

Communication and Meetings – Tips and Tools

Initial Staff Interview – Sample Questions

When you first begin as a new chair, dean, manager or director it is helpful to spend some time getting to know the staff. Pick 4 or 5 of the following questions depending on what you are interested in knowing.

1. Tell me about yourself – your family, your education, other places you have worked, what you like to do?
2. Tell me what your job is – what do you do?
3. How do you know if you are successful every day?
4. What does a good (or successful) day look like for you?
5. Where do you see yourself in 5 years – what do you see yourself doing? (or what are your career plans or aspirations?)
6. What is your dream job?
7. What are your top 3 to 5 strengths?
8. What are your top three successes for achievements from the past year or two?
9. What are your learning and development needs? Or what training would you most like to attend this year?
10. If you could change one thing about this office (faculty, department, unit) what would it be?
11. What could I do (or we do in this unit/department/faculty) that would help you do your job better?
12. If I came to you a year from now and I asked you how are things going and you said “never been better” can you describe for me what would be happening/what that would look like?
13. If you had a concern about me being your chair/director/supervisor what would it be
14. Looking at the faculty/department/unit as a whole, what do you think we could do differently that would make us more effective and/or make this a better workplace?

Tips for Effective Listening © Achieve Global – used with permission

Listening to staff is probably one of the most powerful ways to keep them engaged and keep you informed. But taking time to listen can be difficult especially when you are busy and otherwise engaged. The tips and steps for listening described below can help you build staff engagement and commitment and get the information you need.

Key Action 1. Evaluate your need or ability to listen ‘right now’

- Assess whether this is a time you need to listen to staff – e.g. urgent priorities, they are upset about something, you need to know what they are doing
- Decide if you can listen properly right now. If you are distracted or unable to devote full attention, you may need to delay the conversation. If you decide you can listen then take a deep breath, slow down and focus completely on what the staff member is telling you.’

Key Action 2. Manage internal and external ‘noise’

- Put aside work and other distractions
- Face the staff member
- Decide what you need to get out of the conversation
- Resist the urge to prejudge
- Watch your own biases
- Push unproductive thoughts aside
- Internally reframe challenging or irritating messages or statements – think of the message as a chance to learn, gain information, or build a positive relationship.

Key Action 3. Maintain curiosity and show interest

- Show interest in what the staff member has to say
- Display sincere, attentive, non-verbal behaviour – e.g. positive body language and facial expressions
- Pay attention to your tone – e.g. inquisitive vs. interrogative.
- Use short phrases to acknowledge and encourage the staff member to continue speaking (e.g. Uh, huh, I see... Go on...)
- Allow for silences to encourage the staff member to respond more fully. Sometimes it is helpful to silently count to 10 before talking
- Notice cues in the staff member’s behaviour and voice tones so you can ‘listen beyond the words’. (e.g. It seems like this has been pretty frustrating for you)
- Acknowledge emotions - it can help the staff member feel they have been heard and encourages them to share further information (e.g. You must be disappointed after putting in all that extra time)

Key Action 4. Ask Questions and clarify what you have heard

- Ask open-ended questions to get the staff member to expand on what they are saying (e.g. So, what happened to cause the delay?)
- Ask closed questions to determine specific information (e.g. Who was affected by this?)
- Ask follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding (So what happened after that?)
- As needed, take a moment to summarize your understanding of what's been said. This lets the staff member confirm whether or not you've received their message accurately. If not, you have a chance to clarify by seeking more information.

Key Action 5. Manage the flow of the conversation

- Suggest a time frame – let the staff member know how much time you have. If they need more time than that, you may need to suggest another time to continue
- If possible identify a joint outcome – what information will be most useful to you and what does the staff member need from you;
- Redirect – if the conversation gets 'off track' you can gently steer it back to the topic (Ok thanks for that information. Can we go back to the issue of ____?)
- Wrap-Up the conversation by expressing thanks, summarizing what you have heard, its importance, and how you or the staff member will follow up. If needed, book another time to continue or check back.

Basic Principles for a Positive and Respectful Workplace

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In a positive and respectful workplace:

- Every member of the workplace in every interaction treats each individual, whatever his or her job, with respect.

In addition, positive and respectful staff members:

- Are inclusive: - Everyone has a sense of belonging
- Support each others success
- Acknowledge and accommodate differences in needs, knowledge and ways of doing things
- Recognize each other's contributions.
- Treat others with respect
- Let others know what they need from them, courteously and with consideration for their time
- Listen to others actively – are curious about what others are really saying
- Take personal responsibility for calling behavior that makes them uncomfortable
- Address issues directly with the person involved.
- Believe in each other's positive intent.
- Forgive each other and themselves - when problems occur
- Take action to make things better, forgive, and let go.
- Respect each other's confidences.

The basic principles below are helpful strategies that can help staff at all levels work more effectively with others. At first glance these principles may seem obvious and common sense, however, on reflection most of us agree they are not always common practice.

Basic Principles

1. Focus on the situation, issue, or behaviour, not on the person
2. Maintain the self-confidence and self-esteem of others
3. Maintain good working relationships
4. Take initiative to make things better
5. Lead by example
6. Think beyond the moment

Basic Principles Discussion

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1. Principle #1 - Focus on the situation, issue, or behaviour, not on the person advises us to focus on facts or observations, not blaming or judging the person. This means we avoid comments about an individual's character, attitude or general attributes and focus on their behavior.

- *Why would we want to do this?*
- *How can we separate the individual from his or her behaviour?*

2. Principle #2 - Maintain the self-confidence and self-esteem of others tells us to do and say things that support the self-confidence and self-esteem of others.

- *Why is this important?*
- *What kind of things do people do or say to each other that can damage esteem or confidence?*
- *What are some thing we could do or say that would maintain the self-esteem and self-confidence of others?*
- *Why would this be important in building a positive and engaged workplace?*

3. Principle #3 - Maintain good working relationships encourages us to maintain positive working relationships. This does not mean we need to best friends but we all know that good relationships are based on common courtesy, consideration and respect.

- *What are some things people do or say that damage work relationships?*
- *What are things we can do or say to maintain the good working relationships?*
- *How does maintaining good working relationships help us in the workplace?*

4. Principle #4 - Take initiative to make things better encourages us to think about how we might improve a situation and to take steps to do so.

- *Why would we want to do this?*
- *What would happen if we all followed this principle?*

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5. Principle #5 – Lead by Example. Even if you don't see yourself as a leader – there are always plenty of opportunities to set a good example by what we do or say.

- *Why do you think this is important?*
- *What are some examples of what you have seen others do that demonstrated this principle?*
- *How can 'leading by example' help build a better workplace for us all?*

6. Principle #6 – Think beyond the moment advises us to think ahead and take a future focus. We all know that for each action taken or decision made, there are consequences that will impact others and the university or unit.

- *Why is it important to think beyond the moment?*
- *What could we do to help each other think beyond the moment?*

Basic Principles – Sample Behaviours and Actions © Achieve Global – used with permission

<p>1. Focus on the situation, issue, or behaviour, not on the person</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain objective when faced with challenging behaviors • Step back and look at the big picture when analyzing a situation • Avoid letting personality differences keep you from dealing with a problem • Ensure expectations are clear and consistently applied • Make decisions based on facts • Consider the points of view of others
<p>2. Maintain the self-confidence and self-esteem of others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an atmosphere of acceptance, approval and respect • Openly express confidence in others • Recognize accomplishments and ideas • Encourage people to express their ideas • Encourage people to use and expand their abilities • Consider the impact of rank and power and how to mitigate any negative impact
<p>3. Maintain good working relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach others with a positive attitude and communicate support • Use every interaction as an opportunity to build respectful relationships • Acknowledge problems openly, honestly and objectively • Deal with conflicts as they arise • Share information
<p>4. Take initiative to make things better</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continually ‘survey’ the department/centre for ways to make things better • Look for opportunities for improvement • Ask for input and feedback from others • Stay informed and alert to changes that will affect staff • Take risks and stay open to creative solutions to problems • Know when to ask for and when to offer help to others
<p>5. Lead by example</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model the behaviors you expect others to practice • Follow through on your commitments • Admit your mistakes • Remain calm and positive • Challenge yourself and others to try new ways of doing things
<p>6. Think beyond the moment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uphold ethical standards of the University • Deal with problems and issues as they arise. • Weigh the risks, benefits and potential impact of your decisions before taking action on them • Set objectives that motivate action • Plan ahead

Successful Meetings – Process and Agenda © Achieve Global – used with permission

1. Prepare the group for a focused meeting:

Before the Meeting

- Define the purpose and desired outcome(s)
- Determine if a meeting is necessary
- Determine topics to cover and the best format for discussing each
- Estimate the length of the meeting
- Identify participants
- Set a time and a place
- Plan note taking
- Communicate the purpose and desired outcome(s) to all participants

At the Start of the Meeting

- Restate the purpose and desired outcome(s)
- Review the agenda
- Develop or review ground rules
- Provide any key information

2. Encourage diverse points of view:

- State the type of participation desired
- Show that you value ideas, opinions, and questions
- Clarify and paraphrase key ideas
- Be selective about contributing your ideas and opinions
- Ask for different points of view

- Use brainstorming techniques
- Record ideas on a flipchart or whiteboard
- Ask open-ended questions
- Protect new ideas
- Keep the focus on ideas, not on people
- Use positive reinforcement

3. Keep the group focused and moving:

- Let the group carry the content
- Pay attention to the flow of the meeting
- Acknowledge and reinforce constructive contributions
- Use agenda, desired outcome(s), ground rules, and structured discussions to stay on track
- Speed up the pace

- Slow down the pace
- Keep the group aware of where they are in the process
- Periodically summarize key points and ask for agreement
- Help the group reach conclusions

4. Make sure action items are planned:

- Assign action items throughout the meeting, and review them at the end of the meeting
- Help the group decide on next steps
- Make specific assignments
- Conclude by summarizing the group's accomplishments

- Thank group for their participation
- Evaluate the meeting
- Plan post-meeting logistics
- Plan how to monitor progress on action items

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Sample **Meeting Agenda**

Date: _____

Location _____

Purpose of Meeting:

Expected Outcomes:

Meeting Chair: _____

Note Taker: _____

Check in – Is there anything you need to say before we begin? What you want out of this meeting?	
Review of Past Meeting Notes	
Topic	Notes and Decisions
Round Table – 3 min each - essential updates or global issues	
Updates on Ongoing Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none">•	
New Issues or Decisions Required <ul style="list-style-type: none">•	
Check out – What worked? What did not? Suggestions for next time?	

Touch Base Meetings with Staff Members

Touch Base meetings with staff members are a great way to keep the lines of communication open.

- Pre-book a series of 15 minute 'touch base' meetings with each staff member (can be once a week, bi-monthly or once a month).
- Purpose of the meeting is to touch base with them on whatever **they** might need to talk to you about.
- It can be awkward at first if you have never done this before – so have patience.
- Explain to your staff members that you want to have touch base meetings with them so they have a chance every week to discuss problems, issues, successes or anything else they think you should know. Tell them you are interested in their work and it is important for you to know what is happening for them and within the unit.
- Touch base meetings are different from meetings you would schedule to tell employees what you expect of them or to assign them some work – try to schedule these meetings separately.
- To help get the conversation going try asking:
 - “How are things going? And how are you doing?”
 - “What do you think I need to know about this week?”
 - “Tell me what is happening in your work right now?”
 - “What do you want to focus on this week?”
- Listen and try not to interrupt .
- Ask questions for clarification.
- Respond to any questions or requests for information.
- Close the meeting in 15 minutes and thank the staff member for meeting with you.