Building Effective Interpersonal Communication Skills: Self-Assessment Exercise

In today's team-oriented workplace, the development of good interpersonal communication skills is an important key to success.

The following self-assessment exercise is designed to help you evaluate your own interpersonal communication skills and style, and provide you with helpful tips for becoming a good communicator - and team player!

In each of the following, read items A, B, and C, then mark the one that best describes your communication style. (24 total)

1. ___A. When conversing with others, I usually do most of the talking.
   ___B. When conversing with others, I usually let the other person do most of the talking.
   ___C. When conversing with others, I try to equalize my participation in the conversation.

2. ___ A. When I first meet someone, I wait for the other person to make the introduction first.
   ___ B. When I first meet someone, I introduce myself with a smile and offer a handshake.
   ___ C. When I first meet someone, I hug the person.

3. ___ A. I usually "warm-up" new conversations with small talk.
   ___ B. I usually avoid small talk and jump into more important matters.
   ___ C. I usually avoid starting conversations.

4. ___ A. I make an effort to remember and use peoples' names.
   ___ B. I don't pay attention to names as I tend to forget them.
   ___ C. I only learn the names of important people.

5. ___ A. I frequently use courtesy words and phrases - "Please," "Thank you," "You're welcome," "I'm sorry."
   ___ B. I occasionally use these courtesy words and phrases.
   ___ C. I never use these courtesy words and phrases.

6. ___ A. I tend to be serious and don't smile often while conversing.
   ___ B. I smile all the time while conversing.
   ___ C. I smile at appropriate times while conversing.

7. ___ A. I make eye contact while conversing.
   ___ B. I sometimes make eye contact while conversing.
   ___ C. I never make eye contact while conversing.

8. ___ A. While conversing, I hold my head still at all times.
   ___ B. While conversing, I nod my head at appropriate times.
   ___ C. While conversing, I nod my head constantly.

9. ___ A. While conversing, I stand one-foot away from the person.
   ___ B. While conversing, I stand two- to three-feet away from the person.
   ___ C. While conversing, I stand five- to six-feet away from the person.

10. ___ A. I often stand while talking to a person who is sitting.
    ___ B. I often sit while talking to a person who is sitting.
    ___ C. I often lean down while talking to a person who is sitting.

11. ___A. To end a conversation, I often just leave.
    ___B. To end a conversation, I begin to look impatient hoping the person will get the hint.
    ___C. To end a conversation, I wrap up with a closing statement.

12. ___A. If a co-worker has put on weight, I say nothing about it.
    ___B. If a co-worker has put on weight, I tell the person that he or she has changed in appearance.
    ___C. If a co-worker has put on weight, I honestly tell the person that he or she looks fat.

13. ___ A. When I'm listening to the speaker, I often cross my arms over my chest.
    ___ B. When I'm listening to the speaker, I often lean back and turn my body away from the speaker.
    ___ C. When I'm listening to the speaker, I often lean slightly forward and face my body toward the speaker.

14. ___ A. When I cross my leg, I cross my leg facing the speaker.
    ___ B. When I cross my leg, I cross my leg away from the speaker.
    ___ C. When I cross my leg, I bob my foot.

15. ___ A. While listening, I tend to be distracted by things going on around me.
___ B. While listening, I listen for meaning and ask questions.
___ C. While listening, I watch the person speak, but I don't "hear" a word.

16. ___ A. When someone talks about an unfortunate or sad experience, I don't comment about it.
___ B. When someone talks about an unfortunate or sad experience, I try to change the subject.
___ C. When someone talks about an unfortunate or sad experience, I try to relate to the person's feelings and show sensitivity to his or her misfortune.

17. ___ A. When I discuss a topic, I tend to talk about and focus on positive (good) aspects.
___ B. When I discuss a topic, I tend to talk about and focus on the negative (bad) aspects.
___ C. When I discuss a topic, I tend to complain.

18. ___ A. When I have a negative opinion or comment, I just say it.
___ B. When I have a negative opinion or comment, I lead in with a positive comment first.
___ C. When I have a negative opinion or comment, I say nothing.

19. ___ A. When I receive unfavorable feedback, I note where I need to improve.
___ B. When I receive unfavorable feedback, I get angry and defensive.
___ C. When I receive unfavorable feedback, I deny the problem, make excuses, or plead ignorance.

20. ___ A. When I give a person negative feedback, I focus on the person's observable work or behavior and offer suggestions.
___ B. When I give a person negative feedback, I focus on what I don't like about the person.
___ C. When I give a person negative feedback, I simply tell the person what to do right.

21. ___ A. When I give a person negative feedback, I do it around others so everyone can hear.
___ B. When I give a person negative feedback, I do it in front of the supervisor.
___ C. When I give a person negative feedback, I talk with the person alone in a private place.

22. ___ A. When I disagree with a person, I listen first; ask questions for clarification, then disagree non-judgmentally.
  ___ B. When I disagree with a person, I quickly point out the person is wrong and why.
  ___ C. When I disagree with a person, I say little or nothing.

23. ___ A. When I'm in a group, I tend to frown a lot.
  ___ B. When I'm in a group, I tend to smile and use humor at appropriate times.
  ___ C. When I'm in a group I tend to be serious.

This last item has four choices (A, B, C or D). Which one best describes you? **Check each of the statements that fit you bes**t and then see where the majority of your traits lie. You may have traits from each "type," but which one captures the majority?

24.   ___ A. I'm a "hands-on" person. I tend to:

  ☐ prefer hands-on experiences and activities;
  ☐ focus on tasks to be done;
  ☐ refrain from discussions;
  ☐ think in a logical and organized way;
  ☐ do things in an orderly way;
  ☐ have difficulty adjusting to change.

  ___ B. I'm a "thinker." I tend to:

  ☐ enjoy listening to a logical presentation of ideas;
  ☐ enjoy analyzing problems and finding systematic ways to solve problems;
  ☐ enjoy creating models based on theory and information;
  ☐ like structure and organization;
  ☐ act slowly in making decisions;
  ☐ show more interest in ideas than people.

  ___ C. I'm an "explorer." I tend to:

  ☐ try things by trial and error;
  ☐ explore practical uses for ideas and theories;
  ☐ make decisions that provide quick solutions;
  ☐ decide quickly;
  ☐ take risks;
  ☐ enjoy change;
  ☐ rely more on people for information.

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   ___ D. I'm a "free thinker." I tend to:

- ☐ base views and opinions on feelings;
- ☐ enjoy tossing around ideas (brainstorming);
- ☐ approach and view problems and experiences from different perspectives;
- ☐ rely on intuition, not logic, for making decisions;
- ☐ dislike structure.

Communication Skills Self-Assessment Exercise Answer Guide

1. <u>Best answer</u>: c. Conversations should be a balanced two-way flow of dialogue.

2. <u>Best answer</u>: b. It's good to initiate the introduction and introduce yourself
with a handshake and smile. If shaking hands is difficult, a quick head nod is a good substitute. Initiating the introduction with a smile and handshake (or head nod) helps build rapport.

3. <u>Best answer</u>: a. It's good to initiate conversations with small talk. Topics to warm-up the conversation might include a chat about the weather, news of interest, or impressions about the current activity (if you're at a meeting, staff party, or other gathering, for example).

Examples of conversation starters might be:
"It's sure warm today, isn't it?"

"Did you hear about the big accident on the freeway? Traffic's backed-up for miles."

"What did you think about the Blazers game last night?" "This is a nice party, isn't it?"

"Could I get you something to drink?"

4. <u>Best answer</u>: a. It's good to call people by name whenever possible. It makes a good, lasting impression, and it makes the other person feel important and special. To help remember names, try these techniques:

Repeat: After the person tells you his or her name, immediately use it several times in the conversation.
"It's nice to meet you, Bob."
"I agree with you, Bob."
"That was a great joke, Bob!"

Associate: Associate the person's name to something unique and special. You might:
Associate the person's name with a unique feature about the person. For example:

"Gilda has beautiful green eyes."
Think - "GG" - Green Gilda

"Jack tells funny jokes."
Think - "JJ" - Joking Jack

Associate the name with a **visual picture**. For example:

"Sandy" - visualize a sandy beach.

"Glenn" - visualize John Glenn launching into space.

Associate the name with a **personal connection**.
For example:
"Brian" - My uncle's name is Brian.

"Lucy" - I had a turtle named Lucy.

Jot: Jot the person's name down with an identifying description that will help jog your memory later.
For example:
"Chuck" - tall; glasses; works in Accounting; has twin sister; runs marathons; new to Montana.

5. Best answer: a. Regular use of these courtesy words and phrases is important to show politeness and build rapport.

6. Best answer: c. Smiling when greeting people and at appropriate times greatly helps build rapport.

7. Best answer: a. Making eye contact is important for building rapport. It gives the impression you're interested and engaged in the conversation, and you have good self-confidence.

Eye contact should include frequent breaks to avoid staring (this can make the other person uncomfortable). Break eye contact frequently - glance down to the side, then quickly make eye contact again. Glancing down to the side is important. If you instead glance to the side (as if looking out the window, for example) or look up, it gives the person the impression you're distracted and not paying attention to what's being said. This quickly breaks down rapport.

8. Best answer: b. Occasionally nodding your head to indicate you agree or understand helps build rapport. Again, it shows you are interested and engaged in the conversation.

9. <u>Best answer</u>: b. Your arm's length is the appropriate distance (between two- to three-feet). Standing closer than arm-length makes the other person feel uncomfortable (or feel threatened). Standing a further distance away breaks down rapport.

10. <u>Best answer</u>: b. Communicating at eye level helps build rapport. So, if the person is sitting and a chair is available, take a seat! There's one exception - If you walk into your supervisor's office or co-worker's office, it's best to ask the supervisor or co-worker if you can sit down first. Even better, wait for an invitation to sit. The person may not have time to talk at that moment.

11. <u>Best answer</u>: c. It's best to bring the conversation to an end by making a polite closing comment or gesture. Good closing (wrap-up) comments might be:

> "I've enjoyed talking with you."
> "Let me give you my business card."
> "Well, I need to go speak with...."
> "Do you know a person I can contact?"

12. <u>Best answer</u>: a. It's best to say nothing. Never say anything that might hurt or offend the person. It's called being <u>tactful</u>. It's always best to give compliments only, and only say things that will make the person feel good.

> "I like your dress." Or "That's a nice shirt."

13. <u>Best answer</u>: c. Leaning slightly forward and facing the speaker shows you're interested, and it helps build rapport. Sitting with your arms crossed over your chest gives the message you are defensive. Leaning back with your body or turning your body away from the speaker gives the message that you are bored, disinterested, or feel in charge. Such body language breaks down rapport.

14. <u>Best answer</u>: a. Crossing your leg toward the speaker shows you're interested,

and it builds rapport. Crossing your leg away from the speaker gives the message that you are defensive, disinterested, or feel in charge. In essence, you are putting up a subtle barrier. And if you bob or swing your foot, you're sending the message that you're anxious or nervous!

15. <u>Best answer</u>: b. If you're a good listener, you keep mentally busy searching for for meaning in the message, and you ask questions. This mental "search for meaning" helps keep you focused, attentive, and engaged. If you get easily distracted, try taking notes if the setting is appropriate. Note-taking helps draw and focus your attention as you must mentally "search for meaning" and listen for information in order to take notes. This might be helpful in meetings, for example.

If you watch someone speak but you don't "hear" a word, gauge if you are bored, tired, might have a gap between your speaking and listening rates, or are experiencing "emotional deafness." We all experience emotional deafness on occasion, especially when we're feeling overwhelmed, upset, or nervous. You hear people ask - "I'm sorry, what did you say?" or make the comment - "I have a lot on my mind right now. Could you repeat what you said?" If it's a frequent problem, gauge the source and seek help if needed.

16. <u>Best answer</u>: c. Showing empathy (sensitivity) to another person's feelings helps build rapport. It's called "reaching out to people." Empathy can be shown by making comments, such as:

> "That must have been a scary (or upsetting) experience for you." "I felt the same way when that happened to me."
>
> "I know (understand) how you feel." "I can imagine how you feel."
>
> "I would feel that way too in your situation."

17. <u>Best answer</u>: a. Focusing on the positive (good) aspects draws people's attention in a favorable way, and people enjoy the conversation more. People are generally more attracted to a person who has a "positive outlook on life." And when it comes to work evaluations, positive-minded people generally do better.

Consider the following examples:

Positive:	"The plan has some good ideas."
Negative:	"The plan has some serious problems."
Complaint:	"No one ever listens to my ideas."

Positive:	"These changes might have some benefits."
Negative:	"These changes would be awful."
Complaint:	"I'm always having to relearn and re-do everything around here."

18. <u>Best answer</u>: b. It's best to say something positive first, then express a negative opinion or comment in a tactful way. Consider these examples:

Positive lead:
"I like many aspects of your idea *(positive lead)*, but it may not work well for this department." *(tactfully stated)*

> Interpretation: The idea won't work.

Positive lead:
"You did a nice job setting the bread plates and glasses (positive lead), but the forks need to be placed to the left." (tactfully stated)

> Interpretation: The forks are in the wrong place.

Positive lead (with empathy):

"I know you worked a long time on this *(positive lead),* but it would look better retyped." *(tactfully stated)*

> Interpretation: It needs to be retyped.

19. <u>Best answer</u>: a. When you receive feedback, it's important to know what you do well, but it's equally important to know where improvements can be made to increase your chances for success. Few people do everything well, and you've undoubtedly heard the saying - "No one is perfect." Simply make note of "weak" areas (we all have them!) and make changes needed. Receiving honest feedback is truly "a gift." It usually means someone cares and wishes to see you succeed.

20. <u>Best answer</u>: a. When you give negative feedback, you should focus on and communicate your observations of the person's work or behavior, not focus on nor judge the person. Focus on performance, not personality (or personal traits). After sharing your observation about the person's work or behavior, offer a suggestion in a tactful way. Consider these examples:

> **Example 1:**
> "The forms you completed were thoroughly done *(positive lead),* but I notice *(observation)* there are a few spelling errors *(work feedback).* Perhaps they can be corrected with correction fluid *(suggestion)."*
>
> *Important*: Notice it says - "...there are a few spelling errors" instead of - "<u>you</u> made a few spelling errors." Leave out "you" whenever possible.

> **Example 2:**
> "Your presentation covered the main points very well *(positive lead),* but I noticed *(observation)* contact information was left out *(work feedback).* I wonder if it might be good to include a contact name and phone number *(suggestion).*"
>
> Notice it says - "...contact information was left out" instead of - "<u>you</u> left out contact information." It avoids using "you."

> **Example 3:**
>
> "I like your ideas *(positive lead),* but it appears *(observation)* the delivery (communication style or behavior) weakens them. Perhaps they could be written down and handed out to everyone to review *(suggestion).*
>
> Notice it says - "...the delivery weakens them" instead of - "you weaken them." It avoids using "you."

21. <u>Best answer</u>: c. It's always best to meet the person privately and away from other people so others can't hear.

22. <u>Best answer</u>: a. It's fine to disagree, but it's important to disagree agreeably. This means you should:

> 1) show respect for the other person's ideas,
> 2) listen attentively until the person is done,
> 3) ask questions if needed,
> 4) disagree non-judgmentally, and, if possible,
> 5) offer an alternative solution. Consider these examples:

"I respect your view, John, *(shows respect)* but I think the problem is due to a lack of time *(point of disagreement).* One way to solve the problem might be to computerize the reports *(offered solution).*"

"I hear what you're saying *(shows respect),* but it seems the staff would do better, not worse, with flextime schedules *(point of disagreement).* I would suggest we try it for six months *(offered solution)."*

23. <u>Best answer</u>: b. At appropriate times, it's always good to smile. And when used at appropriate times and in appropriate ways, humor is beneficial for group dynamics. Humor helps "break the ice" when people first meet. Humor helps relieve stress and tension. A humorous observation and comment helps lower the heat when a heated discussion gets too "hot." And most importantly, humor helps build team cohesiveness.

If you observe people at a gathering, you'll notice people naturally gravitate toward people considered "approachable." Approachable people are the ones who smile; they are the ones who add humor and lightness to conversations; and they are the ones who make fun of themselves in a self-deprecating and humorous way. In any group setting, smiles attract, and humor bonds people together. Do you know a good joke?

24. <u>Best answer</u>: The one that fits you! The four choices above describe and identify four communication (and *learning*) styles, and no <u>one</u> style is better than the other. This part of the exercise merely serves to illustrate how people can (and do) think, act, learn, and communicate differently. Each person in a group may have a different style.

How well you are able to recognize, respect, and adjust to other people's way of communicating and "doing things" is a key to success when working with a supervisor, group of people, or class instructor.

For example, if you are a "free thinker" - you like to brainstorm ideas and do what "feels right" - you might find it frustrating working with (or learning from) a "thinker" - a person who focuses on and approaches tasks and ideas based on logic, reasoning, and organized structure. The "thinker" would be equally frustrated working with a person or group that loosely brainstorms ideas all afternoon.

How successfully "opposites" work together largely depends on how willing and well each person is able to adjust to the other's style. Flexibility and compromise are key.

If you find yourself working with a supervisor, co-worker, team player, or instructor who has a style that differs from your own, recognize and respect the other person's individual style, and learn to accommodate the person's style as much as possible.

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Consider these "how-to" tips:

How to accommodate a "hands-on" style:

- ☐ arrive promptly;
- ☐ pay very close attention to deadlines;
- ☐ don't procrastinate or made excuses;
- ☐ be organized;
- ☐ accept structure;
- ☐ try to do things in an exact and precise way;
- ☐ make brief and "to-the-point" comments (don't ramble);
- ☐ minimize discussion - get to the task;
- ☐ ask questions in a brief, concise way;
- ☐ use concrete terms and explanations (not abstract);
- ☐ do things in sequential and orderly steps;
- ☐ discuss and show practical applications;
- ☐ demonstrate to illustrate an idea or point;
- ☐ allow for "hands-on" project-type tasks.

How to accommodate a "thinker" style:

- ☐ arrive promptly;
- ☐ pay very close attention to deadlines;
- ☐ don't procrastinate or make excuses;
- ☐ be organized;
- ☐ use outlines, charts, graphs, and spatial mapping to show information and the relationship of ideas;
- ☐ provide data;
- ☐ provide documentation;
- ☐ be open to the use of abstract explanations and terms;
- ☐ support information with facts (proof);
- ☐ support views and opinions with logic and evidence;
- ☐ focus on main ideas, related details, and logical conclusions;
- ☐ be open to topics that allow for debate;
- ☐ be patient with quick and sudden moves from idea to idea;
- ☐ allow for research-type tasks.

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How to accommodate an "explorer" style:

- be open to new ideas;
- be open to change;
- allow room for creative innovation;
- be open-minded to opinions and views;
- be attentive;
- show interest;
- relate ideas to the real world (use real world examples);
- focus on processes and applications rather than facts;
- be willing to take a risk or investigate;
- be be patient with disorganization;
- share humor and laugh at jokes;
- be patient when jumps from one idea to another;
- be willing to discuss ideas;
- allow for innovative- and creative-type tasks.

How to accommodate a "free thinker" style:

- smile and be friendly;
- be willing to chat and visit;
- share personal experiences;
- participate in discussions and activities;
- lean forward - be attentive and show interest;
- use gestures and positive body language;
- use humor;
- be sincere;
- use images, pictures, and color;
- apply personal meaning to ideas;
- show how ideas and details apply to life;
- show interest and concern for people;
- be patient if describes extensively;
- avoid questioning or challenging the person's insight or logic;
- be patient with interruptions;
- be open to use of metaphoric language and expression;
- don't force structure - allow room for flexibility;
- allow for interactive-type tasks.