



Tips for When You May be Called Upon to Counsel

Counselling usually deals with personal problems. Even the most conscientious worker may occasionally face performance disruption due to issues outside work. When employee attitudes or personality are the problem, you need to provide counselling, which is merely the act of talking things over.

For the most part, your role is that of a listener. Imagine you are conducting a friendly interview to obtain as much information about a situation as you can. Often, when someone has had the opportunity to think aloud, the right action is suddenly very clear. The following listening skills will help you to achieve maximum success in your role of counsellor.

1. Know the difference between “you” and “me”.

“Don’t judge any person until you have walked two moons in their moccasins.”
(Native American Proverb)

2. Possess an attitude of respect and acceptance.

Suspend judgement on a person’s goodness or badness and have an absence of defensiveness. Watch for any trigger words or phrases, particularly “you” statements:

“You messed that up.”
“If you believed that, you must have been dreaming.”

3. Send good body messages.

Show you are available and not rushing. Use a relaxed body posture, physical openness, lean slightly forward and gaze with a comfortable level of eye contact. Be aware of appropriate gestures and be sensitive to physical proximity and height (heads should be at the same level).

4. Use small rewards.

These are brief verbal and nonverbal expressions of interest designed to encourage further speaking:

“Uh-hmm”	“Go on”	“Right”
“Yes”	“I hear you”	“Then.....”

Alternatively, use facial expressions, head nods and good eye contact.



5. Use openers and open-ended questions.

An opener gives the impression that you are interested and prepared to listen:

“You seem upset. Would you care to say what’s bothering you?”
“Tell me what the problem is.”

An open-ended question helps to elaborate the internal viewpoint and may enable the person to see an answer for himself/herself:

“Tell me about it.”
“How do you feel about that?”

6. Reflect feelings.

Reflecting usually involves rewording what you’ve heard. This is often a difficult skill to achieve. Within the limitations of the work environment, you might just use a simple response or ask a question to be sure you have understood the situation.

7. Avoid unrewarding “don’ts”.

So that individuals may explore possible solutions to their own problems, avoid judging and evaluating, directing and leading, blaming, reassuring, humour, advising, teaching, interrogating, inappropriate self-disclosing, putting on a professional façade and faking attention. A major “don’t” is breaking confidence.



Facilitator Notes:

Begin the activity by discussing the following definitions:

- Assertive Behaviour: the rights of each party are respected.
- Aggressive Behaviour: your rights are more important than the other party's rights.
- Passive Behaviour: the other party's rights are more important than your rights.