Office Communication Toolkit

10 tips for managers on active listening skills, motivating employees, workplace productivity, employee retention strategies and change management techniques

Office Communication Toolkit

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Special report from BusinessManagementDaily.com

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1. The best managers are the best listeners: 4 steps

Managers spend a good part of their workday listening to other people. But bear in mind, there's a big difference between "passive" and "active" listening.

In many cases, managers are too busy thinking about their response rather than listening to the employee's full statement. In a business setting, this lack of attention can result in costly mistakes, wasted time, poor service and management failure.

By listening fully and in a way that shows understanding and respect for the speaker, you develop a rapport and build trust. That's the true foundation from which you can manage and influence others.

Effective listeners use a four-step process to ensure understanding:

1. Listen to the total message

If you hear only bits of what is said, you may draw the wrong conclusions.

So, before you begin to frame your response, listen to everything the person has to say and give 100% of your attention. Find the main thought the person is trying to share and consider it from his or her perspective—not yours.

Prove that you care by suspending all other activities. Don't flip through papers or keep checking your watch.

2. Prove your understanding by using nonverbal signals

Let the person know that you're paying attention through your nonverbal cues. Doing so sets a comfortable level for the conversation and encourages the other person to keep talking. It also demonstrates that you're interested in the topic and paying attention.

Some positive nonverbal signals:

- Moving from behind the desk
- Maintaining eye contact
- Leaning forward slightly
- Raising your eyebrows when the speaker makes a significant point
- Nodding to indicate agreement

3. Use open-ended probes

These are questions that allow the other person to respond at length, rather than with just a "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions begin with words like "why," "how," "explain" and "describe."

By asking these types of questions, you'll encourage the other person to share his or her opinions and feelings and elicit additional information.

Be aware of how many open-ended questions you ask. Then consciously try to increase the number.

You'll find that the quality of your communication improves dramatically.

4. Paraphrase what you hear

To say "I understand" isn't enough. People typically need some sort of evidence of your understanding.

In addition to nonverbal cues and questions, prove your understanding by briefly restating the information you've just heard or by asking a question that proves you know the main idea.

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5 bad habits to guard against

To be an effective listener, you must pay keen attention to the speaker. Seems like common sense, but too often we don't walk the talk. As managers, it's important to model this behavior for employees and teach by example.

To check your own effectiveness, take the following listening quiz to make sure you're not guilty of these bad habits:

1. Are you constantly trying to jump in, finishing people's sentences when they pause too long?

2. Do you step on people's sentences by talking before they've finished speaking?

3. Do you fail to make eye contact with people who talk to you, or give them verbal cues that you're listening (e.g., head nod)?

4. Do you often say "Yeah" or "Uh-huh" while others speak?

5. Do you often make the same point someone else just made, or ask a question that's just been answered?

You don't do this to prove that you were *listening* to the person, but to prove that you *understand* them. There's a big difference.

2. Setting deadlines for employees: 4 do's and don'ts

Without deadlines, employees flounder. They can't be aware of the urgency or priorities of a project unless their supervisors tell them.

Following are four tips to help supervisors set realistic deadlines for their employees:

1. Do be specific

Name the target day and time. And mean what you say. If you ask for completion "next week," don't complain on Friday that you really needed it on Wednesday.

If you say, "By the end of the month," be sure that 5 p.m. on the afternoon of the 31st is acceptable.

By contrast, if you wanted the project completed by 9 a.m. on the 31st so you could present it to your boss that afternoon, say so. Otherwise, you won't meet your boss's deadline.

2. Do clarify priorities

Let people know if this assignment takes precedence over any other projects they're working on now. Avoid the old, favorite deadline "ASAP," which usually translates in an employee's mind as "whenever it gets done."

What does ASAP mean? Drop everything and work overtime, or first finish up what you're already doing?

Even worse: Never tell employees to work on something "when you get a chance." If you do, don't be surprised if it never happens.

3. Don't set false deadlines

Setting a deadline earlier than necessary (because you don't trust your employees to meet the real deadline) creates more problems than it solves.

Your staff will soon learn that's how you operate and will assume there's always air in the schedule. As a result, they'll always miss that first deadline, just as you knew they would.

Nor should you claim that a project is a rush job that just came up when, in fact, you've sat on it for a few days. People have a way of finding out the truth.

Also, being dishonest about deadlines can hurt you later when a project truly is a rush job. Your staff may not believe you and won't make the extra effort to get it done on time.

One caveat: If you have a new employee, you may want to allow extra time in the schedule for revisions. Let the employee know that you're building review time into the schedule.

4. Do establish an update schedule

The best-laid plans can go astray, and so can deadlines. You'll minimize the chance of this occurring by setting up a progress report schedule when you assign the project. This is especially important for long-term projects.

When you make the assignment, discuss how you and the employee will communicate about his or her progress. Do you want the person to stop by your office once a week and give you a quick status report? Send you a daily email? Update the status at the monthly staff meeting?

The schedule should be reasonable and convenient for both of you. It should make sense in terms of the length and complexity of the job, as well as the employee's competence and experience. Whatever you decide, now's the time to set the schedule.

3. 6 ways to help employees do their best each day

A manager's job is 100 times easier and more rewarding when his or her employees are performing like a well-oiled machine. But when that machine runs slowly or breaks down entirely, a manager's job becomes exponentially harder.

Here are six tips for keeping employees on task and working together toward the common goal, according to a report by OnPoint Consulting:

1. Clarify, clarify, clarify

It's hard to get things done when people don't understand their roles, their responsibilities or exactly what's expected of them.

Too often, supervisors assume their employees understand what needs to be done. Or, they fear they'll insult an employee's intelligence by stating what seems obvious to them.

Don't underestimate the importance of making certain that everyone is on the same page. Clearly communicating roles and duties is never a wasted effort.

2. Establish clear expectations

Goals are an important part of clarifying. They help employees focus on what's important and provide incentives to find more efficient ways to get work done.

The only way to improve the way you're doing things is to set clear, measurable goals and constantly monitor your success in those areas.

3. Don't micromanage your entrepreneurial-minded employees. But *do* monitor them

Entrepreneurial-minded employees—those who take initiative and do an effective job without much direction from managers—are often great employees.

But just because you feel like you can let them loose with a project doesn't mean they don't need management. In fact, when you empower employees in this way, monitoring becomes even more important. You may be concerned they'll think you're micromanaging them. Don't be. When done right, monitoring doesn't have to feel like micromanaging. Use these check-ins as an opportunity to recognize effective behavior and get their feedback.

4. Encourage employees to share bad news with you

How? Don't shoot the messenger!

If there's a problem, mistake or delay, employees may be hesitant to inform you. They may fear your reaction or think they'll look incompetent. That's why it's important to react correctly to bad news. Strive to be constructive, not punishing. Express appreciation for the accurate information, no matter how negative it may be. Respond quickly to the problem with specific actions.

5. Solve problems quickly, but not *too* quickly

Don't waste time when dealing with threats or problems. But be aware that jumping to solutions too quickly can end up causing more headaches.

Smart managers know when additional information or analysis is essential—and when it will only delay action without adding value. Before taking action, managers should always use a systematic, logical analysis to identify the cause of a problem.

6. Encourage informal and spontaneous interaction

Your employees' informal relationships are key to getting things done. The ability to connect with a colleague "in the moment" when you have a problem or new information is vital for effective execution.

But in today's high-tech world, it can be difficult to make these connections. Don't let co-workers in departments go days just emailing back and forth. Facilitate informal gatherings to brainstorm and hash out problems face to face.

4. Listen for subtle whispers of employee turnover

Most good employees don't stand up one day and quit out of the blue. They send off subtle hints that, if you're listening, you can act on before the good employee walks out the door. That's why it's important to listen to statements like these that can act as an "advance warning system" for employee turnover:

- **"This job isn't what I thought it would be."** Rather than exploring what the employee was originally told or trying to defend miscommunication, focus on the present. Ask, "How do you want your job to be?"
- **"I'm at a plateau. I can't grow here."** Consider that a plea for job stimulation. Provide the employee with new responsibilities, cross-training opportunities or exposure to influential mentors.
- **"I don't get any feedback."** Most employees crave regular input from their supervisors. Don't leave them in the dark. Plan regular sessions to discuss ongoing projects and performance.
- **"This place has too much politics."** While you may not be able to eliminate all dissension and politics in the organization, you can level with the employee. If someone makes this complaint, address rumors head-on, and don't play favorites.

Plug holes in morale with three questions

To discover potentially serious threats to morale, periodically ask employees the following three questions. Then, use their answers to assess whether they're disgruntled or dedicated.

1. "If you knew what you know now, would you have taken this job? Why or why not?"
2. "In an ideal world, how would your job change over the next year?"
3. "What is your favorite part of the job?"

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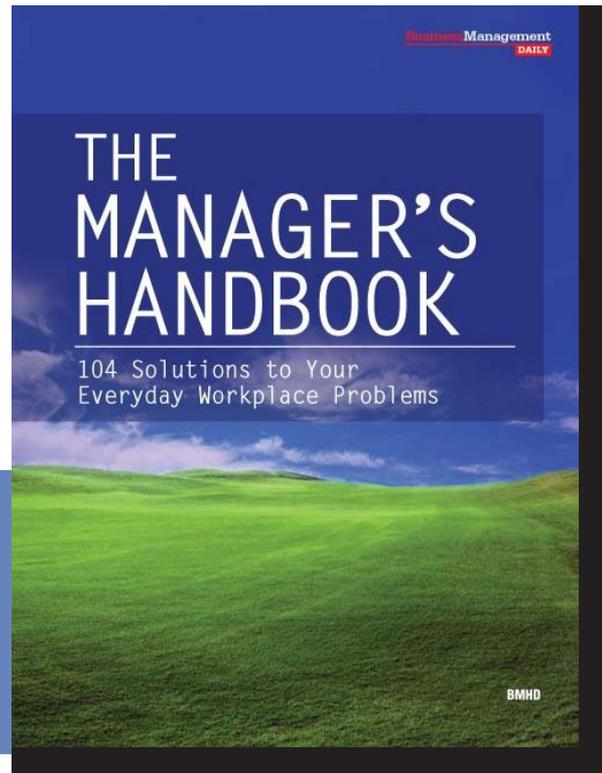
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- **Coaching & Motivating**—a key to ensuring MVPs keep playing on your team

- **Discipline & Termination**—how to be fair but firm, and stay out of court

- **Employee Performance**—how to get your people to meet your expectations (or exceed them)

- **Hiring & Interviewing**—everything from how to spot liars to measuring the results of your decisions

- **Leading Teams**—better brainstorming, avoiding bossy know-it-all remarks, knowing when to step back and let self-managing teams thrive, and much more

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You'll consult this handbook weekly, perhaps even daily. Whenever a problem crops up, your handbook will be at your fingertips. And as you become a better problem-solver—and a better manager overall—the higher-ups in your organization won't help but notice. **Get your copy today!**

5. 7 common employee gripes (and how to silence them)

A study says that 40% of managers in the United States are considered "bad bosses" by their employees. Yet most managers assume that their relationships with their employees are running smoothly.

Obviously, some of those bosses are wrong … and that can create major problems for a business. A Gallup Poll says organizations are 50% less productive—and 44% less profitable—when serious boss-employee conflicts exist.

According to the book *30 Reasons Employees Hate Their Managers* some common employee complaints about management, plus ways managers can silence them, include:

1. **"My boss doesn't respect me."**

   - Get to know your employees as people.
   - Treat them as adults and respect their privacy.
   - Recognize that employees have lives outside work and try to accommodate those needs.

2. **"Nobody appreciates my hard work."**

   - Provide regular feedback and recognition.
   - Mix an equal number of "thank-you's" and "good job" with your critiques. Ask employees for their ideas, and then use them.
   - Thank and reward employees while they're in the act of performing well; don't wait for their next review.

3. **"There are different rules for different people."**

   - Focus on being fair and consistent with the workload, pay, perks and appreciation.
   - Be aware of the legal risks of making work decisions based on race, age, gender, religion or disability status.

4. **"My performance reviews are useless."**

   - Provide continuous feedback. Nothing in the review should come as a surprise.
   - Involve employees in setting goals, and adapt a development mindset.

- Focus on specific employee behaviors (and cite documented examples). Don't criticize the person's character traits.
- Conduct reviews on time.

5. **"My boss micromanages my work."**

- Realize that employees are not happy when they can't make decisions. Delegate when possible.
- Allow employees to have more say in how they do their work.

6. **"We have too many meetings."**

- Institute a time limit on meetings.
- Use a meeting facilitator.

7. **"I hate coming to work."**

- Ask employees what specifically would improve their outlook. Try to at least meet them halfway.
- Consider how you can enrich jobs (or juggle tasks among employees) to make them more motivated.

What makes a good boss?

Qualities that U.S. workers consider necessary for being a good boss (in order of importance), according to a Yahoo! survey:

1. Communication/listening skills
2. Effective leadership skills
3. Trust in their employees to do their jobs well
4. Flexibility and understanding
5. Intelligence
6. Teamwork skills
7. Even temperament

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6. 8 little things managers can do to retain the best

When good employees leave for greener pastures, it makes a manager's job much more difficult. Managers can prevent this syndrome by doing what they can to make *their own* pasture the greenest.

While compensation helps, it's not always cash that makes pastures greener. When salaries are equal with the marketplace, other factors take priority.

Here are eight easy-to-plant "seeds" that help keep employees growing and content, according to a KEYGroup report:

1. Keep them engaged. Bored employees are neither happy nor productive. To keep your employees engaged and satisfied, present them with challenging assignments and opportunities to grow and develop. Consider ways to provide opportunities for employees to improve on their skills or learn new skills they can use in their jobs.

2. Give praise where praise is due. If someone does a great job, let the person know. It's that simple. And then let his or her co-workers know. Then let the customers know! Recognizing a job well done isn't an expensive proposition, but it will mean the world to your employee.

3. Be aware of employees' changing needs. As your employees progress in life, their needs change. After having a child, an employee may want to travel less. As your baby boomer employees get older, so do their parents. They may need to take time off to care for the health needs of their mom or dad.

By recognizing these changing needs, you show sensitivity to what's going on in their lives. This builds loyalty and helps bring stability to their personal lives, which means they can focus better at work.

4. Realize that great employees thrive under great leaders. Employees won't leave for greener pastures unless you drive them. The buck starts and stops with their leaders.

Employees of great leaders will go to the ends of the earth to do a good job for them. The flip side is that employees with poor leadership will simply go.

5. Conduct regular "stay" interviews. Rather than exit interviews, use regular "stay" interviews to provide an opportunity to compliment high performers on their work and inspire them to do more.

Use these interviews to gauge how well you are meeting employees' needs. Seek out their suggestions on what you and the company can do to improve.

6. Create an environment where people can do their best work. By allowing employees to develop and implement their own ideas, you'll keep them passionate about their work.

Make sure they have the right tools and equipment they need. Nothing frustrates employees more than not having everything they need to get their jobs done.

7. Create an environment of trust. Employees are happier and work harder when they trust their leaders. They decide which leaders they can trust based on how their fellow employees, company vendors and customers are treated.

As a leader, it's important to ask yourself: Do I treat people at work with respect? Do I behave ethically and hold others accountable for their actions?

When an employee sees his or her manager treating someone poorly—whether it's a vendor or a fellow employee—the employee's level of trust in the whole company diminishes and he or she cares less about doing a good job.

In addition, remember that trust is a two-way street. Your employees need to feel that you trust them as well.

8. Rid your pasture of weeds. The weeds are those poor performers and negative employees who stifle the good attitudes and high performance of their co-workers. If you're not pulling out your weeds, they'll choke out your best performers. Obtain consistent feedback and keep good documentation so you can sort out employees.

The bottom line: Striving to keep employees happy and engaged is not just a "nice" thing to do. It's the only way to create a successful business.

And it's not just a matter of trying to retain people to avoid the high cost of recruitment. Engaged employees are creative, productive, motivated and brimming with good ideas. Not only will they stay, but they'll be fully committed to their jobs, to you and to the company's success.

Top 10 aspects of employee satisfaction

1. Compensation
2. Benefits
3. Job security
4. Work/life flexibility
5. Communication with management
6. Feeling safe at work
7. Recognition from management
8. Relationship with supervisor
9. Autonomy, independence
10. Opportunities to use skills

Source: Society for Human Resource Management

How satisfied are U.S. employees with their current jobs?

Very satisfied	38%
Somewhat satisfied	41%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	9%
Somewhat dissatisfied	8%
Very dissatisfied	4%

Source: SHRM
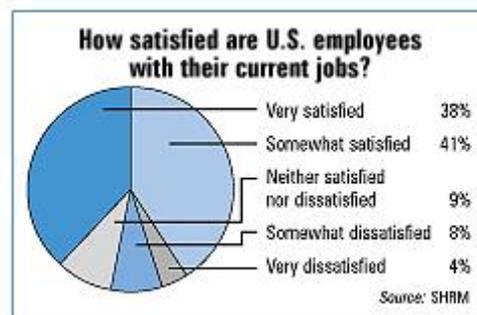
7. Confronting poor performers: 6 tips for managers

No manager enjoys having "the talk" with employees. But ignoring an employee's poor performance won't make the problem go away; it will only make things worse.

If you're apt to take the head-in-the-sand approach to employees' job failings, you're not alone: Only 31% of U.S. workers agree with the statement "My manager confronts poor performance," according to a KEYGroup survey.

And companies that tolerate poor performance will drive away top performers who are unhappy working in such an environment.

The solution: Approach workers about their performance problems in a fair, problem-solving manner. When you confront such people in a tactful way, you'll find that one of two things happens: They improve or they move. According to the KEYGroup, here are the six rules of engagement:

1. Be specific

If an employee has been consistently late, specify the number of times or amount of time. Avoid exaggerations, such as *"You are totally unreliable."* Instead, say, *"This is the third time in one week that you have been at least 10 minutes late."*

If this issue has been a problem in the past, remind the employee when you have pointed out the offense previously. Say, *"I indicated to you last Tuesday that coming in late is not acceptable."*

2. Focus on business reasons

Always refocus the employee on the stated business reason for your comments. Example: *"It's important for you to be here at the designated time since customers rely on our immediate responsiveness when they have questions about their order."*

If you need to correct something like inappropriate casual dress, reiterate the company guidelines. Don't comment on the employee's personal taste.

Straying into areas that have nothing to do with workplace performance will result in a loss of credibility with that person. Stay focused on the employee's job performance and how it affects the company.

> ### *Giving employee feedback: It's as easy as A, B, C*
>
> **Accurate.** Offer objective, concrete descriptions of the problem, not vague statements. Provide specific examples and dates, backed by documentation. Avoid words like "always" and "never"; they're exaggerations and don't usually reflect realistic frequency.
>
> **Business-oriented.** Focus on the business reason for the corrective comments. Stay away from personality critiques. Be able to point to written employee goals and company guidelines that aren't being met.
>
> **Consistent.** Provide regular feedback throughout the year; don't dump it all on the employee at performance review time. Include what was done, the impact and how it will be eliminated (negative) or repeated (positive) in the future.

3. Give timely feedback

A common management mistake is to bombard employees with feedback at their appraisal, but remain mostly quiet during the rest of the year. The appraisal should be a *review* of the discussions held during the year. Nothing mentioned at that time should come as a surprise to the employee.

That's why it's vital to provide all employees with both positive and negative feedback on a consistent basis.

Poor performers require *more* feedback, not less. Make them aware of what they did wrong immediately.

One caveat: Don't try to give corrective feedback when the person is upset or emotional. Wait until the employee has calmed down.

4. Consider employee's personality

Everyone handles feedback differently. Some people want it straight while others are more sensitive. With an employee who wants straightforward feedback, you can get away with saying, *"You gave the customer the wrong information because you didn't have the updated manual. How do you think we should handle it?"*

To get through to a more sensitive employee, take a different approach. For instance, *"I understand why you provided the customer with this information. Are you aware that the guidelines have changed? What do you suggest we do in this situation?"*

Regardless of the person's personality, be clear and straightforward in your communication.

5. Check for understanding

Avoid asking close-ended questions during the discussion or when summarizing. At the end of a confrontation, don't ask, *"Do you understand?"* The employee could simply say "Yes."

Instead, ask the employee to summarize his or her understanding of the situation. Have the person lay out actions, steps or accountabilities that were discussed.

6. Keep a paper trail of discussions

Good documentation, such as a performance log for each employee, allows you to easily identify and prove recurring problems. (This could also help if the employee decides to sue.)

After each meeting with the poor performer, take notes that summarize the discussions. Include the problem, the action taken to correct or eliminate it, the dates, the result that occurred, and any comments that will help you recall feedback sessions when you complete the performance appraisal.

Don't let the performance log become a little black book of mistakes and errors. Also include examples of acceptable and/or outstanding performance.

8. Helping employees accept change in the workplace: It's all about the 4 C's

New project. New boss. New goals. New office. Employees are constantly facing changes to their work environment.

Supervisors who are able to understand the impact of those changes on their employees—and are able to help them through those unsteady times—will earn their employees' trust and loyalty.

To start, you must first understand why people are so quick to resist change. By knowing this, you can make intelligent decisions about how to introduce changes.

Initial response is often negative. People seem to instantly scan new changes for any factors that aren't to their benefit. Then they complain about it. This negative focus often blocks their awareness of positive aspects.

Also, when employees do welcome changes, that initial optimism is sometimes followed by a period of regret (the "buyer remorse" phenomenon). *The bottom line:* Expect negative reactions and plan accordingly.

Change equals loss. One main reason for the negativity: When things change, you lose something. You may gain something as well, but a loss is usually involved.

For example, employees may win promotions but also lose the comfort of their previous jobs.

Acceptance requires planning

If you want employees to accept change, invest some time in planning and communication. Too often, managers throw a change out there and expect others to say, "Well, that's just fine." That's not likely.

To get people to accept change, the first step is to understand what, from their perspective, they feel that they're losing. If you can empathize with their feelings—and possibly compensate for the loss—you've taken a giant first step toward acceptance.

Here are four more factors—the four C's—to promoting acceptance of change:

1. Caring. Listening and responding to people's reactions is just as important as explaining the reasons for change.

2. Control. People want input into how change will be implemented. But never ask for input unless you plan to consider it.

3. Choice. Employees feel better if they are given options as part of the change process. The more choices they have, the more they feel in control.

4. Competence. Workers are happier about change if they feel they have the skills and abilities to succeed after the change. The faster you can help someone move through the learning curve, the faster they will accept the change.

So, before you begin to implement any important change with employees, take time to develop a plan that incorporates those four features.

9. 15 questions to ask employees in their first 60 days

Recruiting, hiring and training new employees can eat up a manager's time. The last thing a manager wants to do is restart the process all over again because that new hire just stood up and walked out the door after three months.

To avoid repeating that time-consuming process, it's important to talk with new employees soon after they arrive to uncover potential problems that can cause turnover.

Many managers make the common mistake of waiting until an employee's performance or behavior shows problems before talking with the employee. By then, however, it can be too late. The employee is halfway out the door.

Make it a point to meet with new hires within the first 60 days. *Your goal:* Discover their likes/dislikes about the job and environment, see if the job meets their expectations and nip potential problems in the bud.

View these one-on-one chats as a continuation of new-employee orientation and a way to gain fresh insight into your department and the organization. Start the meeting by reminding new employees that you're glad they're part of the organization, and that you value their input and observations.

Then, ask some of the following questions, adapting them to your own needs:

1. Why do you think we selected you as an employee?

2. What do you like about the job and the organization?

3. What's been going well? What are the highlights of your experiences so far? Why?

4. Do you have enough, too much or too little time to do your work?

5. How do you see your job relating to the organization's mission?

6. What do you need to learn to improve? What can the organization do to help you become more successful in your job? (Don't ask these two questions unless you are prepared to follow up with action. Otherwise, you can build false expectations, and that can cause disappointment.)

7. Tell me what you don't understand about your job and about our organization.

8. Compare the organization to what we explained it would be like.

9. Which co-workers have been helpful since you arrived? (Goal: Pinpoint which employees can be influential in retaining the new hire.)

10. Whom do you talk to when you have questions about work? Do you feel comfortable asking?

11. Does your supervisor clearly explain what the organization expects of you?

12. How does it go when your supervisor offers constructive criticism or corrects your work?

13. Do you believe your ideas are valued? Give examples.

14. How well do you get along with co-workers?

15. Have you had any uncomfortable situations or conflicts with supervisors, co-workers or customers?

Finish the discussion by asking the employee if he or she has any questions for you or suggestions on how the job can be managed better.

10. Becoming a better boss: 13 steps to success

Managers aren't only responsible for an organization's fiscal assets; they're also responsible for its human assets.

According to an Adecco report, here are 13 simple ideas you can implement today to become a more effective manager:

1. Recognize a job well-done

Everyone likes to know when they've done something well. Make your employees feel important every day. Show enthusiasm for their work.

2. Encourage staff to take risks

Give them enough freedom to take prudent risks. You will find employees at all levels come up with good ideas.

3. Always be honest

Let employees know you trust them, and be honest and open in return. Just one deception can destroy your credibility for good. A Gallup Poll found that one in five workers say their bosses don't treat their employees fairly.

4. Offer a challenge

Productivity and enthusiasm significantly decrease with boredom.

A survey by the American Productivity & Quality Center found that the best motivator for employees is challenging work. Your challenge is to keep them challenged.

5. Realize that money isn't everything

Studies show that money isn't the only motivator for employees. In fact, most studies show that employees choose factors like recognition for a good job, personal development and challenging work as being more important than salary.

So if you want to keep employees, a pat on the back can be just as effective as additional pay.

6. Be a straight shooter

Don't set foggy goals for your employees. People want to know what you expect of them. Give directions to employees in simple language. Tell them precisely what is involved and why you think they're best for the job.

7. Know when, where to criticize

Inform employees when they perform well and when they don't. Tell them immediately. Don't lump all your complaints into one session.

Don't criticize employees in front of others. Highlighting failures in public will discourage innovation by everyone involved, and you will quickly turn colleagues into enemies.

8. Keep communication lines open

Employees crave clear, ongoing, understandable and unambiguous communication. Don't communicate just in times of trouble. Relay positive news as well. Give employees information before, not after, important events.

9. Make employees feel important

The need to feel needed—everyone has it. One study found that more than half of the employees surveyed felt their managers failed to make them feel important as individuals. And 77% of those employees also said they were thinking of looking for another job. Allow employees to contribute. Ask for their opinions and advice. Reduce the number of autocratic decisions.

10. Be consistent

Workers can learn to live with any boss if they know what to expect. If you keep them guessing, you will keep them looking … for another job. Inconsistent behavior breeds anger, frustration, dismay and disappointment.

11. Be impartial

> ## *Learning how to listen*
>
> More than 20% of American workers feel that their bosses hardly ever listen to their problems, said a Gallup Poll. And that can cause resentment.
>
> To improve your listening skills, focus on these key points:
>
> ►**Ignore distractions.** When an employee talks to you, give the person your undivided attention. If you allow distractions to interfere, you may miss critical information and/or make the employee feel like a low priority.
>
> ►**Repeat the message.** If an employee makes a request or provides you with information, clarify what he or she said. That way, everyone is sure they got the right message.
>
> ►**Be objective.** If you assume information is trivial, you won't remember it. Don't pay more attention to some employees than others. Listen to employees as if you were listening to the CEO.

Don't play favorites. Discrimination destroys morale, hurts productivity and opens the door to lawsuits. Bosses who promote unfairly will quickly lose employees' confidence in them. Treat everyone the same, politely.

12. Take an interest in employees' careers

Coach or counsel employees on how they can climb the corporate ladder. Become a mentor to employees with real potential and fire.

13. Know how to say "no"

There will be plenty of times that you can't be Mr./Ms. Nice Guy. You have to say no. How? Just do it. Explain the reason for your refusal. Avoid making a snap decision unless time constraints force your hand. If possible, tell the employee you will consider the request and decide in a day or two. Take enough time to let the employee know that the request has had a fair hearing.

10 Secrets to an Effective Performance Review: Examples and tips on employee performance evaluation, writing employee reviews, a sample performance review and employee evaluation forms.

Learn how to conduct positive, valuable assessments that lead to maximizing staff performance and helping your employees achieve their professional goals and your organization's objectives. Use Business Management Daily's practical advice for writing employee reviews and conducting performance evaluations. Don't forget to reference our sample performance review and employee evaluation forms for your own staff assessments.

http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/EffectivePerformanceReview

Workplace Conflict Resolution: 10 ways to manage employee conflict and improve office communication, the workplace environment and team productivity

Learn how to manage employee conflict and improve office communication and team productivity. Disputes between employees are inevitable…left unresolved, they can disrupt your department's productivity, sap morale and even cause some good employees to quit. Learn 6 steps for managing "difficult" employees, what to do when employees resent another's promotion, learn when and how to step in to referee disputes, and much more.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/WorkplaceConflictResolution

Maternity Leave Laws: 7 guidelines on pregnancy discrimination law, state maternity regulations, pregnancy disability leave, plus a sample maternity leave policy

It's important to know what you must do—and what you can't do (or say)—under federal anti-discrimination and maternity leave laws. And it's vital to double-check state maternity leave statutes, which may provide more liberal leave benefits. While no federal law requires you to provide paid maternity leave, most employers must comply with the pregnancy discrimination law and FMLA maternity leave regulations. Here are 7 guidelines on how best to comply with maternity leave laws, plus a sample leave policy you can adapt for your own organization.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/MaternityLeaveLaws

[**The Office Organizer**](http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/OfficeOrganizer): 10 tips on file organizing, clutter control, document management, business shredding policy, record retention guidelines and how to organize office emails

Learn how to keep your office operations running smoothly—and ward off chaos and legal trouble—with practical document management techniques for administrative professionals, office managers and HR professionals.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/OfficeOrganizer

[**Best-Practices Leadership**](http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/LeadershipTeamManagement): Team management tips and fun team-building activities to boost team performance, collaboration and morale

Learn new team management tips and team-building activities to boost team performance, collaboration and morale. Take our leadership assessment exercise to gauge your own performance as a team manager. See how businesses of all sizes are getting creative with team-building icebreakers and activities. Fight off team complacency with 5 strategies for making team-building exercises part of your daily routine.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/LeadershipTeamManagement

[**Employment Background Check Guidelines**](http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BackgroundCheckGuidelines): Complying with the Fair Credit Reporting Act, conducting credit background checks and running a criminal check to avoid negligent-hiring lawsuits

Employment Background Check Guidelines shows employers and HR professionals how to properly conduct reference/background checks, select third-party background firms and why screening candidates online on social networking sites is legally risky business. Don't allow your organization to risk being held liable for "negligent hiring" or "failure to warn" should an employee turn violent on the job.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BackgroundCheckGuidelines

[**Salary Negotiating 101**](http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/SalaryNegotiating101): 7 secrets to boosting career earnings, negotiating a raise and striking the best deal in a job offer negotiation

Think you deserve a raise, but are afraid to walk into your boss's office and ask? Don't let ineffective negotiation skills hold you back. Employees at all levels can boost their career earnings by following the rules on negotiating a raise, hashing out the best pay package in a job offer negotiation and knowing their market value.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/SalaryNegotiating101

FMLA Intermittent Leave: 5 guidelines to managing intermittent leave and curbing leave abuse under the new FMLA regulations

One of the biggest employer complaints about the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the productivity problems caused by employees' use—and abuse—of FMLA intermittent leave. The problem: Employees with chronic health problems often take FMLA leave in short increments of an hour or less. The Department of Labor took steps to help minimize workplace disruptions due to unscheduled FMLA absences by saying that, in most cases, employees who take FMLA intermittent leave must follow their employers' call-in procedures for reporting an absence. Amend your organization's policies, update your employee handbook and revisit how you track FMLA intermittent leave with these 5 guidelines.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/FMLAIntermittentLeave

Overtime Labor Law: 6 compliance tips to avoid overtime lawsuits, wage-and-hour Labor audits and FLSA exemption mistakes

Employers, beware: The Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division reports that wage-and-hour labor litigation continues to increase exponentially. Federal class actions brought under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) outnumber all other types of private class actions in employment-related cases. Use this special report, Overtime Labor Law: 6 compliance tips to avoid overtime lawsuits, wage-and-hour Labor audits and FLSA exemption mistakes, to review your overtime pay policy and double-check your FLSA exempt employees' status. Expecting a visit from a DOL auditor? Get prepared by taking the self-audit at the end of this report.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/OvertimeLaborLaw

Office Communication Toolkit: 10 tips for managers on active listening skills, motivating employees, workplace productivity, employee retention strategies and change management techniques

A manager's job is 100 times easier and more rewarding when his or her employees are performing like a well-oiled machine. But when that machine runs slowly or breaks down entirely, a manager's job becomes exponentially harder. The best managers are the best listeners ... listen to our 10 tips and maximize office communication skills and bolster workplace productivity.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/OfficeCommunicationToolkit

[**Workplace Violence Prevention Toolkit**](www.businessmanagementdaily.com/WorkplaceViolencePrevention): HR advice, guidelines and policies to keep your workplace safe

Unfortunately, in the wake of a spate of workplace shootings, HR professionals and managers nationwide must consider the horrific possibility of violence erupting at their own facilities and events. To help employers prevent tragedy, this toolkit offers business advice, guidelines and policies aimed at keeping workplaces safe from employee violence. Learn prevention strategies, tips on identifying potentially violent workers, managerial advice on maintaining a safe workplace. It includes two sample anti-violence policies, adaptable for use in any company, plus checklists to use in case violence erupts.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/WorkplaceViolencePrevention

[**14 Tips on Business Etiquette**](www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BusinessEtiquette101): Setting a professional tone with co-workers, clients and customers

For organizations and employees alike, recognizing the critical link between business protocol and profit is key to your success. Learn how to confidently interact with colleagues in ways that make you and your whole organization shine. Discover best practices on making proper introductions; cubicle etiquette; "casual dress" rules; handshake protocol; guest etiquette; workplace behavior faux pas; business dining etiquette, office wedding invites and other co-worker special occasions; business letter and email protocol—and even how your office decorations may affect your professional image.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BusinessEtiquette101

[**12 Ways to Optimize Your Employee Benefits Program**](www.businessmanagementdaily.com/EmployeeBenefitsProgram): Low-cost employee incentives, recognition programs and employee rewards

If you've had to cut pay and staff and now expect more from those who remain, it's vital to revamp your employee recognition and rewards program. Employers can double their rewards and recognition efforts in innovative, cost-efficient ways with employee-of-the-month awards, employee incentive pay, employee appreciation luncheons, more time off, shopping sprees, wellness incentive contests, plus employee rewards customized to motivate Millennials, Gen Xers, Baby Boomers and the Matures. Now is the time to get clever with your employee recognition programs. This report shows you how with great ideas offered up from our Business Management Daily readers.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/EmployeeBenefitsProgram

[**The Bully Boss Strikes Again!**](http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BullyBoss) How to deal with bosses who make crazy requests

And you thought your boss was unreasonable? Bet he never asked you to perform oral surgery or fill in for the bomb squad. Talk about "other duties as assigned!" Even if your direct supervisor swamps you with petty tasks and doesn't appreciate all you do, you can always "manage up" to make sure the boss's boss knows your worth. This report includes practical advice on how to manage a toxic boss along with dozens of outrageous stories about bully bosses.

http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/BullyBoss

Microsoft Email: Outlook Tips & Training: How to improve productivity by effectively employing under-used features already at your fingertips

We all use Outlook. It's easy. You can answer email, keep your appointments and your calendar, and save your files in various folders. But are you using it to manage your entire workflow? You can. Melissa P. Esquibel combines her 25+ years of experience in information technology with a background in training, technical writing and business risk analysis to move beyond email and help you understand Outlook's amazing workflow benefits. You'll discover how to get more out of Outlook than you ever dreamed possible with this hands-on road map to Outlook that can send your productivity skyrocketing.

http://www.businessmanagementdaily.com/MicrosoftEmailOutlook

17 Team Building Ideas: The team building kit for managers with team building exercises, activities and games to build winning teams today!

With employees still reeling from workplace budget cuts, now's a great time for new team building ideas. No, you don't need an expensive round of paintball to gain the benefits of team building exercises, but you do need to squeeze the most out of them. This report provides teamwork examples, exercises and tips for leading winning teams. Go from being a manager who oversees people to a leader who molds them into winning teams with these 17 team building ideas.

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/TeamBuildingIdeas

10 Time Management Tips: A how-to guide on efficiently managing your time through effective delegating, calendar management and using productivity tools

In this era of downsizing and the quest for efficiency, businesses of all sizes are asking employees to take on extra tasks to boost productivity. Has your job turned into one of those "stretch jobs"? If so, you may be looking for a better way to get more done in less time, reduce stress and stop burning the midnight oil. Read about calendar management, keyboard shortcuts, running productive meetings, setting up agenda templates and using tech tools for project management with these 10 time management tips. Learn to prioritize your tasks and stop working in a crisis mode all the time

www.businessmanagementdaily.com/TimeManagementTips
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At Business Management Daily, we're driven to help organizations and individuals succeed. That's why we deliver plain-English, actionable advice to high-performers at over 80,000 companies of all sizes across hundreds of different industries.

Our Free Email Newsletters, Print Newsletters, Free Special Reports and Webinars, Podcasts, Audio Conferences & CDs help provide business professionals with the news, skills and strategies they need to grow their business, avoid legal pitfalls and advance their careers.

Our editorial team includes experienced managers, leaders, HR professionals, lawyers, administrative professionals, CPAs, strategists and business owners from a wide variety of industries.

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- Save you time by making that advice concise, actionable and available in your preferred format
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