.

Sources: www.glsworld.com, downloaded on July 2, 2012; "The Most Important Thing a Captain Can Do Is to See the Ship from the Eyes of the Crew," *Fast Company*, April 1999, 114-26; and "Fast Pack 2000," *Fast Company*, March 2000, 248.



Instant Replay

**Strategies for Active Listening**

- Paraphrase the content.
- Mirror the speaker's feelings.
- State your own feelings.
- Ask for information or clarification.
- Offer to help solve the problem.

# Working and Writing in Teams

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Module 18 provides advice on making your experiences working and writing in teams fun and productive. After completing the module, you should be able to

- LO 18-1** Identify message types for the group's attention.
- LO 18-2** Classify roles for group members.
- LO 18-3** Apply strategies for leadership without arrogance.
- LO 18-4** Apply strategies for conflict resolution.
- LO 18-5** Apply strategies for co-authorship of documents.

**T**eamwork is crucial to success in an organization. Some teams produce products, provide service or recommend solutions to problems. Other teams—perhaps in addition to providing a service or recommending a solution—also produce documents. **Interpersonal communication** is communication between people. Interpersonal skills such as listening (◀◀ Module 17) and dealing with conflict are used in one-on-one conversations, in problem-solving groups, and in writing groups. These skills will make you more successful on the job, in social groups, and in community service and volunteer work. In writing groups, careful attention to both the group process and the writing process (◀◀ Module 4) improves both the final product and members' satisfaction with the group. Teams are often most effective when they explicitly adopt ground rules. Figure 18.1 lists some of the most common ground rules used by workplace teams.



Site to See

Go to

<http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/LeadTeams.html>

For the National School Boards Association's tutorial on developing successful teams.

- **Solving interpersonal problems.** Opening discussion of interpersonal problems in the group and suggesting ways to solve them.
- **Listening actively.** Showing group members that they have been heard and that their ideas are being taken seriously (◀◀ p. 291).

Negative roles and actions that hurt the group's product and process include the following:

- **Blocking.** Disagreeing with everything that is proposed.
- **Dominating.** Trying to run the group by ordering, shutting out others, and insisting on one's own way.
- **Clowning.** Making unproductive jokes and diverting the group from the task.
- **Withdrawing.** Being silent in meetings, not contributing, not helping with the work, not attending meetings.

Some actions can be positive or negative depending on how they are used. Criticizing ideas is necessary if the group is to produce the best solution, but criticizing every single idea raised without ever suggesting possible solutions blocks a group. Jokes in moderation can defuse tension and make the group more fun. Too many jokes or inappropriate jokes can make the group's work more difficult.

### Leadership in Groups

You may have noted that "leader" was not one of the roles listed earlier. Being a leader does *not* mean doing all the work yourself. Indeed, someone who implies that he or she has the best ideas and can do the best work is likely playing the negative roles of blocking and dominating.

Effective groups balance three kinds of leadership, which parallel the three group dimensions:

- **Informational leaders** generate and evaluate ideas and text.
- **Interpersonal leaders** monitor the group's process, check people's feelings, and resolve conflicts.
- **Procedural leaders** set the agenda, make sure that everyone knows what's due for the next meeting, communicate with absent group members, and check to be sure that assignments are carried out.

While it's possible for one person to do all of these responsibilities, in many groups, the three kinds of leadership are taken on by three (or more) different people. Some groups formally or informally rotate or share these responsibilities, so that everyone—and no one—is a leader.

Several studies have shown that people who talk a lot, listen effectively, and respond nonverbally to other members in the group are considered to be leaders.<sup>2</sup>

Leaders can encourage groups to make fair decisions. For instance, someone in the group usually brings up an idea's flaws. For balance, John Tropicman recommends that leaders also call upon an "angel's advocate" to speak up for the idea's positive aspects.<sup>3</sup>

### Characteristics of Successful Student Groups

A case study of six student groups completing class projects found that students in successful groups were not necessarily more skilled or more experienced than students in less successful groups. Instead, successful and less successful groups communicated differently in three ways.<sup>4</sup>

1. In the successful groups, the leader set clear deadlines, scheduled frequent meetings, and dealt directly with conflict that emerged in the group. In less successful groups,



According to Florida State University researchers, employees with abusive supervisors were much more likely to hide, slack off, hand in sloppy work, and take sick leave when healthy than those with more benevolent ones. Abuse includes berating, ignoring e-mails, and putting down workers in front of others. Employees with kinder bosses were three times more likely to proactively fix problems and approach supervisors with helpful ideas. A Gallop Poll of a million workers found that bad bosses are the top reason for quitting a job, and a 2011 poll conducted by Harris Interactive for the American Psychological Association found that nearly 50% of workers say they don't feel valued on the job.

Source: Jeanna Bryner, "Abused Workers Fight Back by Slacking Off," October 8, 2007, downloaded at [http://news.yahoo.com/s/livescience/20071008/sc\\_livescience/abusedworkersfightbackbyslackingoff](http://news.yahoo.com/s/livescience/20071008/sc_livescience/abusedworkersfightbackbyslackingoff); and Douglas LaBier, "The Lowdown on Abusive Bosses and Unhealthy Management," June 6, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/douglas-labier/the-lowdown-on-abusive-bosses\\_b\\_887157.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/douglas-labier/the-lowdown-on-abusive-bosses_b_887157.html).