Effective Communication

Belonging and Excellence for All (BE4ALL) is a joint effort by SMART, SMACNA, and the ITI to create an industry-wide culture where everyone is welcome and belongs, including those from historically underrepresented groups, and where we all strive for the highest standards of performance and professionalism, resulting in a thriving unionized sheet metal industry that affirms the dignity and worth of us all. These Toolbox Talks are in support of this mission.

Think about this: How many times has a job gone wrong because of a simple miscommunication? How many times has someone lost their cool and taken their frustration out on a coworker, a subordinate, or thrown a hand tool or two? In the heat of the moment, sometimes simple miscommunications can lead to angry fireworks, which can create an environment where ultimately, we may regret our behavior.

At the end of the day, it doesn't have to be this way. Most of our time, whether at work, school, or home, is spent communicating in some way with others. Drawings, instructions, verbal and non-verbal feedback, body language – there are many ways we interact with others to share our ideas and ultimately, to attempt to arrive at the same place: safely, ahead of schedule and under budget.

So, **how do we help resolve conflicts on the job site** that arise from miscommunication?

First, take a step back. There are times when struggling with a conflict is not helpful in the moment and only leads to more frustration. Prepare to focus on the job at hand and make time to iron out any miscommunication.

When doing so, refrain from becoming upset and communicate professionally and respectfully to others.

Then, try approaching the situation with empathy. It's understandable for people to be frustrated when things don't go exactly how we planned. Remembering that, more often than not, everyone here is trying to do the best they can, however they can, with what they have at the time. This can go a long way to approaching the conflict with empathy. Each of us has our own struggles that may not be visible all the time.

Try shifting the focus away from blaming others. It's our responsibility to remain cool headed and try to find a solution – and that won't happen if everyone involved is arguing with each other, trying to find out who is at fault.

Once a solution to the issue is found, work together to offer options for preventing it from happening again. Was an ambiguous term used in the directions? Was a coworker left with too little supervision or assistance during a particular task because it was unclear how much experience they had? Were assumptions made? Working respectfully together as a team to prevent it from happening again will not only stop future incidents, but it'll also help develop a

culture of learning from errors and increase the quality of communication between us all. **Effective communication is a learned skill, just like anything in our trade, and it takes practice.** Sometimes that means getting it wrong and learning from our mistakes. However, it can be hard to receive criticism while we're learning anything, just as it can be difficult to give constructive criticism to others.

Some tips on active listening:
o When listening to someone trying to explain something to you, be present and give them your full attention. Show them that you are receptive and open to hearing them out.
o Try not to get defensive: let them finish before either acknowledging what they said or asking them a question for clarification.
o Listen to understand, not just to respond.

Pointers on giving effective feedback:
o Try to choose a calm, relaxed environment, and time to provide effective feedback. This works best for both the person receiving the feedback to listen more actively, and for the person giving the feedback to explain and cover all the points fully. Be respectful.
o Tell the person a mix of things they did correctly as well as things they need to work on. Provide encouragement.
o Focus on the process, not the person. Be a mentor.

Staff Conversation and Notes: Let's hear from you!

(1) How can you practice these suggestions when a conflict arises on the job?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

(2) How can we remind each other to step back and take this approach when conflict does arise?

_____
_____
_____
_____

(3) What resonated with you most: resolving a miscommunication, active listening, or effective feedback?

_____
_____
_____
_____

BE4ALL Toolbox Talk
Effective Communication

Survey