

HOW TO BE A SUPERCOMMUNICATOR AT WORK

After reading this guide, use the cheat sheet below to make tough conversations at work feel a little easier. Whether you're giving feedback, resolving a conflict, or just trying to connect, these rules will help you listen, align, and respond thoughtfully.

STEP 1

WHAT KIND OF CONVERSATION IS HAPPENING?

For more, see *Supercommunicators* pg. 29

- » *Identify if the conversation is:*
 - » *Practical (solving problems)*
 - » *Emotional (discussing feelings)*
 - » *Social (exploring identity or roles)*
- » *Ask deep questions*
(Instead of "What do you need from me?" ask "What's most important, and how can I help?")

STEP 2

SHARE AND LEARN EVERYONE'S GOALS

For more, see *Supercommunicators* pg. 68

- » *Start by clarifying your own goal*
(“What outcome am I hoping for here?”)
- » *Ask the other person's priorities*
(“What's most important to you in this discussion?”)
- » *Notice verbal and non-verbal cues*

STEP 3

PROVE YOU ARE LISTENING

For more, see *Supercommunicators* pg. 164

- Looping for understanding can help:
1. *Ask questions.*
 2. *Repeat back, in your own words, what you heard.*
 3. *Ask if you got it right.*

STEP 4

ASK ABOUT OTHERS' FEELINGS, AND SHARE YOUR OWN

For more, see *Supercommunicators* pg. 161

- » *Acknowledge emotions*
(“It sounds like this has been frustrating.”)
- » *Ask open-ended questions:*
(“What's been the most meaningful part of this project?”)
- » *Avoid shifting focus to your own experiences too quickly*

STEP 5

EXPLORE IF SELF-IDENTITY IS IMPORTANT

For more, see *Supercommunicators* pg. 228

- » *Approach differences with curiosity*
(“How do you see your values aligning with this project?”)
- » *Ask about people's experiences, values and beliefs.*
- » *Seek similarities that help you connect and build understanding.*

Exceptional communicators can make workplaces more efficient, harmonious and successful by helping co-workers understand each other and ensuring we're all aligned. In the book *Supercommunicators* we explore that at the root of communication among co-workers is an understanding that discussions involve three distinct types of conversations: There's the practical, decision-making conversation: *What's This Really About?* There's the emotional conversation: *How Do We Feel?* And the the social conversation: *Who Are We?*

The Three Conversations



We are often moving in and out of all three conversations as a dialogue unfolds. However, if we aren't having the same kind of conversation as our coworkers, employees, clients or business partners, we're unlikely to connect with each other.

Here's how to align with these different kinds of conversations and make communication at work clear and effective.

STEP 1

PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT KIND OF CONVERSATION IS HAPPENING

In every conversation, we send subtle clues about what kind of exchange we're seeking. Through our words, our tone, and the topics we focus on, we hint at whether we're seeking a practical conversation (focused on problem-solving and decision-making), an emotional conversation (centered more on our feelings and reactions), or a social conversation (related to

identities, values, or the roles we play at work). If we want to have deeper connections in the workplace, we need to train ourselves to notice these clues. And once we begin to notice, it will become a habit.

To give a better idea, picture a performance review where an employee shares that they're struggling to keep up with deadlines:

EMPLOYEE:

"I've been working really hard to hit the timeline, but it feels like a lot. Sometimes I feel like I'm getting overwhelmed."

MANAGER:

"Have you tried breaking down your tasks into smaller steps to make them more manageable?"

From the manager's perspective, offering the employee a practical solution might seem like a helpful response. But the manager has missed a key clue in the employee's admission: The language they used was personal and feeling-focused ("*feels like a lot*"; "*I'm getting*

overwhelmed"), which indicates they are looking for reassurance and empathy before they can start to hear the solutions the manager is offering.

If the manager was listening for these kinds of clues, they might have responded with something thoughtful:

MANAGER:

“This workload is tough—and it’s totally normal to feel overwhelmed. I understand how you’re feeling, and I’ve felt it myself. Can I share a few things I’ve learned about managing those feelings – and then talk about solutions that might help you get on top of everything?”

By responding to the employee’s emotional needs first, and then asking permission to move from an emotional conversation to a practical conversation, the manager creates a deeper connection – and helps their employee be ready to listen to good advice.

Situations like this show the value of asking “**deep questions**” at the beginning of a conversation. Deep

questions invite coworkers, employees, and clients to share their experiences, beliefs, or values – which are clues about how to develop genuine connections.

Here are some deep questions we can use to promote more meaningful connections in our professional lives:

Instead of Asking	Try Asking
<i>What do you need from me?</i>	<i>How is this making you feel? What can I do to help with that?</i>
<i>How was your weekend?</i>	<i>What’s the best thing you did this weekend?</i>
<i>Got any ideas for the pitch?</i>	<i>What excited you the most about this account?</i>
<i>Is that report done?</i>	<i>What will someone carry away from your report?</i>
<i>Got any thoughts on improvement?</i>	<i>What’s one change that you think would have the biggest impact?</i>

When we shift from surface-level questions to deeper inquires, we show people we’re genuinely interested in what they have to say. Sometimes, of course, we simply want answers – and in those moments it’s okay to ask direct, fact-based questions.

But for the most important discussions, and the most important topics, deep questions turn our conversations into moments that helps everyone focus on the same goals.

STEP 2

SHARE YOUR GOALS, AND ASK WHAT OTHERS ARE SEEKING

When we start a conversation at work, we usually have some kind of goal in mind. Maybe I'm looking to get my project prioritized, while my colleague could be hoping for positive feedback. Getting clear on our own aims, and then gracefully asking others what they need, is the first step toward a productive exchange.

To start, ask yourself,

“What outcome am I hoping for here?” and

“How will I respond if they bring up a topic I've been avoiding?”

By knowing what we want out of the conversation, we're better prepared to keep things focused and purposeful.

Once we're clear on our own objectives, it's important

to understand what others hope to achieve. One of the easiest ways to find out what others need from a conversation is to ask directly:

“What's most important to you here?”

If a softer approach feels more appropriate, you might lead with something like,

“I want to make sure we're on the same track. Do you think we could chat about...?”

Sharing your own goal first can make it easier for others to be upfront about their priorities.

Here are some work-related questions that invite others to share their goals:

<i>What's the main priority for you in this meeting?</i>	<i>What kind of feedback would you find most useful right now?</i>
<i>What's your ideal timeline for finishing this project? What happens if we need it faster?</i>	<i>Are there any tools or resources that would make your work easier?</i>
<i>What do you need from your coworkers?</i>	<i>How can I make it easier for you to reach out when you need help?</i>

While these questions can help set up a smooth conversation, we also need to stay alert to both verbal and nonverbal cues during the discussion. In the workplace, it's easy to get focused on our own objectives and miss the signals that others might be sending. Paying attention to these cues can reveal a lot about how people feel and what they need, even if they haven't said it directly.

Here are some cues you may notice in a work conversation and what they might mean:

Verbal Cues	Probable Meanings
Someone keeps asking clarifying questions	They're invested in that topic
They ask a lot of "how" or "why" questions	They're confused and need more background or context
They repeat certain phrases or concerns	They're signaling that this is a priority, or something they feel anxious about.
Nonverbal Clues	Probable Meanings
They lean in and nod frequently	They're engaged and finding it interesting
They fold their arms or glance away	They may be feeling uncomfortable or defensive
They bring up other topics repeatedly	They are distracted or feel anxious about this topic, but don't know how to express it.



STEP 3

PROVE YOU ARE LISTENING

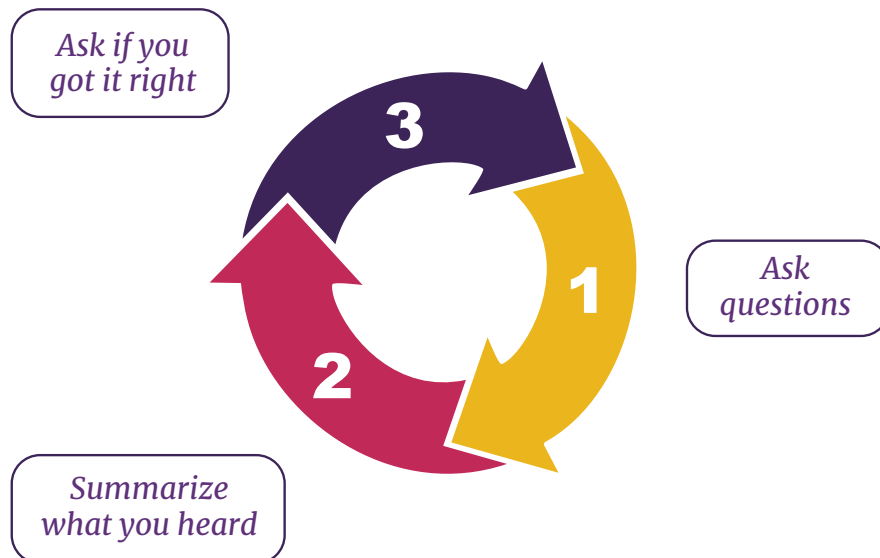
Listening is critical at work. But just as important is *showing* we're listening. Otherwise, many people have a sneaking suspicion that you're not really paying attention – rather you're just waiting for your turn to talk.

Luckily, there's a technique to prove that we're

listening, known as looping for understanding. Here's how it works:

- » *Ask questions, to make sure you understand what someone has said.*
- » *Repeat back, in your own words, what you heard.*
- » *Ask if you got it right.*

We prove we are listening by Looping for Understanding



Repeat until everyone agrees we all understand

The goal of looping isn't parroting someone's words, but rather distilling another person's thoughts in your own language, showing them that you are working hard to see their perspective, and then repeating the process until everyone is aligned.

That last step – asking if you got it right – is important,

because what you are actually doing is asking for permission to *acknowledge* that you were listening. And once I acknowledge you are listening to me, I become much more likely to listen to you in return. In other words, if we want someone to hear us, we should first prove we hear them.

ASK ABOUT OTHERS' FEELINGS, AND SHARE YOUR OWN

Emotions play a role in every conversation—and influence our discussions, whether we like it or not. Emotions shape how we interact with others, how we listen and speak, and, if obvious emotions are neglected, it can lead to serious communication problems.

When we start a discussion, acknowledging feelings—our own and other people's—creates a sense of mutual understanding and respect.

A great way to begin is by starting with open-ended questions like, *“What’s been the most meaningful part of the job for you so far?”* or *“How has this new direction, influenced your workload?”* Showing curiosity about someone’s experience tells them that you genuinely care about their work, while questions like *“Do you like your job so far?”* tend to close off the conversation, inviting only simple, one-word responses that leave little room to

explore emotions and experiences.

It’s also valuable to share your own feelings. But it’s important to stay mindful of how we respond. If a coworker shares that she’s been struggling after her aunt’s passing, when someone jumps in with, *“Oh, I totally get it—I lost my dog a decade ago,”* it feels like they’re trying to steal the spotlight and refocus attention on themselves, rather than offering real support. Instead, something like, *“I know that must have been hard. What’s the day-to-day been like for you since then?”* keeps the focus on her experience, showing genuine empathy and inviting her to share more if she wants, without unintentionally minimizing what she’s going through.

Here are a few ‘Do’s and Don’ts’ to keep in mind for creating an emotionally supportive conversation:

DO's	Don'ts
Ask open-ended questions like, <i>“What’s been the most meaningful part of this project for you?”</i>	Avoid closed questions like, <i>“Is everything going well?”</i> that limit deeper sharing.
Show genuine curiosity about someone’s experience by inviting them to share more.	Don’t immediately shift focus to your own experiences, even if you can relate.
Acknowledge emotions directly with statements like, <i>“That sounds really tough. Tell me how you feel.”</i>	Don’t unintentionally minimize their feelings by saying things like, <i>“Everyone’s feeling stressed right now.”</i>
Ask permission to offer support by saying, <i>“How can I help make this easier for you?”</i>	Avoid unsolicited advice that might make them feel dismissed or misunderstood.

EXPLORE IF SELF-IDENTITY IS IMPORTANT TO THIS DISCUSSION

Each time we engage in a conversation at work, we bring more than just our professional roles to the discussion; we bring our entire backgrounds—our experiences, values, and beliefs. These often subtle influences impact our interactions with our co-workers, and shape how we communicate with clients and customers. Consider a discussion around work-life balance: Some team members might prioritize strict boundaries—they may have families obligations to their church or social groups. Others might lean into a ‘round-the-clock’ approach, are fresh out of college and eager to make their mark.

This discussion isn’t just about schedules—it’s a chance to see what each of us values in life and work. By asking, ‘Who Are We?’ questions, we go beyond logistics and start to explore how each of our self-identities fits with those around us. And when we take time to understand identities, we’re not just avoiding friction—we’re building a team that connects more deeply and collaborates more effectively.

When you inevitably need to address a difficult conversation where social identities clash—say, navigating different approaches to problem-solving, or discussing how each person defines professionalism, or helping co-workers navigate hard conversations about

performance, politics or social issues—preparation is key. Start by reflecting on your own values and experiences. Then, ask yourself what you hope to learn or understand. When you’re ready for the big conversation, enter it with genuine curiosity, asking questions like, ‘Did your previous job influence your approach to solving problems?’ or ‘What cultural values might influence your understanding of professionalism?’

Approaching conversations with preparation and a genuine curiosity lets us find common ground—and shows us how our differing viewpoints can actually become a source of strength in our relationships at work.



SUMMARY

Conversations at work aren't always easy, but they're at the heart of what makes a team, a company or an organization come together. Recognizing whether a conversation is practical ("What's This Really About?"), emotional ("How Do We Feel?"), or social ("Who Are We?") allows each person to be understood. It gives everyone a chance to explain how they see themselves and what's important to them—something we often skip over in the rush of daily tasks. When we know which conversation we're in, it reduces misalignment and makes room for deeper, more meaningful exchanges. And when we approach each conversation with genuine curiosity in the people we work with, we go beyond office small talk. Suddenly, those conversations start to create real connections that transform how we work together and, ultimately, makes our work more fulfilling.

