


The Double-Edged Sword of Workplace Communication

Strengthening workplace wellbeing through effective communication and connection

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Agenda

- Pop Quiz
- Workplace Wellbeing Defined
- The Link Between Clinic Culture and Wellbeing
- Relational and Transactional Communication
- Core Communication Skills to Promote Connection
- Connection Busters
- Resources

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Objectives

At the end of this module, learners will:

- Define workplace wellbeing
- Compare and contrast transactional & relational communication
- Describe two core communication skills to promote connection
- Describe one connection buster

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Pop Quiz

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Workplace wellbeing is inextricably linked with:

- A. Client behaviors
- B. Team communication
- C. Size and scope of practice/organization
- D. All of the above

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Communication is called a double-edged sword because:

- A. Some people are naturally good at it; others are not
- B. Communicating at work is like jousting
- C. How we communicate has the power to both harm and heal
- D. All of the above

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Workplace Wellbeing Defined; Workplace Culture

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Workplace Wellbeing Defined

A work environment that promotes a state of safety and satisfaction and allows an employee to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and their organization.

Key takeaway: Mutually beneficial

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)
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Work Culture Matters

Positively associated with mental health and wellbeing

- Strong sense of **belonging** to the team
- High degree of **trust** in the organization
- **Candid and open communication** among team members
- A healthy work environment was also associated with recommending the profession to others

Merck Animal Health. 2022. The Merck Animal Health Wellbeing Study III. Madison, NJ.
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Connection

...rarely can a response make something better—
what makes something better is connection

- Psychological safety
- Encourages questioning
- Creates goodwill, minimizes miscommunication
- Encourages innovation and timely decision-making
- Enhances morale

Brown, B. (2015). Doing Greatly. Riverside, D. (2015). 5 Reasons Why Trust Matters on Teams. © Copyright 2025, American Veterinary Medical Association. All rights reserved.



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So Now What?

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Relational vs Transactional Communication

Every interaction is an opportunity to strengthen connection.

YOU HAVE INFORMATION TO SHARE



Loewner, J. (2019). Relational vs. Transactional Communication. © Copyright 2025, American Veterinary Medical Association. All rights reserved.



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Communication Skills to Build Connection

- Open-ended questions
- Reflective listening
- Empathy

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Open-ended Questions

- **Who, what, where, when, how, tell me more...**
 - Cannot be answered with yes or no
 - Encourage full, meaningful answers using the speaker's knowledge, attitude, opinions, beliefs and feelings
 - Avoid "why"
- **Remember your history-taking skills**

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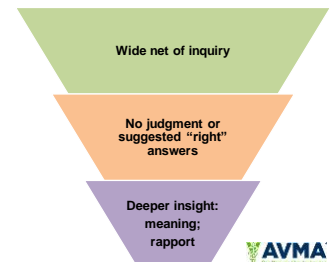
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Open-ended Questions Promote Connection

Is workplace wellbeing important to you?

vs

What does workplace wellbeing mean to you?



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Convert to Open-ended Questions

1. How many times do I have to repeat this process to you?
2. You know short staffing the weekend coverage is what's causing everyone to be miserable, right?
3. Are you happy with the way things are?



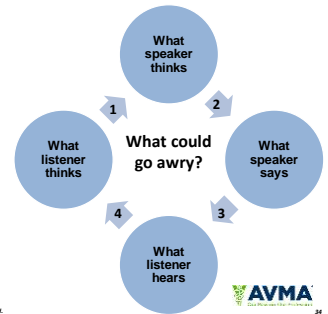
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Reflective Listening

Check-in process to determine if you accurately understand the content, feelings, and context of the message



Nail Kati & Kevin Mahaly

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Reflective Listening Promotes Connection

Speaker

- Seen and heard
- Articulate more clearly
- Process own thoughts and feelings
- Arrive at own solutions

Listener

- Check for accuracy; avoid illusion of understanding
- Avoid offering premature solutions
- Clarify speaker needs; burden of "fixing" is weighty and often unnecessary



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Choose the Best Reflective Response

Your colleague says, "The scheduling process is ridiculous. I've been scheduled to work three out of four weekends the last two months, and somehow, the phone rings off the hook the nights I'm on call. That never seems to happen to you! Why me?"



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1. You know, sometimes everyone ends up with the short end of the stick.
2. Have you thought about how you are going to address the scheduling issues?
3. Why do you think this keeps happening?
4. The scheduling issue sounds upsetting. I can see how that would seem unfair.



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Scenario: You've asked members of your team "What impacts your wellbeing at work?"

1. View the video clip
2. Write a reflective listening response in your workbook
3. Write down the exact words you would use
4. Be prepared to share your response



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Empathy

“...[T]he ability to sense other people’s emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling.”

Greater Good Magazine: What Is Empathy
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Empathy Promotes Connection

- Empathy is contagious—group norms increase likelihood of showing concern for others
- Reduces prejudice, bullying, and disagreements
- Less illness and greater happiness at work
- Reduces risk of unfair work practices
- Increases confidence to handle crises

Rivas, H. J Patient Exp. 2017 Jun; 4(2): 74-77
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What Empathy Sounds Like

- It sounds like you’re feeling an enormous sense of loss. Is that right?
- Thank you for trusting me with this.
- I’m here as a resource. What would be most helpful for you right now?
- How are you feeling today?

Chang, S. Emotional Intelligence 101: Empathetic Responses.
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Connection Builders

Recap: Open-ended questions, reflective listening, and empathy

- **Start with the assumption that people are doing the best they can at their current capacity**
 - This includes you (self-empathy)
- **Rule of Six (alternative hypotheses)**
 - Cultivate curiosity

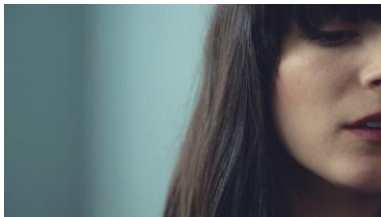
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Connection Busters



**Intent vs
Impact**

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More Connection Busters

Correcting: That’s not how that happened.

Advising: I think you should...

Denial of feelings: Quit worrying! It’s a waste of time.

One-upping: That’s nothing! Wait till you hear my story!

Minimizing: It’s not that big of a deal.

Diagnosing: Your problem is that you’re too sensitive.

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Key Takeaways

- Clinic culture is a positive predictor of mental health and wellbeing and recommending the profession to others
 - sense of **belonging** to the team
 - high degree of **trust** in the organization
 - **candid, open communication** within the team
- Core communication skills—**open-ended questions**, **reflective listening**, and **empathy** support connection



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Resources

- axon.avma.org
- avma.org/wellbeing
- journeyforteam.org



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Resources

- AVTE wellbeing resources



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Survey

Please take a moment to complete the following survey. The responses are reviewed by the AVMA to refine this presentation and develop additional wellbeing resources.



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