

Unit 2: Communication Skills

Welcome to Unit 2 which focuses on Communication skills. There are 4 video segments in this unit on the topics of Courtesy (which means being polite), Introductions, Addressing People and Negotiating.

Courtesy

Introductions

Addressing People

Negotiating

Courtesy

The standards and expectations for courteous behavior varies widely across the globe. What may be considered polite or acceptable behavior in one country can be very rude in another country. For example, in Canada it is a sign of a friendly and polite person to chat casually to people standing beside them on the train, bus, or in the elevator.

Canada is generally considered to have a very polite culture. However, be mindful that what you and your culture consider polite may be different from Canadian standards. Being polite does not mean always agreeing with the other person. Differences of opinion are both expected and respected. A 'yes-man' (someone who always agrees with the boss) is thought of somewhat negatively. Politely expressing your opinion or directly stating the situation are respected.

The most important thing to remember is to be courteous and thoughtful to the people around you, regardless of the situation. Consider other people's feelings, stick to your convictions as diplomatically as possible. Address conflict as situation-related, rather than person-related. Apologize when you advertently or inadvertently make someone angry or upset.

If you always behave so that you would not mind your spouse, kids, or grandparents watching you, you're probably doing fine. Avoid raising your voice, using harsh or derogatory language toward anyone, or interrupting. Then you say will be much more effective because it carries the weight of credibility and respectability.

Be mindful to learn the corporate culture of your workplace.

Introductions

Every day we encounter people in a variety of business and social situations. The way we meet and greet them creates lasting impressions and paves the way for a productive encounter. Introductions project information. Besides the obvious elements of name, title, and affiliation, an introduction conveys a level of respect and reflects how the person making the introduction views the other person's status. Mastering the art of the introduction will help put you and the people you are introducing at ease. Learning the basics - and they are not very difficult - is the first step.

The most important point about introductions is to make them. Failing to do so causes embarrassment and discomfort. If given a choice, most people would prefer you to make the introduction incorrectly, even if you forgot their name, rather than stand there unacknowledged and disregarded.

A second important point in any introduction is the order of names. The name of the person being introduced is mentioned last, and the person to whom the introduction is made is mentioned first. The rules for who is introduced to whom depends on whether it's a business or a social introduction.

Example: David and his wife Sarah are at a party. David sees his friend, John, and calls him over. David says, "John, I'd like for you to meet my wife, Sarah".

In this example, Sarah is being introduced to John.

Business Introductions: In business, introductions are based on power and hierarchy. Simply, persons of lesser authority are introduced to persons of greater authority. Gender plays no role in business etiquette; nor does it affect the order of introductions.

For example, David wants to introduce a new employee Stephen Collins (a man) to the company president, Harriet Watson (a woman).

David says, "Mrs. Watson, this is Stephen Collins. He joined our company today as our department's new legal assistant."

As you say each of the individuals' names, look at him or her. In this way, you focus attention on them and make them feel important while appearing to be in control. Once a conversation has begun and everyone seems at ease, you may excuse yourself.

When introducing peers to one another, mention both the first and last names. It doesn't matter who is introduced to whom. Including a tidbit of information that might start the conversation is always a good idea. Even if everyone in a group is on a first name basis, introduce people by both first and last names. But, if you only know one person's first name, be consistent in your introductions and use their surnames, "Ms. White, Mr. Clark".

At social events, it's not necessary to introduce a newcomer to everyone in the room. Introduce that person to the closest group by saying the newcomer's name first and then giving the names of the others. Ask the members of the group to introduce themselves if you can't remember everyone's name. Make sure from time to time, though, that the person is circulating (being able to move to a different group and different people).

At any function, the host should meet all the guests to make them feel as if their presence matters. At many business functions, guests may not know the host. It's a good idea to appoint several representatives of the corporation to stand by the door to act as greeters when guests arrive. The greeters introduce themselves and escort the guests to the host, make the introductions and then escort the guests to the bar or introduce them to several other guests while the host remains free to greet new guests.

For functions with more than fifty guests, a receiving line within the party area is preferable to insure that everyone meets the host. The receiving line remains in formation until all guests have arrived. To relieve the pressure on one host at a large social function, list several corporate officers as hosts on the invitation and have them relieve one another. All the hosts need not stand in line at once. A short receiving line moves more quickly and easily, and guests are not bogged down in a long, tedious line.

If no-one introduces you, step in and introduce yourself. Someone may be too embarrassed to admit forgetting a name or may be distracted by other matters. Feeling slighted because you were not introduced only puts you at a disadvantage. Introduce yourself by extending your hand, smiling and saying something like, "I'm Matt Jones, David's partner." Avoid making any comment such as "Helen works for me" that might be misconstrued as arrogance or superiority. Instead, say, "Helen and I work in the same office."

Be clear and concise in your introduction; the fastest way to alienate a new acquaintance is to ramble on about your life history or, worse, your problems or illnesses. If you expect people to respond favourably to your introduction, leave your problems on the doorstep and make sure your tone is engaging.

Try to gauge information that will be of interest to the others. At business functions, it would be appropriate to mention where you work. However, just saying "I'm in public relations at IBM" is not likely to stir a great deal of interest or conversation whereas "I try to lure investment in IBM by working on the company's annual reports," might be more interesting. Just don't focus too much

attention on yourself with grandiose pronouncements.

Don't expect someone else to be forthcoming with their job information at functions that are not strictly business because many people feel that they are not defined by employment. At an organized event, such as an environmental fund raiser, you can mention your connection to the organization. Or, if you have a mutual interest, mention that as long as you phrase it to keep the focus is on the other person. For example, "Gina tells me that you are a member of the Global Business Association. I'm also involved in international trade so I'd be interested in learning how the association has benefited you."

At any business meal, always introduce yourself to the people sitting next to you to open the way for conversation. Not introducing yourself can cost you a valuable business lead because few people want to deal with someone who comes across as aloof or unsavvy.

The way you respond to someone else's introduction is just as important as making the introduction. In response to informal introductions, simply say "hello". Add a phrase like, "I've heard so much about you, Barry," only if it is true and if it is complimentary. Beware of phrases like, "Pleased to meet you" because that may not be true after only a few minutes of conversation.

"How do you do?" followed by the person's name is the customary response to a formal introduction. Do not use first names until the person to whom you've been introduced has indicated that the familiarity is preferred.

Always stand for introductions. Everyone should rise to greet newcomers at both business and social functions. The old rule that a woman remains seated when new people enter a room and are introduced is obsolete. At a very large function, only those nearest the newcomer would rise and say hello. If you are wedged into a tight position in a restaurant, there may not always be sufficient room to stand properly, but at least make the attempt so that by remaining seated you will not be perceived as aloof. In an office, always rise and come around from behind the desk to greet visitors.

If you forget someone's name when making an introduction, try putting the other people at ease rather than concentrating on your own embarrassment. Remain calm; if you fall apart, the person whose name you forgot may feel obliged to put you at ease, compounding your faux pas. Be straightforward yet tactful in admitting your memory lapse. By saying, "I've forgotten your name," you imply the person wasn't worth remembering. "I've just drawn a blank," or "my memory seems to be malfunctioning" connotes a more temporary condition that doesn't have the same insulting implications. If you can't remember someone's name, but you remember an interesting point about them, cite it. You might say, "I clearly remember our conversation about Thai food, but your name seems to have temporarily slipped my mind. Please help me out."

Then, whatever happens, get off the subject of the memory lapse and onto something more interesting to everyone. Profuse apologies only make everyone uncomfortable. The sooner you forget about it, the sooner everyone else will...and the happier everyone will be.

When you're introduced to someone, say the person's name, then repeat it several times during the conversation. Not only do you project a genuine interest in someone by repeating their name, but the repetition is more likely to imprint the name on your memory. When someone seems to have forgotten your name, just jump in, hand outstretched, a smile on your face, and offer your name.

Canada is an ethnically and culturally diverse country. Many people may have names that are new or usual for you. It is completely acceptable to ask the person to repeat their name and for you to practice it to ensure that your pronunciation of their name is correct.

You would commonly shake a person's hand when you are introduced to him or her. Extend your right hand, palm in and firmly but briefly shake their hand. The hand shake should only take about 5 seconds. If you hold the other person's hand longer than that, they may become uncomfortable.

Addressing People

In Canadian work environments, you will normally address your co-workers by their first names. If you are a sales representative, you might choose to address your clients or potential clients by their title (Mr. or Ms.) and their surnames unless invited to address them by their first names.

Be careful of name pronunciation, especially when dealing with Francophones. It is very acceptable to ask someone to repeat their name during the introduction or shortly thereafter. Ensure you are comfortable with the pronunciation of the name and repeat it once or twice if it is unfamiliar to you. Most people are very happy to help you achieve the correct pronunciation of their name.

The order of most Canadian names is first name, middle name, and last name.

To confer respect, use an applicable professional title such as "Dr." or courtesy titles such as "Ms.", "Miss", "Mrs.", or "Mr." with the last name, until you are told to do otherwise. Among French Canadians, use courtesy titles such as "Monsieur" or "Madame", followed by a last name.

If you are unsure of a woman's marital status, use "Ms." [pronounced "Miz"], followed by her last name. If a woman dislikes this term, she will usually tell you the courtesy title she prefers.

Although they often use first names over the telephone, French Canadians may revert to using surnames in person.

Negotiating

Negotiations have a variety of acceptable styles and tones. You need to develop your own style that makes you feel comfortable and confident while respecting the cultural needs of the people you are dealing with. Here is a list of general things you should consider when in a meeting or negotiation in Canada:

In business situations, maintain good posture and an air of formality. In most cases, meetings are essentially democratic and all participants are allowed to express their opinions. Agreement tends to be sought rather than imposed.

Negotiating styles are frequently similar to those in the United States, although the pace may be slightly slower.

Negotiations must lead to a direct action plan.

In general, Canadian businesspeople are well-informed and, within reason, open to new ideas and discussions.

In Quebec, ethnocentrism can be pronounced. Moreover, when negotiating with Quebecers, a fundamental belief in their own self-determination may become apparent.

Empirical data and other substantial facts are considered the most reliable forms of evidence; feelings are not as much of a priority.

Generally speaking, Canadians are polite listeners and will rarely interrupt a good speech or presentation. Moreover, many Canadians excel in courteous, "give and take" debate.

Rhetoric or overly aggressive statements are not generally appreciated.

Refrain from making exaggerated or otherwise unsubstantiated claims in presentations or promotional literature.

A good sense of humour is almost always a welcome attribute.

In most cases, one person can be replaced by another without disrupting negotiations.

Generally, Canadians do not have difficulty saying "no."

Refrain from bringing up the subject of family and other personal affairs in the course of negotiations.

Experts are relied upon at all levels.

Although decision-making can be highly individualistic, company policy must be followed at all times.

Decisions are not rushed and a certain amount of caution is advised, but Canadians of practically all origins dislike wasting time.

People Skills

Talk and visit with people. Don't differentiate by position or standing within the company. Secretaries and janitorial staff actually have tremendous power to help or hinder your career. Next time you need a document prepared or a conference room arranged for a presentation, watch how many people are involved with that process and make it a point to meet them and show your appreciation.

Make it a point to arrive ten or fifteen minutes early and visit with people that work near you. When you're visiting another site, linger over a cup of coffee and introduce yourself to people nearby. If you arrive early for a meeting, introduce yourself to the other participants. At social occasions, use the circumstances of the event itself as an icebreaker. After introducing yourself, ask how they know the host or how they like the crab dip. Talk a little about yourself- your hobbies, kids, or pets; just enough to get people to open up about theirs and get to know you as a person. Be careful not to become too personal and involve your co-workers in your intimate life dramas.

Keep notes on people. There are several "contact management" software applications that are designed for salespeople, but in business, nearly everyone is a salesperson in some capacity or another. They help you create a "people database" with names, addresses, phone numbers, birthdays, spouse and children's' names; whatever depth of information is appropriate for your situation.

It's a good idea to remember what you can about people; and to be thoughtful. Send cards or letters for birthdays or congratulations of promotions or other events, send flowers for engagements, weddings or in condolence for the death of a loved one or family member. People will remember your kindness, probably much longer than you will!

Phone Skills

Always return calls. Even if you don't yet have an answer to the caller's question, call and explain what you're doing to get the requested information, or direct them to the appropriate place to get it.

If you're going to be out, have someone pick up your calls, or at a minimum, have your answering system tell the caller when you'll be back in the office and when they can expect a call back.

When you initiate a call and get a receptionist or secretary, identify yourself and tell them the basic nature of your call. That way, you'll be sure you're getting the right person or department and the person you're trying to reach will be able to pull up the appropriate information and help you more efficiently.

When you're on the receiving end of a phone call, identify yourself and your department. Answer the phone with some enthusiasm or at least warmth, even if you ARE being interrupted, the person on the other end doesn't know that!

Make sure your voice mail system is working properly and doesn't tell the caller that the mailbox is full, transfer them to nowhere, or ring indefinitely. Address technical and system problems- a rude machine or system is as unacceptable as a rude person.

You don't have to reply to obvious solicitations. If someone is calling to sell you something, you can indicate that you are not interested and hang up without losing too much time on it. However, you do need to be careful. You may be receiving a call from an insurance or long distance company that wants to hire you as a consultant! Be sure you know the nature of the call before you (politely, of course) excuse yourself.

Personalize the conversation. Many people act in electronic media (including phone, phone mail, and e-mail) the way they act in their cars. They feel since they're not face-to-face with a person, it is perfectly acceptable to be abrupt, crass, or rude. We need to ensure that we make best use of the advantages of these media without falling headfirst into the disadvantages.

Email

Most Canadians working in an office environment receive dozens of emails a day. Ensure that yours is clear, correct and concise.

Before you send the email, review it.

Make sure the email says what you want it to.

Make sure it is grammatically correct and use the Spell Checker feature.

Make sure it is no longer than it needs to be. Employees' time is valuable.

Make the subject line specific. Think of the many messages you're received with the generic subject line, "Hi" or "Just for you."

Don't forward messages with several pages of mail-to information before they get to the content. In the message you forward, delete the extraneous information such as all the "Memo to," subject, addresses, and date lines.

When replying to a question, copy only the question into your e-mail, then provide your response. You needn't hit reply automatically, but don't send a bare message that only reads, "Yes." It's too blunt and confuses the reader.

Address and sign your e-mails. Although this is included in the To and From sections, remember that you're communicating with a person, not a computer.

DON'T TYPE IN ALL CAPS. TOO INTENSE, and you appear too lazy to type properly. This is still a written medium. Follow standard writing guidelines as a professional courtesy.

Appreciation, Credit, Apologies

Always pass along credit and compliments to EVERYONE who made a contribution to the effort.

Speak well of your coworkers and always point out their accomplishments to any interested party. Appearing to have taken the credit in a superiors' or customers' eyes is the surest way to sabotage a relationship with a coworker.

Interruptions

Avoid interruptions (in singular or group work sessions, meetings, phone calls, or even discussions) if at all possible. Most management feel free to interrupt informal working sessions of subordinates, but need to realize that they may be interrupting a brainstorming session that will produce the company's next big success.

Always apologize if you must interrupt a conversation, meeting, or someone's concentration on a task. Quickly state the nature of what you need, and show consideration for the fact that you are interrupting valuable work or progress.

This is the final topic in Unit 2. The information on Introductions and Negotiating is available for download from our Resource page.