

**COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR TECHNICAL
PROFESSIONALS**



**INSTRUCTOR GUIDE
8-HOUR COURSE**

HRDQ[®]

COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR TECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS

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Phone: (800) 633-4533
Fax: (800) 633-3683
Web: www.HRDQ.com

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Instructional Design and Learning Philosophy

We are committed to providing the best core skills content possible for Instructor-Led Training (ILT). The following principles are applied in the development of programs:

Sound Instructional Design

All course content is developed using a variety of research techniques. These include:

- Brainstorming sessions with target audience
- Library research
- Online research
- Customer research (focus groups, surveys, etc.)
- Subject Matter Experts (SME)
- Interviews with trainers

Expert instructional designers create imaginative and innovative solutions for your training needs through the development of powerful instructional elements. These include:

- Learning objectives — effective tools for managing, monitoring and evaluating training
- Meaningfulness — connects the topic to the students' past, present and future
- Appropriate organization of essential ideas — helps students focus on what they need to know in order to learn
- Modeling techniques — demonstrate to students how to act and solve problems
- Active application — the cornerstone to learning — helps students immediately apply what they have learned to a real-life situation
- Consistency — creates consistent instructions and design to help students learn and retain new information
- Accelerated learning techniques — create interactive, hands-on involvement to accommodate different learning styles

Application of Adult Learning Styles

Adults learn best by incorporating their personal experiences with training and by applying what they learn to real-life situations. Our experienced instructional designers incorporate a variety of accelerated learning techniques, role-plays, simulations, discussions and lectures within each course. This ensures that the learning will appeal to all learning styles and will be retained.

Course timing

Chapter 1: Characteristics of technical professionals

Type of Activity	Segment	Time
	Strengths and shortcomings of technical professionals	10
	Do you speak techie?	20

Chapter 2: Defining communication

	Levels of meaning	15
	The communication process	15
	Levels of communication	15

Chapter 3: Communication filters

	Identifying filters	10
	Age	10
	Race and ethnicity	15
	Gender	15

Course timing

Chapter 4: Personality types

Type of Activity	Segment	Time
	Benefits of using the MBTI™	5
	Administer assessment (self-scorable)	30
	Interpretation and validation	55
	Type distribution	5
	Team type	15
	The need for opposites	10

Chapter 5: Building rapport

	The ways humans connect	10
	Paraphrasing statements	10
	Encouragement	10
	Non-verbal and subtext messages	10

Course timing

Chapter 6: Who are you talking to?

Type of Activity	Segment	Time
	Communicating with your customers	10
	Communicating with your manager	20
	Communicating with your team	10
	Reinforcing feedback	5
	Corrective feedback	10

Chapter 7: Writing business documents

	What should you include?	5
	What action do you want readers to take?	5
	Putting pen to paper	5
	Use the active voice	5
	Don't let writer's block bog you down	10

Chapter 8: Electronic communication

Type of Activity	Segment	Time
	E-writing	10
	Netiquette	10
	The shape of e-mail	10
	Best uses of voicemail	5

Chapter 9: Avoiding unnecessary conflict

	Misunderstanding or disagreement	5
	Sources of conflict	10
	Preventing conflict	10
	Handling conflict	10
	Better next time	5

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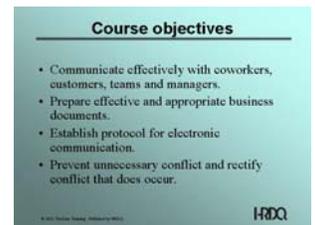
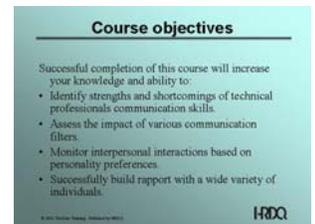
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Course objectives

Successful completion of this course will increase your knowledge and ability to:

- Identify strengths and shortcomings of technical professionals communication skills
- Determine various levels of meaning and identify the subtleties of communication.
- Assess the impact of various communication filters.
- Monitor interpersonal interactions based on personality preferences.
- Successfully build rapport with a wide variety of individuals.
- Communicate effectively with coworkers, customers, teams and managers.
- Prepare effective and appropriate business documents.
- Establish protocol for electronic communication.
- Prevent unnecessary conflict and rectify conflict that does occur.



ChapterOne



CHARACTERISTICS OF TECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS

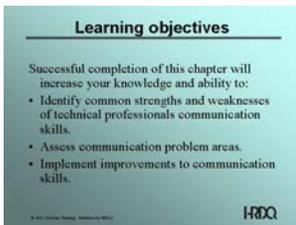
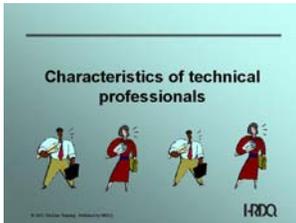
Chapter One: Characteristics of technical professionals

Learning objectives

Identify common strengths and weaknesses of technical professionals communication skills

Assess communication problem areas

Implement improvements to communication skills



Strengths and shortcomings of technical professionals

Why bother?

Since the advent of downsizing, organizational flattening and layoffs, teams rather than individuals are doing more work. To succeed in this type of environment, technical professionals need effective “soft skills” (a.k.a. communication skills) to accompany their technical prowess.

The ability to communicate, cooperate, coordinate, resolve differences and persuade others effectively will determine success as much as (if not more than) techies’ abilities to perform the technical aspects of their job.

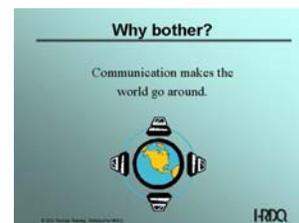
Strengths

- Core knowledge necessary to operate business.
- Help other professionals be more efficient in their work.
- Have the means to disseminate information easily.
- Teach others how the technology works.

Shortcomings

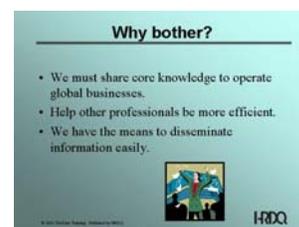
- Rapport with coworkers may not be built, and without rapport, trust will not come easily.
- An environment of secrecy may be created.
- View people and meetings as interruptions.
- Lack of patience when dealing with individuals who don't get the technical aspects of a situation.
- Ideas or solutions are rejected because people simply don't understand them.

All the training technical professionals receive is very specific to their field. Very little falls into the “soft skills” area.



In today's fast-paced world, you have to be able to get your point across quickly or you won't be effective.

Speak First Training Company in North London conducted a study that found that people are hired because of their technical aptitude, but as they move up the ladder they will be measured more on their ability to communicate. It is common for people who have good technical knowledge to be unable to communicate effectively.



Facilitate a brainstorming session about the strengths and weaknesses of technical professionals as communicators. Work to expand the lists on this page.

The national survey of employers is cited by Daniel Goleman in *Working with Emotional Intelligence*.

The June 1999 edition of IDG said, "IT managers and CIOs need to adjust their job descriptions and applicant-screening methods to crank up the dial on interpersonal skills and business training."

What the experts say

"Career-minded technical professionals need to beware: A lack of business knowledge can strand you in middle management, doomed to never be entrusted with work that involves making strategic decisions."

Mark Pined, Editor, Computerworld 11/29/99

Moving up

Advice to technical professionals

"Your focus needs to change from understanding every last detail to understanding the business and the talents of your staff."

Leo Connor, VP and COO, California State Automobile Association

"You need the interpersonal skills and the ability to think through ambiguity and deal with people."

Mike Cole, VP for IT, Rockwell International Corporation

The reality of the matter

Business skills encompass the ability to effectively lead, manage, communicate, facilitate, plan and interact with others effectively. These skills create an interpersonal vehicle for performance enhancement and will provide the technical professional with a competitive edge by improving overall expertise.

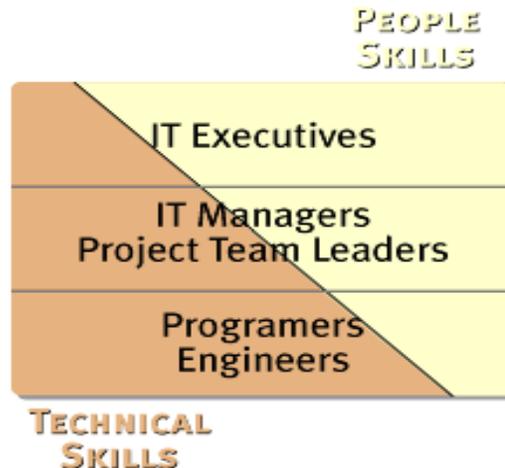
A national survey of what employers are looking for in entry-level employees listed the following skills:

- Ability to learn on the job
- Listening and oral communication skills
- Adaptability and creative responses to setbacks and obstacles
- Personal management, confidence and motivation
- Groups and interpersonal effectiveness, cooperation and teamwork, skills at negotiating disagreements.

Fluff or key skills?

The Gartner Institute reports the following:

- Seventy-four percent of all IT projects are over budget and run past original deadlines.
- Fifty-one percent of IT professionals exceed budgets by 200% and only deliver 75% of projected functionality.
- The greatest contributor to project failure is poor project management.



Do you speak techie?

Rate yourself on each of the following scales. 1= I'm never like this; 3=I'm sometimes like this; 5=I'm always like this.

Statement	Rating
I use logical and linear thinking patterns.	1 2 3 4 5
I have a narrow focus on work issues.	1 2 3 4 5
My work life and personal identity are closely aligned.	1 2 3 4 5
I am a perfectionist.	1 2 3 4 5
I am an information miser and don't like to share information.	1 2 3 4 5
I don't care at all about office politics.	1 2 3 4 5
I will stick to a problem until it is solved, no matter what.	1 2 3 4 5

Tell participants to rate themselves on each of the seven scales.

Each scale represents areas that are typical challenges for technical professionals.

Someone who rated all 4s or 5s is not a good communicator. Someone who had a mix of low and high ratings has medium communication skills.

Technical Tendencies

- Logical and linear thinking pattern
- Narrow focus on work issues
- Work life and identity are one and the same
- Perfectionist
- Information miser
- Not interested or concerned about politics
- Will work a problem until it is solved



Logical thinking patterns: technical people tend to view the world as a rational place where there are reasons for everything, and where problems can be solved by application of logical thought. For something to make sense to the technical professional, it must be logical. Difficulties often arise because "logic" is self-defined – so others don't necessarily share the same viewpoint. Techies will be more successful by simply understanding that others may have a different perspective.

Narrow focus on work issues: Most techies are always in search of solutions to finite problems. The tendency is valuable because it provides better solutions. Left unchecked, however, the techie can lose track of organizational needs while pursuing interesting but irrelevant solutions.

Work life and personal identity: Technically gifted people tend to identify closely with their work. Criticism or praise of their work is tantamount to criticism or praise of them personally.

Perfectionists: When pursuing a solution or doing a job, techies often do not know when to stop. Get boundaries for "being done" up front.

Do you speak techie?

While each area has benefits and appropriate times for use, there will be other situations where these behaviors will get you into trouble. Apply the tips and strategies as suggested.

Statement	Tips and strategies
1. I use logical linear thinking patterns.	<p>Understand and acknowledge that other people may have different perspectives and approaches to thinking.</p> <p>Listen to other opinions, show respect and explain your reasoning.</p> <p>Use win/win problem solving when you disagree with someone.</p> <p>Prioritize your issues and choose battles wisely.</p>
2. I have a narrow focus on work issues.	<p>Gauge what you are trying to achieve with organizational goals.</p> <p>Make sure that your activities fit with the activities of your team and that you can articulate the connection to others.</p>
3. My work life and personal identity are closely aligned.	<p>Don't take criticism personally.</p> <p>Ask for clarification when criticized and turn it into positive action.</p> <p>Put yourself in the other person's shoes.</p> <p>Look at the big picture.</p>

Do you speak techie?

<p>4. I am a perfectionist.</p>	<p>Recognize when good is good enough.</p> <p>Focus on costs as well as quality.</p> <p>Clarify with your manager or customer the degree to which projects need to be completed.</p>
<p>5. I am an information miser and don't like to share information.</p>	<p>Share what you know about your projects with you team.</p> <p>Continually ask, "Who could benefit from knowing what I'm up to?"</p> <p>Discuss the concept of information sharing with your manager and team.</p> <p>Clarify what information should be shared and how it will be shared.</p>
<p>6. I don't care at all about office politics.</p>	<p>Reach out to other departments when considering action that will affect them. Make them allies up front.</p> <p>Consider politics when making proposals.</p> <p>Nurture a support system and network.</p>
<p>7. I will stick to a problem until it is solved, no matter what.</p>	<p>Clarify priorities and define important tasks with your manager.</p> <p>Don't get bogged down in minuscule or tangential issues.</p> <p>Communicate broader perspectives with others, especially nontechnical people.</p>

Information miser: Techies may be reluctant to share information with others. This can be due to their education and past work efforts in which they were judged for individual accomplishments rather than team efforts. It may be due to an unwillingness to share something until it is completed, or because of the desire to feel powerful by knowing what other people do not. Whatever the reason, the team will suffer when they don't have the information needed to make decisions. Individuals can also suffer career-wise if labeled as not being a team player.

Don't care about politics: This can lead to frustration, apathy or "early retirement on the job." The best defense is a good offense. Instead of denying the existence of office politics, it is advisable to use them to your advantage. This does not mean jump into plotting and scheming, it simply means that you need to know what you will face.

Stick with a problem no matter what: Techies usually find pleasure in solving problems. When presented with a problem, they automatically begin solving it. This tendency makes them valuable to the organization, but can be troublesome if priorities are not clearly enacted.

