

# How to COMMUNICATE UNDER STRESS



## SPEAK CAREFULLY

### ■ Be Specific.

Listeners are not mind readers. Specifically define the problem or name the feeling. It is unlikely that others will know what we are wanting or feeling if we leave them guessing.

### ■ Say less.

Silence is helpful when emotions are strong, and we feel stressed or fired. Often, during those times, we say things we do not mean. We tend to exaggerate or escalate the situation to a magnitude that is not real.

### ■ Stay focused.

Discuss only the issue at hand. Getting off the track and bringing up old issues is confusing and irritating. Don't say things you don't mean or threaten things you won't carry out.

### ■ Stay it with tact.

Ban blaming. Keep comments descriptive rather than critical, blaming or all-knowing. Avoid criticism and sarcasm. "I" statements are less threatening to the listener.

## LISTEN ATTENTIVELY

### ■ Receive criticism successfully.

Put your shields up. Act like a coffee filter. Strain out the emotional grounds — like fear or anger — from the facts.

### ■ Accept what is said without giving advice.

There are times when we believe the speaker is wrong, and it would feel so good to tell them what to do. However, even when the advice is eventually followed, the timing is important. It is best to listen, to support and to let the feelings be heard before offering any advice.

### ■ Don't interrupt.

Sometimes it is necessary to stop talking to hear all of the words. Concentrate on the words and pay careful attention to the nonverbal gestures. Eliminate both mental and physical distractions.

### ■ Listen with empathy.

Put yourself in their shoes. Try to understand their perspective. It is not necessary to agree with the other point of view to understand or empathize with it.

## RESPOND ACCURATELY

### ■ Be honest.

Remain honest by saying, "I understand why you feel that way." Acknowledging and accepting the speaker's feelings does not mean that you agree with them.

### ■ Check your interpretations.

The goal of communication is mutual understanding. Listeners interpret what is being said. It is important to check with the speaker to be sure that what you heard is what the speaker meant. Ask the speaker if your perspective is accurate. For example: "Do I understand you to mean...?" "Did you say...?"

### ■ Get all the facts.

Listen carefully until you understand what is being said. Ask the speaker to clarify anything that you don't understand. But don't ask too many questions, as that can be distracting.

### ■ Listen to yourself.

Make a conscious effort to hear how you speak. Do you have a positive or negative attitude? What is your tone of voice? A steady stream of snappy responses puts others on the defensive.