

BASIC COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR MEETINGS

Meetings are a tough challenge because it's normally *very* hard for people to get together, work constructively, and agree on anything, especially in the workplace. We're all such individuals and bring so many agendas to a gathering.

People play many roles at meetings: actual vs. formal leaders, mediators, focused task drivers, idea generators, information testers, etc. For us, in order to get down to basics and give suggestions useful for the widest range, let's just divide meeting behavior into two general roles, convener/leader and participant.

- *The leader* needs to recognize the dynamics of the group and guide everyone toward each goal with awareness of the disparate elements at play. He/she needs to know how to go about getting group decisions while also participating him/herself, developing the focus of the meeting, watching the time, and coming up with the results.
- *Participants* also need to be aware of the dynamics of the group, but can sometimes have a more objective view since they're not involved in the overall conduct of the meeting. They can add a calming influence and some perspective, and can often see how two points can fit together. Although their role is to participate, they can often shape the direction of the meeting as much as, if not more than, the leader.

Listening

Why do we need lessons in listening? Because in our zeal to tell *our* ideas, to make ourselves known and make a dent in the world, we sometimes fail to consider that someone *else* has ideas, needs, feelings, too, and that we need to take the time to hear them.

This is especially true in a group situation where we are visible to each other *and* to the boss. Our competitive spirit may urge us to dismiss others' contributions or see them as a threat.

The Process of Non-Listening

It works something like this:

You start to talk. I listen to the beginning of what you're saying. Then