

Communication Ethics @Work

Mixing Business with Pleasure

Best known for his snarky sense of humor and famous “Top Ten” lists, CBS funnyman *Late Show* host David Letterman made waves for an entirely different reason in the fall of 2009.⁴¹ When word got out that he had an office romance with an intern on his staff, then another, then another, the story grew to scandalous proportions. Although release of this story was sensational (as it included stories from coworkers, graphic details, and the juicy little tidbit that Letterman was in a committed relationship at the time), it did highlight an ever-increasing issue for leaders in the workplace: office romance. Just how common is workplace romance? In a survey by Careerbuilder.com, 40 percent admitted to dating a coworker, with an additional 12 percent who hadn’t but said they would.⁴² Of the 40 percent who had dated a coworker, 42 percent said they had dated a boss or supervisor. Three of ten respondents also said they married someone they met at work. Leaders are now recognizing that workplace romances are inevitable.

Historically, workplace romance has been considered taboo. But now companies are recognizing that by permitting office

romance, employees get what they consider an important benefit of working for the company: an opportunity to enhance their social life. However, an office romance almost certainly will have an effect on the interpersonal dynamics within a group.⁴³ In a recent survey, 85 percent of respondents said that although common workplace romances are a potential distraction for everyone at work. In addition, relationships between supervisor/subordinate, such as those Letterman engaged in, can have devastating consequences. There is the risk of retribution if the romance sours. Also, “third-party” employees can feel left out or begin to question the fairness of evaluations or rewards. In addition, the types of relationships have the potential to make the work environment so uncomfortable, that parties could file sexual harassment or hostile workplace complaints.

How does a leader navigate these legally and ethically murky waters? Do you believe the potential rewards for office romance outweigh the potential risks? As a leader, would you encourage or discourage these types of relationships? Would you participate in one?

develop and market products and services that meet these needs. For example, the late Jobs, cofounder and CEO of Apple, identified a consumer need for portable and personalized tablet computers designed to deliver audiovisual media—including books, magazines, movies, music, and games—to users. Under his leadership, Apple developed and delivered the iPad to millions of people throughout the world.

Researchers are learning that task-focused relationships do not necessarily result in satisfied or loyal customers.⁴⁴ With minor exceptions, customers who are treated in a depersonalized manner walk away feeling unsatisfied. To enhance the quality of the service provider–customer relationship, **outward communication**, which is the communication that occurs between a service provider and a customer, needs to be focused on meeting the needs of the customer. Wendy Zabava Ford has conducted a number of research studies examining customer-service communication.⁴⁵ Ford’s research finds that personalized service, which occurs within a person-focused relationship, is “tailored service, or service that attempts to address the unique needs of the individual customer.”⁴⁶ Examples of communication behaviors associated with personalized service include asking questions to identify customers’ specific needs, offering options and advice to customers, and spontaneously sharing information on topics of interest to customers.

One service company that continues to set the standard for customer service is Disney. Much has been written about how Disney trains its employees or cast members to communicate and interact with customers (guests).⁴⁷ Whenever the word “Guest” is used in their internal or external communication, the “G” is capitalized as a symbolic way of showing how critically important the customer is to the Disney organization. To make guests receive personalized customer service, Disney cast members practice the following “7 Guest Service Guidelines”:⁴⁸

1. Make eye contact and smile. Begin and end every interaction with a Guest with eye contact and a sincere smile.
2. Greet and welcome each and every Guest. Extend an appropriate greeting to every person you come into contact with. In some areas of the park, themed greetings are offered.

terms & definitions

Outward communication
communication between
a service provider and a
customer.

Understanding the nature of relational conflict on the job is the first step in learning how to manage conflict at work. The elements of our definition will guide you in diagnosing the conflict and identifying the causes of the conflict. Also, knowing how relational conflict is communicated (through competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, or accommodating) allows you to be prepared to manage conflict, which is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

Skills for Managing Emotions

The problem that most people have when trying to manage conflict is controlling their emotions. Most conflicts provoke emotional responses: anger, hurt feelings, frustration, fear, or defensiveness. Of all the emotions that people can feel on the job, frustration and anger are the most commonly experienced emotions.⁵² According to Anne Kreamer, who studies and reports on workplace emotions, the main cause of the frustration and anger is coworkers who are not doing their share of the work.⁵³ So what do you do with your emotions at work? Should you check them at the office door or should you recognize and process them? Kreamer argues that "it's high time we get rational about emotions in the workplace."⁵⁴

Emotions play an instrumental role in how you solve problems. Again, research does not support the old assumption that emotions only get in the way of rational thinking. Cognitive neuroscientists Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Antonio Damasio argue that emotions and thinking should not be separated.⁵⁵ *Emotional thought* is the term they use to describe how people solve problems.⁵⁶ The emotional and thinking systems in the brain work together in a synthetic manner to solve important problems. For example, if you've ever been caught not doing your share of the work on an important project, you probably felt embarrassed and ashamed. These emotions have a "stickiness" that remain in your memory and prevent you from repeating the same mistake.

Although some people want to express their anger and frustration to show the other person their level of anger and frustration and to release bottled-up emotions, these emotional outbursts usually ignite the other person's emotions and result in emotional contagion. Like conflict in general, emotions are like a virus that spreads very quickly from one person to another.⁵⁷ We have a tendency to mimic each other's behaviors. If you approach a conflict situation in a hostile or defensive manner, the other person, maybe even without knowing it, starts mimicking your behaviors and begins feeling hostile and defensive too.⁵⁸ If you're going to be successful at managing a conflict, you must become aware of the contagion effect and try to prevent it from occurring. Although you do not have control over another person's emotions, you can affect his or her emotions indirectly by managing your own emotions during a conflict conversation. Here are a few suggestions for how you might prevent the contagion effect.

SELECT A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE TIME AND PLACE TO DISCUSS THE CONFLICT. Let the other person know that you would like to discuss something important and find out when the other person might be available. Make sure this time works for you and your coworker too. If you or the other person is tired, there's a risk of becoming locked in an emotion-charged confrontation. It's best to have a conflict conversation when you're both well-rested. Also, make sure you have some privacy for your conversation.

MANAGE THE EMOTIONAL TEMPERATURE. Let the other person know that you expect the conversation to be respectful and that if the conversation becomes too emotional, you will call a "time-out" or postpone the conversation until the emotions have subsided. For example, you might say, "I know we both feel strongly about the decision not to promote Leslie to unit manager, but I hope we can calmly discuss other alternatives for

her career development.” Verbal messages like this acknowledge feelings but also reinforce expectations for being polite to one another.

BE NONVERBALLY RESPONSIVE TO OTHERS. Emotions are conveyed primarily through nonverbal messages. And remember that we don’t have as much control over our nonverbal messages as we do our verbal messages; emotions have a tendency to “leak” out of us in our nonverbal behavior. Many times these leaked cues convey negative emotions. Although it is natural to have a closed body orientation (to cross arms and pull back) during conflict conversations, try remaining nonverbally responsive to the other person. Make appropriate eye contact. Ensure an open body position by facing the person, uncrossing arms and legs, leaning forward, and using appropriate head nods. Nonverbally responsive messages have a tendency to defuse or neutralize negative emotions.

AVOID PERSONAL ATTACKS, NAME-CALLING, PROFANITY, AND GUNNY-SACKING. Because conflict situations are usually emotionally charged, it is easy to resort to what conflict researchers refer to as “below-the-belt” fighting.⁵⁹ This type of conflict is expressed by attacking the individual and making the conflict personal. Profanity, which is usually not acceptable in the workplace, or a personal attack is usually reciprocated by the other person. This cycle of negative emotional expression needs to be broken if there is to be any hope of managing the conflict constructively. Another way to manage emotions is to avoid engaging in gunny-sacking, or kitchen-sink fighting.⁶⁰ Gunny-sacking occurs when a person begins discussing a single conflict situation and then continues to unload or dump on the other person all of the things that have been bothering him or her. Essentially, it’s emptying the “gunny-sack” of grievances. This type of conflict management is perceived as unfair by most people and increases negative emotions. To avoid gunny-sacking, limit the scope of your conflict conversation to a single issue rather than multiple issues.

Skills for Managing Conflict Conversations

Imagine you’re having a problem with your coworker Michael. Rather than talking behind his back, you discuss the problem with Michael directly. But while you’re talking, something happens almost without your knowing it: Michael “spins” the conversation so that the problem seems to be about you and not him. It happens quite often, and it can be frustrating. If we’re not careful, people can hijack conflict conversations. When this happens, we walk away from the conflict conversation asking ourselves, “How did that happen? Why did I let him do that?” In reality, the problem is not just the other person’s and it’s not just yours. Because you and the other person are interdependent, the problem belongs to both of you.

To keep your conflict conversation on track and work toward a solution acceptable to both individuals, consider structuring your conversation using what we refer to as the PUGSS model of conflict management. Each letter of the PUGSS acronym represents a different part of the conversation:⁶¹

- P = Describe the Problem
- U = Achieve Understanding
- G = Identify Goals
- S = Brainstorm Solutions

DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM. What is the other person saying or doing that is bothering you? Using “I” language, describe the problematic behavior. “This is what I see you doing. This is what I hear you saying. This is how I’m feeling.”

ACHIEVE UNDERSTANDING. Make sure the other person understands the problem. Simply ask, “Do you know why this is a problem?” You might want to ask the person to paraphrase what she or he hears you saying to confirm understanding. If the person doesn’t understand, which is common, then continue to describe the problem but in a different way. It is important not to continue to the next step in the conversation until you’re confident that the other person understands the problem.

Also, make sure the person doesn’t hijack or deflect the conversation and make the problem about you. For example, if you’re discussing with an employee the fact that the person is frequently late, the employee may change the subject and mention that you need to be less rigid and more understanding. If this occurs, tell the person that you’d be happy to follow up at another time to hear his or her thoughts about your being rigid and not understanding. Then redirect the conversation back to the employee’s business problem. In other words, keep the conversation focused on the employee’s behaviors, not on yours. That’s a different conversation that should be conducted at another time.

IDENTIFY GOALS. Next, let the other person know what you want and need. Find out what the other person wants and needs. Once you have identified individual goals, identify the goals you have in common. Build on your common goals. For example, if you’re working with an employee who is constantly late to work, you might mention that the goal you have in common is for this person to remain employed. You might say, “I know you want to keep your job, and I want you to keep your job too. Our goal is the same. Now let’s work together to reach this goal.” People are usually surprised to find out that they have a number of common or similar goals.

BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS. Now that the problem and goals have been identified, it’s time to find a solution. Ask, “What can we do to fix the problem? How can we ensure that both of our goals are met?” Withhold all evaluation and generate as many creative solutions as possible.

SELECT THE BEST SOLUTION. Finally, select the best solution. Evaluate each of the brainstormed solutions and compare each to the goals you’ve identified. If a solution doesn’t meet the goals of both people, then it’s not the *best* solution. Continue evaluating each solution until you come up with one that meets all the goals identified earlier.

Figure 6.4 reflects how PUGSS might unfold in a real relational conflict in the workplace. This particular conflict, which actually occurred, involves two employees who work in the same office. One of the employees, Marisa, brings her infant daughter to work because she has been unable to arrange child care. The other employee, Rick, is distracted by the child’s crying and often ends up doing Marisa’s work.

For most people, working through conflict is troublesome and difficult because there’s so much uncertainty. We have no idea how the conflict conversation is going to go. This uncertainty produces a lot of anxiety. One of the advantages of using PUGSS to structure your conflict conversations is that it makes managing and resolving conflict like working through a script. To reduce the uncertainty and anxiety, we encourage you to plan your conflict conversations and structure them using the PUGSS model.

There is simply no way to escape relational conflict at work. To manage conflict when it occurs, first ensure that the workplace climate is conducive to managing conflict. Workplace environments that are supportive, trusting, caring, and accepting ensure that relational conflict is managed well. Second, manage your emotions carefully by managing

Describing the Problem

- Rick:** Do you have a second? I have a problem and I know that you can help me fix it.
- Marisa:** Sure, come in. What's the problem? How can I help?
- Rick:** Something has been bothering me.
- Marisa:** What is it?
- Rick:** I haven't been able to get much work done lately. I begin a project that requires concentration and then I hear your child crying. The other day she cried from 9:00 a.m. until 11:00. I was feeling very frustrated.
- Marisa:** Yes, she was not having a good day. I'm so sorry.
- Rick:** I have also had other employees assign me work that is usually given to you. Yesterday, the Director of Marketing asked me to stuff all of these envelopes and I don't even report to her. I feel like I'm getting dumped on because others don't want to burden you with additional work. I'm feeling a bit abused by this situation, and I'm frustrated and anxious.

Achieving Understanding

- Rick:** Do you understand why this is a problem for me?
- Marisa:** I think so. Here's what I hear you saying: My child bothers you and others are dumping my work on you because they perceive me as having too much to do, with my child and everything else.
- Rick:** Your child is not the distraction, but her crying is.
- Marisa:** I also didn't know that others perceived me as ineffective.
- Rick:** I don't think anybody thinks you're ineffective at all—I just think they perceive you as having your hands full with your workload and your child.
- Marisa:** I understand. Again, I apologize for this and I'm glad you brought this problem to my attention. Let's fix it.
- Rick:** What do you suggest we do to fix the problem?

Identifying Goals

- Marisa:** What do you need to get your job done?
- Rick:** I need a quiet work environment. I also need others to know that you're available so they stop giving me your work. I don't feel our work is equally distributed. What do you need?
- Marisa:** I need to be able to care for my daughter and work at the same time. Being a single working mother is challenging.
- Rick:** Well, yes—I can't even imagine how hard it must be.
- Marisa:** Well, we both need our jobs and we like working here. . . .
- Rick:** Also, we're good friends and I don't think we want this to damage our friendship.
- Marisa:** I agree completely. What do you see as being a workable solution?

Brainstorming Solutions

- Rick:** How about having your parents care for her while you're working?
- Marisa:** I could see if I could change offices so we wouldn't bother you.
- Rick:** How about seeing if the company might help you finance daycare?
- Marisa:** How about you change your work schedule and work nights? Is that a possibility?
- Rick:** Could you get a babysitter with whom you could exchange babysitting services? For example, you sit with the other person's child on the weekends and this person could sit with your child during the week.

FIGURE 6.4 The PUGSS Approach to Conflict

Selecting the Best Solution

- Marisa:** Why don't I see if I could change my office so that my daughter and I will be out of your way?
- Mike:** I think that would meet my need for a quiet workplace; however, I still believe people will perceive you as having your hands full and they will come to me. Is it possible for your parents to care for your child during the day?
- Marisa:** Well, unfortunately my parents aren't capable of caring for my daughter. They're not comfortable around babies. My mother pops Valium every time we step foot in the house and my dad leaves once my daughter begins to cry.
- Mike:** What about exchanging babysitting services with a neighbor?
- Marisa:** That idea might work. . . . My neighbor is a firefighter and he works two 24-hour shifts during the weekend. I could watch his kids all weekend, and I believe he would be willing to watch my daughter during the workday.
- Mike:** That would meet both of my needs and yours. Do you agree?
- Marisa:** I do agree. All I want is good childcare for my daughter and to keep my job.

FIGURE 6.4 (continued)

conflict at the appropriate time and place, explaining your expectations for how you will treat each other during the conflict conversation, being nonverbally responsive, and avoiding personal attacks, name-calling, profanity, and gunny-sacking. Third, plan and structure your conflict conversations to ensure that you reach a solution you both can agree on.

Skills for Managing Bullies

Although we're used to hearing about bullies on playgrounds and in high school hallways, we're not used to hearing about them in business and professional contexts. Unfortunately, bullying in the workplace is becoming more and more of a problem at work. Communication researcher Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik and her colleagues report that 1 in 3 of all workers in the United States have been bullied sometime during their work history.⁶² According to Lutgen-Sandvik, **workplace bullying** is an extreme, negative, and persistent form of emotional workplace abuse achieved primarily through verbal and nonverbal communication.⁶³ Four characteristics differentiate workplace bullying from other forms of employee abuse: (1) bullying communication behaviors are extreme and intense, (2) the behaviors persist over long periods and result in negative effects, (3) targets or those bullied believe these communication acts are intentional, and (4) targets feel they cannot defend themselves in the situation.⁶⁴ Examples of bullying may include some of the following behaviors:

- When someone criticizes you when there is no reason to justify the criticism
- When someone falsely blames you
- When someone treats you differently than the rest of your work group
- When someone swears at you
- When someone intentionally excludes you from important activities
- When someone shouts at you or humiliates you
- When someone makes you the target of practical joke
- When someone excessively monitors you

A leader is held responsible for managing these difficult and often challenging situations. There are a number of strategies for managing bullies in the workplace. Figure 6.5 examines two best practices: talking to the bully and writing a letter to the bully.

terms & definitions

Workplace bullying an extreme, negative, and persistent form of emotional workplace abuse achieved primarily through verbal and nonverbal communication.

Communication Skills FOR A Digital Age

The Do's and Don'ts of Using Facebook for Work⁶⁵

Many of today's entrepreneurs are using their Facebook for work and for pleasure. Because of their careful use of social media, these ambitious leaders are blurring the lines between their private and public lives in a seamless manner. One example of this is Ms. Randy Yezak, an animal science major from Texas A & M University, who uses her Facebook to sell necklaces, bracelets, earrings, rings, and other accessories under the name "Southern Jewlz," in addition to managing her personal relationships. Her two-year-old business has 8,000 fans on Facebook and her online sales have doubled in a six-month period.⁶⁶

Applying Your Skills⁶⁷

- *Don't have two profiles—one for personal and one for professional.* If Facebook learns that you have two profiles, they may shut down your account. The lines between personal and professional are blurring. You should be transparent and confident enough to let them blur. Of course there are some photos that you may not want your workplace colleagues to view. Facebook has excellent privacy settings that can be customized so your professional connections are limited in what they can view. Become familiar with these privacy settings.
- *Do create a Facebook page for your business.* Profiles are meant for people, whereas pages are meant for business.

Because pages were meant for businesses, they have different features that make them more valuable for a business. For example, business pages don't need to "accept" friend requests; they can get "liked" by anyone. Also, business pages come with viewer information so you know if you're reaching your customers and market on Facebook.

- *Don't turn off wall posts for your business page.* The point of Facebook is to interact with your customers. Turning off wall posts or comments screams to your customers, "We don't want to hear from you." Be prepared for what customers might post, and be ready to respond in a timely and authentic manner. Every time a user interacts with your page, that interaction gets in front of that user's network, spreading your reach far beyond your existing customer base. Use this unique opportunity carefully.
- *Do update your business page on a regular basis.* If you ignore it, your customers are going to ignore it as well. Your Facebook page should be an interactive platform where you and your customers interact regularly. If you update your business page with interesting content, your users are more likely to engage with your page, and their interactions get shown to their networks, expanding your reach exponentially. This virality is what makes Facebook such an incredibly powerful tool for businesses.

Negotiating Solutions at Work

Another important tool essential to effective leadership is negotiation, which is a particular type of conflict management. **Negotiation** has been defined as an exchange of proposals and counterproposals as a means of reaching a satisfactory settlement to a conflict.⁶⁸ Whereas all negotiation is a form of conflict management, not all conflict management is negotiation. For example, if you supervise an employee who comes to work under the influence of alcohol, you have a conflict that needs to be managed. There is no negotiation. The employee violated one of the workplace rules that usually results in immediate termination. In contrast, negotiation occurs when there is room for bargaining or for give-and-take. You give some and the employee gives some until you reach a solution that suits both of you. In short, you exchange proposals and counterproposals until you can agree. During negotiations, your proposals change and evolve. It's rare to leave the negotiation process with your first proposal untouched.

You will use negotiation strategies during the interview process when a company offers you a job. You have an idea of what the position and your skills are worth; however, the company also has an idea of a starting salary for you. That's when you begin the negotiation process. For example, you will take the job for \$35,000. The company offers \$27,000 and an extra week of vacation. After a strategic conversation, you and the company's representative agree on an annual salary of \$31,000 without the extra week of vacation. This illustrates the exchange of proposals and counterproposals. Another example would be when you're

terms & definitions

Negotiation an exchange of proposals and counterproposals as a means of reaching a satisfactory settlement to a conflict.

Communication Skills FOR A Digital Age

How Technology Can Help You Manage Time

You don't manage time, you manage what you do with your time: You manage your communication. Here are several software programs and applications that time management experts recommend to help you manage information and messages that you send and receive each day.¹⁶

- **Xobni <xobni.com>**: This free program helps you manage email messages and attachments.
- **MindManager <mindjet.com>**: This low-cost software program is based on the mind-mapping technique of making links between the ideas you develop. It provides tools to help you take notes and capture ideas while simultaneously helping you keep major projects in mind.
- **Evernote <evernote.com>**: If you currently use sticky notes or other methods to record ideas and information, this free software program can help you consolidate all of your scribbles in one place and also help you find what you've written.
- **RescueTime <rescuetime.com>** and **JournalLive <journalLive.com>**: These two free programs help you keep track of what you do with your time while on the computer.
- **Dropbox <getdropbox.com>**: This free software lets you sync files among several computers so you don't have to hunt for a file on your desktop computer that may be on your laptop.
- **Jott <jott.com>**: If you need to make a quick reminder note but don't have a pencil or pen handy, you simply call a phone number, leave a recorded message, and then later you'll receive an email message with your message now in text format.
- **FileCenter <lucion.com>**: This program is a document management system that permits you to scan large amounts of paperwork so you can easily track where you've electronically filed it.

- Meet people in their office or workspace rather than yours. If you are in someone else's office, you are less likely to get involved in a long conversation from which you can't escape. When the meeting is in your office, you have nowhere else to go; if you're visiting in a colleague's office you can keep the meeting short.
- Verbally communicate how much time you have for a visit. Let others know what your time limits are. You might say, "Janice, I'm due at a meeting in ten minutes, can we discuss this issue in that time?" We're not suggesting that you lie about meetings or other appointments to avoid conversations. But do honestly let others know of your time parameters.
- If you have an administrative assistant, ask him or her to announce when your next appointment is, which will help you signal the need to end a meeting.
- Verbally signal that your time is up. By saying, "Do you have any final observations before we conclude our visit?" you send a clear message that your time is limited. With some people you may need to be even more explicit: "Ken, I'm sorry, but I have to conclude our meeting."

Take Action

Having goals and objectives, making a master list, prioritizing your work, and managing interruptions won't be enough to achieve increased productivity unless you act. The final element in managing your time and managing communication in order to increase your efficiency is to turn your plans into action. One strategy that can help you take appropriate action to accomplish your goals and objectives is to use the power of reflection.

One of your most powerful time management/communication management tools is the power of reflection. When you reflect, you take time for an important but not urgent task: to review what you need to do next. As we emphasized at the beginning of this appendix, becoming aware of what keeps you from achieving your work goals and having clear goals and objectives is the starting place for taking concrete steps to working more efficiently.

terms & definitions

Xobni <xobni.com> program that assist in managing email messages and attachments.

MindManager <mindjet.com> software program that uses a mind-mapping technique to make links between ideas; it provides tools to take notes and capture ideas while keeping upcoming major projects in mind.

Evernote <evernote.com> software used to consolidate the user's notes and ideas. It also helps find entries that have been submitted.

RescueTime <rescuetime.com> and **JournalLive <journalLive.com>** program that helps keep track of how one spends time while on the computer.

Dropbox <getdropbox.com> file-syncing software that allows one to link files from several computers.

Jott <jott.com> system where one can simply call phone number, leave a message, and then receive an email message with the information in text format.

FileCenter <lucion.com> document management system that permits you to scan large amounts of paperwork to easily track its electronic filing.