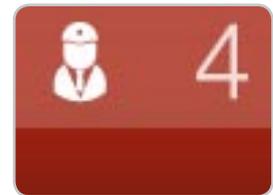


## Effective communication and gaining co-operation



Information sheet from Seven steps > Step 4 > Further tools

### Why should I consider developing my communication skills?

Good two-way communication is at the heart of health and safety. It's not just about saying the right things but also about listening to others. By communicating effectively and showing you respect others' opinions, you are more likely to gain their respect and co-operation – whoever you are talking to.

Good communication can:

- enable you to respond to safety issues quickly before accidents happen; and
- improve worker co-operation and commitment to your business.

### What's the difference between listening and good listening?

One aspect of effective communication – which is often overlooked – is the ability to listen, with research suggesting that we only actually remember between 25%–50% of what we hear.

When someone is talking, many people are already thinking about what they're going to say in response rather than actually 'listening'. They are therefore not fully concentrating and so may not understand what is said – which may not only affect the way jobs are done but could also lead to health and safety risks.

This is where **good listening** is important. Pay attention to what is being said, ask questions and even offer suggestions about what you are told. This can help to improve working relationships, gaining the trust and co-operation needed to make change happen.

### Other good listening tips

When someone tells you something, find a way of communicating that information back to them (eg “So you think we should check the ladders every week then John?”)

Repeating back something the person has said, using their words or phrases, is a powerful way of showing you are listening.

Summarise regularly what they've been saying to you (eg “So what you are saying John is ...?”)

This not only shows you are listening but also helps the other person think about what they've said so far. It's also a useful way of checking you have a common understanding of what's been said.

Ask them to expand on what they've said (eg “Can you tell me more about that John?”)

Using too many questions can feel like an interrogation, so this is another way of finding out information in a way that encourages the other person to talk.

Regularly ask for ideas or suggestions (eg “What would you suggest John?”)

This shares control of the discussion and encourages contributions.



### **I understand good listening but what about the things I should say?**

Much of this depends on your workplace and your own style of communication but it is important to be constructive and remember that workers have different levels of understanding.

Whatever the subject, it is important to make sure that each worker **really** understands what you've told them – and is not simply saying they do. Encourage them to ask questions or even offer suggestions for doing things differently. By doing this, you will find out how much they've **really** understood, while making them feel their ideas and views are valued.

### **What about body language?**

Body language is also important to communication because negative body language (basically, the opposite of the examples below) can damage trust and affect working relationships. The following are examples of good body language:

- making eye contact when someone is speaking to you;
- giving the speaker your full attention;
- nodding or shaking your head, to show your agreement or disagreement; and
- NOT doing things like tapping your pen or drumming your fingers, which shows disinterest or impatience.

Doing these things will show you are interested and listening to what's being said; which should make that person more likely to listen when you have something to say.

### **Practice your communication skills**

As when learning and developing any new skill, you need practice to get it right. Follow the tips here and in the other pages of this website (for example, the Feedback pages of Steps 4 and 6) and you will communicate more effectively with colleagues – which is vital to safety in the construction industry.

Remember, if you don't give workers the chance to speak – especially if you are their employer – they'll think you're not interested in their opinions. So create opportunities for discussion about health and safety and always take the time to listen.

For further information, see: [www.hse.gov.uk/construction](http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction)

**The Leadership and Worker Involvement toolkit is aimed particularly at small and medium sized businesses and is designed to help improve your health and safety and bring additional benefits to your business performance and productivity. See: [www.hse.gov.uk/construction/lwit/](http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/lwit/)**

Developed by the construction industry's Leadership and Worker Engagement Forum. Hosted by HSE 12/11