

5 Simple Steps

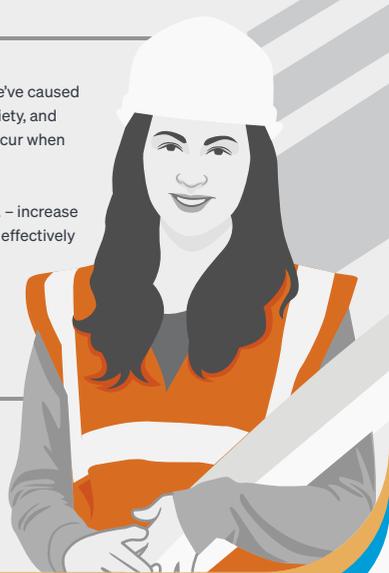
for Supervisors to Avoid Miscommunication



We've all experienced the consequences of poor or ineffective communications. We've caused them, witnessed them, and been impacted by them. A source of frustration, anxiety, and ultimately failure, miscommunications are completely avoidable because they occur when people take shortcuts as they relay information.

More than ever, the communication tools available – e.g., email, text messages, etc. – increase the likelihood of miscommunication. Every front-line supervisor can communicate effectively as long as they consider their words (and actions) deliberately and purposefully.

Effective communication can be achieved through five simple steps.



1. Use plain language

For language to work, it must be understood. As a supervisor, avoid jargon, acronyms, or terms that may not be commonly understood.

Consider the needs of new employees, those who may speak English as a second language, or valuable clients that simply don't understand common industry terms. As an example, a retractable reel used for fall protection is often called a "yo-yo."

Referring to the tool as such when planning a job can lead to confusion and the consequences of miscommunication in this instance could be disastrous. Keep it simple and use plain language.



2. Get to the point

We've all received communications that leave us wondering about the actual point being made. This usually happens when it is buried in non-essential information, or disguised to help soften the potential impact of what could be perceived as bad news.

Get to the point.

Equally as important, communicate in a manner and involving a tone that represents the message being conveyed. Don't leave employees wondering or confused.



3. Communicate in person

Whenever possible, communicate to employees in person. While electronic communications are convenient and efficient, they are not always effective.

Several studies have shown how important body language is in the communication process – not only for the sender, but also for the receiver of information. If crews or direct reports are remote, consider using Skype or a conference/telephone calls before emails.

As for text messages, use them only as a last resort.



4. Ensure understanding

Communication is the art of recreating in someone else's mind an exact replica of what's in yours. Sharing information is an important first step. Ensuring the information is understood is an equally as important follow-up step.

To ensure understanding, simply ask those with whom you are communicating to re-state what they heard you say. It's important that employees do so using their own words. If there's a breakdown in communication or understanding, this is where it will first become apparent.

Take the steps required to make sure those with whom you are communicating clearly understand the points being made.



5. Give context (the WHY)

Great leaders know and understand the power of the WHY. As a supervisor or manager, you are often required to provide guidance and direction involving projects or tasks.

This usually takes the form of explaining what needs to be done and by when. While managers may drive compliance involving expectations, leadership is about gaining commitment. To get employees on board and obtain their buy-in, they need to understand why specific requirements involving behaviors or job performance are in place. As an example, testing the atmosphere of a permit-required confined space prior to entry is a commonly understood requirement.

As a supervisor, you need to help those performing work inside the space understand why it's important they do so. Use personal experiences or stories to get points across in a manner that impacts how employees feel about the situation. Provided you can do so effectively, you'll find a much higher rate of conformance to shared expectations. Not because employees feel they must, but because they want to.

