

Keys to Professional Caregiving



caregivers

PREVENT  PROTECT  PROMOTE
abuse/neglect *clients* *dignity*

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

DHS/DQA/OCQ

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Learning Points

Let's review the main learning points.

Key #1: Identifying Your Communication Style

- Improving communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal
- Identifying your personal communication style and the style of others
- Communicating successfully with other styles
- Understanding communication challenges with clients and family members
- Adapting communication skills for a more successful team

Key #2: Using Your Communication Style Effectively

- Which style is most effective? Assertive? Passive? Aggressive?
- Exploring One Conversation—3 Different Ways

Key #3: Maintaining Professional Boundaries

- Defining professional boundaries
- Making sure relationships with clients are “therapeutic”
- Learning how professional boundaries affect your success as a caregiver

Key #4: 5 Steps to Professional Success

- Putting your best foot forward – professional demeanor
- Understanding the rules of the road – work rules
- Staying on track – teamwork and professional relationships
- Remember your destination – customer service and good care
- Celebrate your journey – life-long learning, professional affiliations

Key #1: Identifying Your Communication Style

As a caregiver, you work as part of a team. And that team is made up of four general groups of people:

- Clients/residents
- Co-workers
- Supervisors
- Family members of clients and residents



Recognizing your own communication style and the styles of others on your team can lead to more success as a caregiver, reduce conflict and frustration, help prevent abuse and neglect of those in your care and increase job satisfaction.

Communicating with others successfully is critical to the goal of your team: providing safe, quality care to clients and residents

Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

When we think of the word “communication” most of us think of verbal communication. However, unspoken communication also affects how others perceive us. Truly, a picture can be worth a thousand words!

It’s important to consider both verbal and non-verbal communication to better understand how both words AND actions send messages to others. We’ve all heard of “first impressions.” Most of us draw impressions of others without even thinking about it. Often, these judgments are made within the first few seconds of meeting a person.

Our first impressions are most often based on unspoken communication, the signals that others send either consciously or unconsciously. While these first impressions can be completely off-base and even unfair, they are often hard to change.

What are some of the ways that a person may communicate without saying a word?

Take a look at some photos of people. Think about your first impressions of the people or the situation.

It's important to be aware of nonverbal messages, so we can avoid sending unintentional messages.

T.E.A.M. Talk: Communicating with Style



Communication styles have been studied for thousands of years. The ancient Greeks characterized peoples' styles using designations of body fluids! In more modern times, many serious students of the subject agree that there are primarily four basic communication styles. Of course, we are all a combination of the four styles and the style we use at any one time may vary depending on the situation.

Conflict among team members often occurs because of a difference in style, not a difference in content. In other words:

It's not **what** we say, but **how** we say it!

In this training, each of the four communication styles is represented by the letters in T.E.A.M.

T=Thinker **E**=Engager **A**=Adventurer **M**=Mover

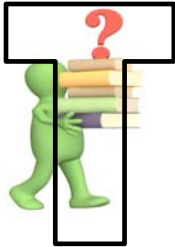
Which T.E.A.M style best expresses the way you communicate? Let's find out!

Activity: T.E.A.M. Talk Cards

Each person has four cards, each one representing a different communication style. Look at each of the cards and sort them in the order in which they seem most like you (on top) to least like you (on the bottom). Don't spend too much time; let your first impressions be your guide.

Let's learn a bit more about each of the four styles by reviewing each one in more detail.

Thinkers thrive on information.

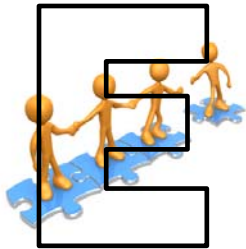


Thinkers seek facts to understand a situation. They value analysis, and like to plan before moving into action. They may be uncomfortable with impulsive decisions. Thinkers play by the rules and respect accuracy and accountability in themselves and others.

The **Thinker** might:

- Use longer, more complex sentences
- Like to review written materials, especially in advance of any decision or meeting
- Consider the consequences of the team's decisions
- Ask lots of questions to clarify or get more information
- Show an understated demeanor and speak in an unemotional tone
- Question change – unless there are facts to support it!

Engagers thrive on personal connections.

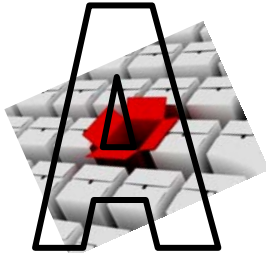


Engagers value relationships and thrive on positive attention from others. They like to be regarded as people who make connections. They tend to be concerned with how a decision will affect all people involved.

The **Engager** might:

- Begin the conversation with personal inquiries (“How are you?” “How was your weekend?” “How’s your family?”)
- Speak in terms of feelings (“Here is how I feel about the situation. How do you feel?”)
- Show a range of emotions
- Ask questions about how other people might feel or be affected
- Express concern about change – how will it affect everyone?

Adventurers thrive on excitement.

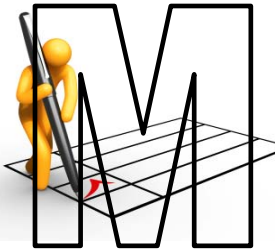


Adventurers tire of boring explanations, and find lectures very painful. They like to move quickly, and tend to do their work in a flurry of activity. They value creativity, freedom and flexibility. Adventurers tend to be very creative in their communication and rely on their intuition.

The **Adventurer** might:

- Tell stories or give examples to support their point
- Use dramatic gestures
- Speak rapidly
- Use humor to make a point
- Use exaggeration (“I’m starving!”)
- Offer new ideas and approaches—think “outside the box”
- Embrace change – it can be “interesting”

Movers thrive on quick results.



Movers make decisions easily and may become impatient with people who can't make up their minds. They often focus on the big picture. They are very goal-oriented and can be competitive. Movers value time, action and getting the job done.

The **Mover** might:

- Use short, direct sentences
- Ask closed questions (requiring “yes” or “no” answers)
- Use words that tell you to get to the point (“What’s your point?” “Let’s move ahead.”)
- Show impatience with long-winded explanations
- Multi-task while speaking with you
- Welcome change—if it will improve efficiency!

Activity: Analyzing the T.E.A.M. Talk Styles

While every member of your team brings value to the group, it's helpful to analyze how each style affects teams differently. Let's try an activity designed to explore both the strengths and limitations of your own style.

Since we now understand the basic characteristics of each style, we'll use that knowledge to consider the following questions:

What strengths does each style bring to the team?

How could each style limit the team?

Avoiding Stereotypes



Because the four communication styles are very simple and straightforward, it is sometimes tempting to stereotype a person based on the limitations of his/her dominant style.

We may say things like:

“Thinkers can’t see the forest for the trees!”

“Engagers are over-emotional do-gooders!”

“Adventurers are flighty and unreliable!”

“Movers are bossy know-it-alls!”

In order to have effective teams, it's helpful to focus on the strengths instead.

It's important to understand that we are a blend of all four styles, and it takes a combination of styles to make an effective team. While under stress, we may show more of our limitations than our strengths.

Sometimes we behave differently in certain situations. For instance, someone might show Thinker traits at work, gathering information before making a decision, but may demonstrate Mover traits with children at home. This is perfectly normal.

Also, style is never an excuse for bad behavior. Someone who is a dominant Adventurer shouldn't show up late for a meeting and say, "Get over it, I'm an Adventurer! Time is relative!" A Mover shouldn't tell everyone what to do and then say, "I'm a Mover. It's my way or the highway!"

Reducing Conflict with Others



While it's quite natural for us to focus on our own strengths and minimize our limitations, it might be helpful to find some "middle ground" that takes our communication to the most effective level.

The Golden Rule says that you should do unto others as you would have them do unto you. In other words, treat others as YOU would like to be treated. The Platinum Rule®, coined by Dr. Tony Alessandro, suggests that you should do unto others as THEY would have you do unto them. In other words, treat others as THEY would like to be treated.

Understanding others' styles gives you a chance to improve your communication and reduce conflict. But the most important key to successful communication is recognizing your own strengths and limitations. Reducing limitations allows others to appreciate those fabulous strengths!

Communicating with Other T.E.A.M Talk Styles

Showing respect in your communication with other team members is crucial to the success of the team, and ultimately, the care of your clients and residents. Translate your message into a "universal" style using these tips:

Communication Tip	Example
Listen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your full attention • Make eye contact • Refrain from interrupting
Understand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions to clarify • Respect others' perspectives

State preference, purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say what you think • State why you think it • Explain the outcome you expect
Outline a problem, suggest a solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid accusations • Propose a solution to the problem
Confirm agreements/plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restate matters in your own words. “This is what I’m hearing...”
Respect the needs of others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include statements/questions such as “Do you want to think this over first?” or “I know this will take some time”
Express appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t just think nice thoughts, say them out loud!
Agree to disagree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smile and accept the differences all bring to work

Improving Communication with Clients

Clients are an important member of your caregiving team. Some clients are able to make their own decisions and have no cognitive impairments. These clients may clearly show an identifiable communication style. Other clients, however, may have cognitive disabilities or disorders as a result of conditions such as mental illness, Alzheimer’s disease or other dementia, autism spectrum disorder, deafness, blindness, brain injury, etc.

Persons with cognitive disorders and other emotional or behavioral disabilities may not demonstrate an identifiable communication style. But knowing your own style will help you communicate with those clients. For example, Movers may have a tendency to rush and may cause anxiety in clients, while Engagers may be intimidated by a client who acts out aggressively and fail to perform necessary cares.

Tips for Improving Communication with Your Clients

- Think about how your client may interpret your style.
- Remember that a client's communication style may be due to illness or disability. Don't take it personally.
- Resist the urge to push forward with a resistive client. Clients have the right to have choices.
- Refrain from arguing with clients with cognitive impairments—they may not be able to process your point, even if it's a good one.
- Watch for non-verbal communication if the ability to speak is diminished. Concentrate on body language and facial expressions instead.
- Always consider re-approaching a client who is uncooperative or upset at a later time.
- Practice empathy—try to put yourself in your client's place.
- Know your client's care plan so that you are fully aware of their physical and emotional condition. A thorough care plan also will provide good tips for communication.
- Use simple language and short sentences. If assisting a client, simplify steps and list them one at a time.
- Repeat words and sentences as needed. You can't assume that a client understands your words, even if the client understood them yesterday.
- Project a calm and friendly approach. A client may sense a tense or hurried approach and become more resistive.
- Make sure that your client can hear you. Don't automatically write it off as dementia. Ensure that an assessment has been done.
- Always ask yourself: Are my actions geared to my client's needs or my own?

Improving Communication with Family Members



Like other members of your team, family members demonstrate communication styles as well. However, it may be more difficult for family members to communicate successfully because of the strong emotions many experience over the illness or disability of a loved one. What are some of the feelings that may cloud family members' ability to communicate?

- Grief – feeling sad about the loved one's declining health
- Stress – assuming additional responsibilities or financial burdens at home due to the absence of the client
- Guilt – being unable to continue to care for the loved one at home
- Anger – feeling upset about being left alone or blaming the loved one for becoming ill

In these instances, it may be best to focus on the universal communication techniques that we discussed earlier. And above all – don't take it personally.

Activity: Using T.E.A.M. Talk Styles to Reduce Conflict

An important element of successful teams is reducing conflict. Let's apply what we've learned by working on some examples of communication conflicts. Can you identify each character's communication style and think of ways to improve their interaction?

Example #1: Janet and Marcia

Janet is a CNA who works at Constant Cares CBRF. Janet senses that several of the residents seem to be uncomfortable around Marcia, another CNA. Marcia is very efficient and quick in her movements with residents. She has a “no-nonsense” approach. Janet feels that Marcia orders residents around and seems impatient with them most of the time. Marcia is all about getting the job done. CBRF managers see Marcia as a high achiever. She was named employee-of-the-month a couple months ago.

Janet would like to bring up the residents’ feelings at the next team meeting, but she thinks Marcia will probably just dismiss any suggestions she might have. Janet feels very connected with the residents and wants to help everyone feel more comfortable. But she’s not sure she can risk confronting Marcia at the team meeting. After all, they have to work together, and she doesn’t want to hurt Marcia’s feelings.

What communications styles do Janet and Marcia show? Why do you think so?

Style (Thinker, Engager, Adventurer, Mover)	Why?
Janet	
Marcia	

How could Janet best approach Marcia?

Example #2: Mario and Toni

Mario is a resident care technician at the Northern Pines Residential Facility for People with Developmental Disabilities and has been working on a project with Toni for two weeks. They are reorganizing the recreation area and have a small budget to add more activities for residents. Mario and Toni have sketched out some different ways to rearrange the room. They also made a list of some new games and art supplies they want to buy.

Mario has told Toni which room arrangement he thinks is best and wants to move forward. Toni thinks each option has pros and cons and wants to think about them a while longer. She also wants to shop more to get the best price on their purchases. Mario realizes that the deadline is next week and says to Toni, “We have a deadline to meet—I don’t know why you can’t make up your mind!”

What communications styles do Mario and Toni show? Why do you think so?

Style (Thinker, Engager, Adventurer, Mover)	Why?
Mario	
Toni	

How can Mario better communicate his concerns to Toni?

Example #3: Keisha and Steve

Keisha is a social worker at Hawk Haven CBRF. Elma is a new resident who seems very lonely. She tells Keisha that she really misses her dog. Keisha thinks it would really perk up Elma’s spirits if her pet could live with her at the CBRF.

Keisha is so excited about the idea that she rushes to talk to Steve, the administrator. Steve is on his way to a meeting and is a bit rushed. Steve says that there are too many things to think about to allow Elma’s dog to be in her room—health codes, infection control, having to feed the dog, etc. He thinks it’s just not worth it. Keisha thinks Steve is overly cautious and can’t think “outside the box.”

What communications styles do Keisha and Steve show? Why do you think so?

Style (Thinker, Engager, Adventurer, Mover)	Why?
Keisha	
Steve	

How can Keisha and Steve communicate better?

Example #4: Michael and Mrs. Lee

Michael is an LPN at Olsen Care Center. One of the residents, Carl Lee, is an 85 year-old man with moderate dementia. Recently, Michael has noticed that Mr. Lee’s dementia seems to be progressing.

One day, Mrs. Lee arrives for a visit with her husband. She has also noticed changes in Carl and says to Michael, “Carl didn’t even recognize me when I came to visit yesterday. Are you people giving him his medication? And I noticed he didn’t touch his lunch yesterday—the food here is terrible. My husband’s going to starve to death!” As Michael tries to explain that he’s reported the changes in Carl’s conditions according to the rules, Mrs. Lee waves her arms at Michael and refuses to listen.

Michael is very frustrated with Mrs. Lee. Doesn’t she understand the facts about dementia? Can’t she see that Michael is doing what he’s supposed to do? On the other hand, Mrs. Lee doesn’t want to hear about policies and procedures. She just wants her husband to get well.

What communications styles do Michael and Mrs. Lee show? Why might it be difficult to identify Mrs. Lee’s style?

Style (Thinker, Engager, Adventurer, Mover)	Why?
Michael	
Mrs. Lee	

How could Michael best approach Mrs. Lee?

Why It's Important to Understand Communication Style



Recognizing that the people on your team have different communication styles helps focus on the message instead of the personality. Each of us deserves the right to be heard and the opportunity to express our thoughts and opinions.

When we treat team members with respect and listen to the content of their communication, rather than the context, the goals of a team are much more likely to be met.

As we've learned, each communication style has strengths and limitations. This training provides an opportunity for all of us to maximize our strengths and be more aware of our limitations.

Take a moment to think about some positive outcomes that may result from understanding communication style.

Key #2: Using Your Communication Style Effectively



Now that you understand the different communication styles, let's talk about how to use your style most effectively.

Being able to communicate effectively with others does not come naturally for most people. Most of us need to learn how to be assertive communicators, rather than passive or aggressive.

- Assertiveness is about standing up for yourself, but also about respecting the opinions and needs of others.
- When we communicate assertively, we are clear about our opinions and wishes in relating to others, but we are also open to their opinions and wishes.

About the Three Different Styles – Passive, Aggressive, Assertive

Let's discuss the characteristics of each style.

Passive

Characteristics of a person with a passive interpersonal style may include:

- easily intimidated by others
- believe that his/her rights and opinions are not as important as those of other people
- avoids eye contact
- appears shy and has difficulty saying "no" when asked to do a favor
- overly-courteous and might do just about anything to avoid a fight, argument or disagreement
- gets angry when someone violates her rights, but isn't likely to stand up for herself directly

- feels put down, taken advantage of, or abused
- feels depressed or anxious due to fear of others getting angry or feeling like a “doormat”
- develops a passive-aggressive approach, i.e., won’t stand up to someone directly, but talks about them behind their back or sabotages the outcome
- intimidated by authority and has a hard time dealing with supervisors
- at high risk for being used or taken advantage of
- rarely gets what she wants or needs

NOTE: It is important to note that in some situations in which there is potential danger, it is appropriate to behave passively in order to protect yourself.

Aggressive

Someone with an aggressive interpersonal style behaves very differently than the person with a passive style.

Some characteristics of a person using an aggressive interpersonal style may include:

- Believes that her rights, opinions and needs are more important than those of others (her way or the highway)
- Violates others’ rights and boundaries in an effort to get what she wants
- Sends the message: “I matter more than you do, so get out of my way”
- Uses a loud tone of voice, violates personal space, generally “in your face”
- Is demanding, angry, and hostile in getting to her goal
- Exaggerates the facts
- Ignores others’ feelings and rights
- Alienates others through her hostile style or gets into arguments
- Often does not get her needs met because she offends others or makes them angry

Assertive

The assertive style is the middle ground between being passive and aggressive.

Some characteristics of a person who uses an assertive interpersonal style may include:

- Believes in her own opinion and right to be heard (self-respect)
- Respects the opinions and needs of others (empathy)
- Uses a calm tone of voice
- Makes eye contact and respects the personal space of others
- Avoids labels and judgments
- Asks rather than demands
- Values herself and values others equally
- Is neither a “doormat” (passive) or a “steamroller”(aggressive)
- Uses “I” statements to get the message across
- Does not exaggerate the situation
- Sticks to the facts
- Often get their needs met because they are respectful of others

Making Assertive Statements

Here’s a great formula that puts it all together:

“When you [their behavior], I feel [your feelings].”

When used with factual statements, rather than judgments or labels, this formula provides a direct, non-attacking, more responsible way of letting people know how their behavior affects you. For example:

“When you *raise your voice*, I feel *threatened*.”

A more advanced variation of this formula includes the results of their behavior (again, put into factual terms), and looks like this:

“When you [their behavior], then [results of their behavior],
and I feel [how you feel].”

Here is one example:

“When you arrive late, I have to wait, and I feel frustrated.”

An assertive person may also need to tell the person what they want:

“When you arrive late, I have to wait, and I feel frustrated. Can I count on you be on time tomorrow?”

Why Assertiveness Is Important

Can you think of some reasons why it may be better for you to use an assertive communication style, rather than passive or aggressive?

When communicating assertively...

Do:

- Express feelings honestly – take ownership of your feelings
- Be realistic, respectful and honest
- Express preferences and priorities
- Choose your response carefully, especially when emotions are high

Don't:

- Depersonalize feelings or deny ownership
- Say "You make me mad"
- Exaggerate, minimize, or use sarcasm
- Agree just to be sociable or agree unwillingly

The following are assertive body language descriptors:

Posture: Erect but relaxed, shoulders straight

Facial Expression and gestures: Relaxed, thoughtful, caring, genuine smile

Voice: Firm, pleasant, smooth, even-flowing, comfortable delivery

Activity: One Conversation, Three Styles

Let's take a look at a situation in which two people have a conversation that demonstrates each of the 3 styles.

Sara is a caregiver in a small group home for persons with moderate developmental disabilities. Sara works the third shift, from 10 pm to 6 am, so that she can be home during the day with her 3 year-old daughter and get her 7 year-old son off to school. Another caregiver named Audrey relieves Sara each morning. Sara can't leave the facility until another staff person is there.

It's Thursday at 6:15 am, and Audrey is late for the third time this week. Sara knows that Audrey has a new boyfriend, and Sara suspects that Audrey is out late every night with him. Sara is upset because she needs to get home to her family. Sara also thinks Audrey is taking advantage of her.

At this point, Audrey breezes into the group home with a big smile on her face.

Discussion Questions

- How were you able to identify the style in each version?
- Which version will have the best outcome for Sara? Why do you think so?
- Why did Audrey have such a different reaction in all three of the versions?

Key #3: Observing Professional Boundaries



We've talked about understanding communication styles and learned how to communicate assertively with those around us. Next we're going to talk about some guidelines for maintaining a positive and helpful relationship with your clients or residents. These guidelines are called professional boundaries.

The caregiver has a powerful role in the relationship between caregiver and client. This power comes from:

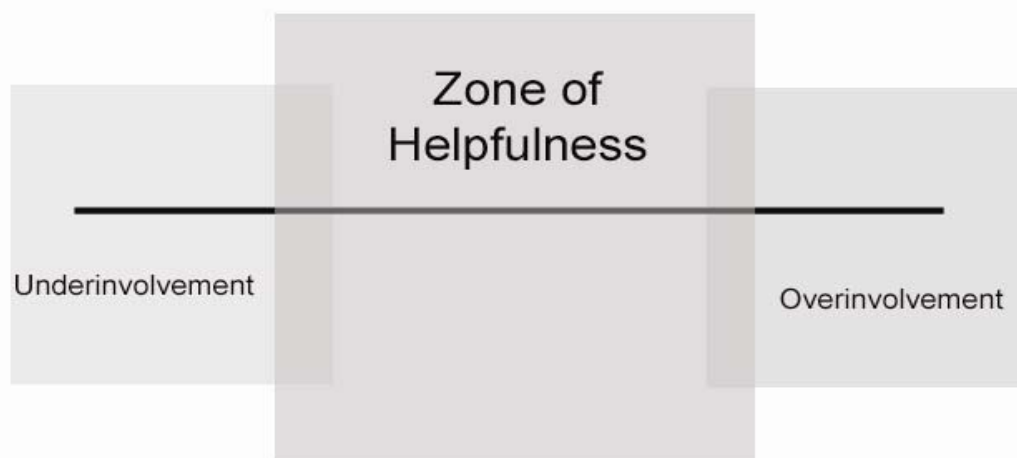
- 1) Control over the services provided to the client
- 2) Access to private knowledge about the client

It's important not to let the balance of power slide heavily onto the caregiver's side of the relationship. Maintaining professional boundaries helps the caregiver maintain a helpful or "**therapeutic**" relationship with the client.

A good question to ask yourself: Are my actions more about my needs than about the needs of my client? If so, you may be crossing a professional boundary.

Zone of Helpfulness

This graphic depicts the idea of maintaining a therapeutic or helpful relationship with your client, neither over-involved or under-involved. Staying within the zone helps you to stay “in bounds.”



Professional Boundaries for Caregivers

Please select your handout entitled “Professional Boundaries for Caregivers.”

Getting Back In-Bounds



Have you ever crossed or thought about crossing any professional boundaries? Have you observed others step over that line? What should a caregiver do if s/he believes s/he may be stepping over a boundary?

- Talk to a trusted colleague
- Talk to your supervisor or manager
- Consider a re-assignment
- Explain to clients that you are unable to behave in certain ways due to professional guidelines (e.g. accept gifts, keep secrets, etc.)
- To protect yourself, draw a line between your work life and your private life

Why Professional Boundaries Are Important

Can you think of some reasons why maintaining professional boundaries is important for caregivers?

Activity: Explore Boundary Crossings

Using what you’ve learned about professional boundaries so far, we’re going to explore some examples of boundary crossings. Please select your handout titled “**Examples of Boundary Crossings.**”

Please choose one person to take notes about your discussion and report back to the larger group at the end of your discussion. When you look at the examples, please discuss:

- What observations can you make about this situation?
- How could the caregiver's actions affect the client?
- How could the situation affect the caregiver?

You'll have about 10 minutes for discussion. You can begin now.

Key #4: Five Steps to Professional Success



While Observing Professional Boundaries (Key #3) outlines appropriate interactions with residents, clients and others in your care, this module focuses on tips for interacting with colleagues, managers and other non-residents.

What are some qualities you think of when you imagine a “professional person?”

Step #1: Put Your Best Foot Forward



Professionalism is most often measured in four basic ways:

- Appearance (How you look)
- Communication (What you say)
- Performance (What you do)
- Attitude (How you approach your work)

Let's look at some tips to make sure that you are succeeding in each area:

Appearance

First impressions are usually made on the unspoken signals you send. As a caregiver, consider some ways that you can convey professionalism without saying a word:

- **Clothing.** Choose clothes that fit the job. Many caregivers wear uniforms, so that can help make choices easier. Appropriate clothing

choices say, “I understand the focus is on the job, not on me.” Clean and crisp attire sends the message that you are organized, competent, and well-prepared to do your work.

- **Hygiene.** The nature of your job requires very close contact with residents and clients, co-workers, etc. so good personal hygiene is a must. Good practices include oral hygiene, daily showers, using deodorant and fresh clothing. Clean hands and short, plain fingernails are two specific ways that caregivers send a message that hygiene is important to them.
- **Body Art.** Different generations and cultures view body art and body jewelry differently. While it’s great to express yourself, it’s best to underplay that aspect of your personality when at work.
- **Perfume/Fragrance:** Although fragrance isn’t visible, those around you will “see you coming” if your perfume is overwhelming. And some are allergic to certain fragrances. Save the perfume for personal time.

Communication



A famous quote suggests that you should never miss an opportunity to say nothing! While we can’t work in silence, it’s important to think about how our words send signals about our professional demeanor. What are some tips for positive communication?

- **Manners.** In today’s busy workplace, it’s easy to forget courtesies like saying please and thank you. How much more likely are you to respond to a request when these simple words are included?
- **Compliments.** When you see it, say it. Never miss an opportunity to acknowledge others’ accomplishments or good deeds.
- **Tone of Voice.** A big complaint in small work spaces is the volume and tone of a co-worker’s voice. Be aware that a loud, angry voice may annoy or frighten others and sends the wrong message about your professionalism.
- **Grammar.** A tune sung off-key focuses on the singer instead of the song. In other words, using poor grammar may cause the listener to focus on how you speak and disregard what you’re trying to say. If your grammar is significantly different from those around you, consider modifying it to convey a more professional image. If you

recognize that grammar isn't your strong suit, how about improving it through on-line courses or websites or textbooks?

- **Jokes/Profanity.** Off-color jokes and the use of profanity may diminish your professionalism more than any other single action. While jokes or conversations sprinkled with swear words may be perfectly acceptable in your personal world, they are a huge roadblock on your road to professional communication.

Performance

Actions speak louder than words. While your words are important, it's your actions that are the final measure of your professionalism.

- **Work Hard.** Being seen as a hard worker is admirable. And employers treasure employees who can get the job done. But how do you prepare yourself to consistently work hard every day? Here are some suggestions for performing your job in the most focused way possible:
 1. Identify Your Job Responsibilities. It really is all about the work. Focus on the tasks associated with those responsibilities.
 2. Do Your Best. Acknowledge that "your best" may vary from day to day. But at the end of the day, can you say you did your best, tried your hardest? If not, take that as a lesson learned for tomorrow, but not as a punishment that you impose on yourself for events already past.
 3. Ask for Help. If you feel that your duties can't humanly be completed in your work day, talk to your supervisor. Ask your supervisor to job-shadow to suggest different approaches. Demonstrating your situation is usually more effective than complaining about it.
 4. Avoid distractions. If you have identified your responsibilities in #1, it's easier to recognize and avoid distractions. Activities that detract from your hard work include excessive chatting with co-workers, focusing on relationships with co-workers instead of customers, allowing too much of your personal life to creep in through phone calls, e-mails, text messages, communications with co-workers, etc.
- **Be Reliable.** The hardest worker in the world can't make up for excessive absenteeism and tardiness. The nature of your job as a

caregiver makes reliability more important than many other positions. Your job won't wait until tomorrow—your services are needed today. Planning ahead for the “what-ifs” in your life that affect your attendance/timeliness can reduce stress and maintain your reliability. What if your daycare provider is unavailable? Do you have a back-up? What if your car breaks down? Do you have another way to get to work?

Attitude

These days, when a person is said to have an “attitude,” it usually means bad attitude. Maintaining a good attitude is critical to any worker's success. A clever quote by Zig Ziglar says it all:

“It's your attitude, not your aptitude, that determines your altitude.”

In other words, a positive attitude can mean more than ability in terms of job success. Employers believe they can always teach skills, but it's much harder to teach “attitude.”

A positive attitude is a good habit that is contagious. Did you ever notice how hard it is to stay grumpy when you're approached by a smiling colleague? With a little practice, you too can view matters from the sunny side of the street. Here's how:

- **Choose Your Attitude.** You have the power to choose your attitude. If you choose the positive approach, your day just got a little easier!
- **Count Your Blessings -- Literally.** Go through a mental checklist of all the good and positive things in your life. This exercise helps put negative things into perspective.
- **Banish the Negative.** While you can't always avoid negativity in the workplace, you can decide never to contribute to it.
- **Keep Moving Forward.** Everyone has an off day or a bad experience. Learn from the past but focus on the future.
- **Don't Take Things Personally.** What others say and do is a reflection of them, not you.

Your attitude affects the way you see yourself and the way others see you. When you choose an optimistic and positive approach to life, both you and your career will benefit.

Step #2: Know the Rules of the Road



There are many rules to keep in mind on your road to professional success, especially when you are a caregiver. Knowing those rules can help you avoid roadblocks and smooth your journey.

Work Rules

Every business has work rules, and abiding by those rules is part of a contract with your employer when you accept a job. Work rules are usually presented and explained during new worker orientations.

It's in your best interest to thoroughly understand the rules at your workplace for several good reasons:

- You want to know what's expected of you
- You don't want to unknowingly break any rules
- You want to be seen as a valuable employee

Here's an example of someone who didn't know the rules:

Mary is 19 years old and has been working at ABC Assisted Living for the last 6 months. It's her first full-time job and she loves helping residents. Her supervisor has complimented her on her hard work and positive attitude.

Yesterday Mary was fired. "I can't believe you're firing me! What did I do wrong?" she asked her boss. The boss reminded Mary that she had been warned twice in the past about being late. "We went over all the work rules in the employee handbook when you started your job, Mary. Here's your signature stating you understood them."

Mary was angry and embarrassed. She hadn't paid much attention to the work rules; it seemed like a bunch of legal mumbo-jumbo. As she left the facility for the last time, she muttered to herself: "Who wants to work here anyway? They don't even appreciate all I did for them!"

Even though Mary was doing a good job, the facility felt it was equally important that Mary get to work on time. Understanding and abiding by the work rules are critical to your success as a professional.

Care Plans

They may be called care plans or individual action plans or given some other name at a care facility. Whatever the name, care plans outline your job duties with each individual resident or client. It's in your best interest, and the interest of the resident, to know the care plans completely.

Advantages to knowing individual care plans include:

- Understanding the resident's history and needs
- Providing the best quality of life possible for the resident
- Making your job easier by understanding successful approaches to use with the resident
- Providing you with an outline of your specific job duties

The most successful care plans include input from doctors, nurses, social work staff, the resident, the resident's family and you—the direct caregiver! Be proactive in participating in the care plan process. Not only will it result in more positive outcomes for those in your care, you will be seen as the professional you really are!

The Caregiver Law



Caregivers in Wisconsin are held to very high standards of conduct. A 1998 law outlines “caregiver misconduct” and imposes penalties on caregivers who commit prohibited acts against clients and residents in long-term care facilities.

The caregiver law is an important set of rules for caregivers. A person found to have violated these rules can be barred from working as a caregiver in Wisconsin. Let’s take a look at the “plain English” definitions of caregiver misconduct.

Caregiver Misconduct – Simplified Definitions

MISCONDUCT	SIMPLE DEFINITION*	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES
ABUSE	<p><i>An intentional act that:</i></p> <p>Contradicts a health care facility's policy/procedures AND Is not part of the care plan AND Is meant to cause harm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical abuse – hitting, slapping, pinching, kicking, etc. Sexual abuse – harassment, inappropriate touching, assault Verbal abuse – threats of harm, saying things to intentionally frighten a client Emotional abuse – humiliation, harassment, intimidation with threats of punishment or depriving care or possessions
NEGLECT	<p><i>A careless or negligent act that:</i></p> <p>Fails to follow facility procedure or care plan AND Causes or could cause pain, injury or death BUT Is not intended to cause harm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not using a gait belt when required or transferring a client alone Failure to perform ROM exercises Turning off a call light Leaving a client wet or soiled Skipping work in a client's home without notifying your employer Disregarding hydration orders Failure to deliver or administer medication
MISAPPROPRIATION	<p><i>An intentional act that:</i></p> <p>Is meant to permanently deprive a client of property OR Misuses a client's personal property AND Is done without the client's consent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theft of cash, checks, credit cards, jewelry, etc. Misuse of property, e.g. using phone to make toll calls Identity theft

These definitions apply to caregivers in health care facilities regulated by the Department of Health Services.

A caregiver with a substantiated finding of abuse, neglect or misappropriation is listed on Wisconsin's Caregiver Misconduct Registry. Caregivers with findings may not work in certain facilities unless approved through the Rehabilitation Review process.

Reporting Misconduct

Under Wisconsin law:

- A *caregiver* must report a suspected incident of misconduct immediately to a supervisor
- A *long-term care facility* must investigate and report to the State Division of Quality Assurance under certain conditions

Activity: Reporting Challenges

One of the toughest challenges a caregiver may ever face is reporting suspected misconduct by a co-worker. What are some of the reasons a caregiver might hesitate to report an incident to a supervisor?

What could supervisors or managers do to make it easier for caregivers to report suspected misconduct?

Both the caregiver and the facility have a legal responsibility to report suspected caregiver misconduct. While it may be the hardest thing you ever have to do, your responsibility to your clients and residents must come first.

When caregivers and facilities talk openly about the requirement to report, there is no unspoken expectation that witnesses to caregiver misconduct will remain silent.

Step #3: Don't Travel Alone!



Few travel the road to professional success by themselves. And what a boring trip it would be! Along the way, colleagues, supervisors, clients and many others will offer challenges, lessons, frustrations, and rewards to your life's experience as a caregiver. Let's talk about two major areas that are essential for successful professional relationships:

Teamwork

Employers often say they are looking for “team players.” But what does that mean exactly? Here are some qualities used to describe people who work well within a team:

Shows Dependability. Gets work done and does his or her fair share. Follows through on job duties—a person you can count on all the time.

Communicates Positively. Speaks up and states thoughts clearly and honestly but with respect for others and the work of the team. Asks for and respects the input of others.

Listens Actively. Considers ideas and opinions from other team members. Accepts criticism and disagreement without becoming defensive.

Participates Energetically. Good team players actively participate in the work of the team. They have a “can-do” attitude and volunteer for assignments. Their philosophy is, “While I’m here, I’ll give it all I’ve got!”

Shares Information and Experiences. Good team members “spread the wealth” by sharing information to keep others informed. They develop good relationships with other members to encourage open communication. Some people see knowledge as power and hoard information. Not this team member!

Cooperates and Supports Partners. This team member believes in working with others to get the job done and works this way naturally. Good team players figure out ways to get along with co-workers who have different styles and views in order to get the job done.

Accepts Change. Good team players see change as an opportunity for growth, not a threat to the status quo.

Shows Flexible Thinking. This team member can live with different points of view and compromise when necessary. Flexible thinkers stay away from rigid thoughts and move forward to get the job done.

Shows commitment to the team. Strong team players value their work, the team and the team's commitment to meet its goals. They give and expect good effort.

Solves Problems. This member approaches problems with solutions in mind. They don't dwell on a problem, or place blame. Problem solvers are always looking forward in a positive way to defeat problems and improve the team's work.

Team players display many different characteristics and styles. It isn't always the outgoing, talkative person who works best on a team. Sometimes it's the quiet person who seems to always offer sensible approaches and follows through on his/her efforts.

The best indicator of teamwork is demonstrated by the person who sees his or her individual work as part of a greater effort. The commitment is about winning—but not in the sports sense. In the caregiver world, teamwork means using the best contributions of the whole team to accomplish a goal. In this case, the goal is providing exceptional care and treatment to clients and residents while enjoying the support of other members of the team.

Activity: Memory Game Team Building Exercise

Many of you have probably played this game in the past. Today we're going to use it to focus on the positive power of a team.

Look back at the qualities of good teamwork that we talked about earlier. Did your team display any of these qualities? Which ones? Did your team have a better outcome (remember more objects) than when you worked alone?

Successful Professional Relationships

Positive relationships with co-workers and supervisors contribute directly to job satisfaction and performance. Remember the saying, "You can pick your friends, but you can't pick your family?" The same holds true on the job; you usually can't choose your co-workers. But you do have choices when it comes to fostering positive relationships in the workplace. And the attention you dedicate to those relationships will pay dividends to you, the workplace, and the residents and clients that you serve.

Listed below are some thoughts about ways to have successful relationships at work:

Friends vs. Colleagues. Working closely with others can blur the line between friendship and professional relationships. You have a personal life full of joy, hardships, successes, and challenges that you naturally want to share with someone. Although lifelong friendships sometimes start as professional relationships, don't assume that every co-worker has your best interests at heart or wants to hear personal details. It can be especially tricky when a relationship with a colleague goes sour because you must still work with that person. Pay special attention if you are considering a romantic relationship with a co-worker.

Too Much Information. Personal information is just that—personal. In your professional life, it's usually best to keep those intimate details to yourself. Sensitive topics include your sex life, problems with family

members, romantic relationships, your health, your salary and your desire to find a different job.

Courtesy vs. Familiarity. In the workplace, courtesy and respect are keys to successful relationships. Behavior that is perfectly acceptable in more casual or personal relationships may be viewed negatively at work. For example, kidding around or teasing friends and family may be a time-honored way of communicating. But those same approaches may be misunderstood by co-workers.

Gossip and the Grapevine. Although both are informal ways to communicate, neither is based on reliable facts. Consider whether you want to participate in a conversation that may prove hurtful or harmful to another. The underlying motivation to gossip maliciously usually stems from feelings of low self-esteem or jealousy of another. The person who gossips is trying to feel important or interesting at the expense of others.

Hot Button Issues. There are certain topics that people tend to feel very passionate about. For that reason alone, it's best to avoid them in your workplace conversations. Topping the list are religion and politics (particularly around election time). Even though you may be discussing either topic with a like-minded co-worker, someone overhearing your conversation may be offended or feel uncomfortable.

Getting Along with the Boss. Some people have trouble with authority or authority figures. But professionals find ways to get along with all types of personalities. Sometimes it helps to "walk a mile" in your supervisor's shoes. You both have the same goal, but your supervisor must also be concerned about staffing levels, training, human resources, costs, building safety and other big picture items. Problem solving is part of your boss's job, too. While it's important to report problems, try to offer solutions. Pay attention to the rules and work with integrity. Most bosses couldn't ask for more.

Dealing with Difficult Co-workers. With the many different personalities and styles found in the workplace, it's inevitable that people will clash from time to time. Most of the time you can disregard or avoid minor incidents, but sometimes you will have to find the courage to face situations head on:

Think about how this assertive approach might work:

1. Talk to the person privately about their words or actions. Avoid exaggeration and be respectful. The statement might start out, “Jane, I enjoy hearing about your children, but when our conversations go on too long...”
2. Tell the person how you feel. “...I feel like I’m neglecting my responsibilities,” or “I’m worried the boss will think I’m wasting time.”
3. Ask for what you want. “Can I count on you to help me limit our personal conversations to lunch or breaks?”

Can you think of any other tips for establishing successful relationships at work?

Step #4: Remember the Destination



Think of your path to professionalism as a means of reaching your destination or goal. Clearly, as a caregiver, the most important goal is providing high quality care to residents and clients.

There are many judges of quality care including supervisors, family members, state regulators and others. But the most important person in determining the quality of care is the person receiving it—the resident.

If we look at the resident as a *customer*, it may be easier to define quality care and service because we’ve all been customers ourselves. We usually think of *customer service* in terms of companies that sell goods or services.

Here are some types of entities that depend on strong customer service to attract and keep your business:

- Grocery, clothing, discount and appliance stores
- Utility, phone and cell phone, internet and cable TV companies
- On-line retailers, home shopping networks and catalog merchandisers
- Rental agencies, banks, insurance companies
- Health care providers, e.g. doctors, dentists, nurses, hospitals
- Elected officials. In this case, the customers are the voters!

Activity: Customer Service

Think about a negative or frustrating situation in which you were the customer. Write down two or three things the customer service representative did to make your experience unsatisfactory.

Next, think about a positive or satisfying situation in which you were the customer. Write down two or three things the customer service representative did to make your experience satisfying.

Take a look at the two charts. What do you think are the most important qualities a caregiver should demonstrate to make their services a satisfactory experience for their customers (residents and clients)?

When we are able to empathize with clients and residents by comparing our own experiences in a similar situation, it seems much easier to reach our destination or goal of providing quality care.

Step #5: Celebrate Your Journey



A caregiver was overhead saying, “This is the toughest job I’ve ever loved!” Caregivers have demanding jobs and provide critical, life-supporting services to fragile people every day. There is no more honorable task than serving those who need us most.

As you follow the steps to reach your professional goals, take the time to celebrate your accomplishments and look forward to higher levels of achievement. Here are some ways to support yourself and your colleagues along the way:

Stay Connected

In the last few years, more resources for direct caregivers are available on the internet. For example:

Wisconsin Direct Caregiver Alliance

Supports caregivers through education, leadership development, and a variety of networking opportunities which will enhance the professional visibility of caregivers and improve quality of care in Wisconsin’s long term care system.

<http://www.wicaregivers.com/Index.html>

Wisconsin Long-Term Care Workforce Alliance

A coalition of public and private organizations and individuals that recognize the critical and indispensable role direct caregivers play in meeting the long term care needs of older persons and persons with disabilities in Wisconsin. The purpose of the Alliance is to develop and implement statewide community based strategies to improve the recognition, retention and recruitment of the long term care workforce.

<http://www.wiworkforcealliance.com/index.htm>

Keep Learning

There are many opportunities for life-long learning:

- **Did you always mean to go back to school?** Whether it means getting a G.E.D. or a Ph.D., explore that next step of formal education.
- **Learn a new skill for your own enjoyment.** Take a cooking class; learn to skate or how to knit. Craft stores, community centers, technical colleges and public school systems offer a variety of free or inexpensive classes.
- **Enrich your professional knowledge base.** Find resources that will improve your professional skills. For example, caregivers are seeing more residents in later stages of dementia or Alzheimer's disease. To learn more about these conditions, start with the Alzheimer's Association website for information and resources at www.alz.org.
- **Suggest training topics.** Most long-term care facilities are required to provide ongoing training to staff. Identify a need and suggest it to your boss.
- **Interested in pursuing a career path?** Find out what it takes to move up the ladder. Health care job opportunities will grow steadily in the coming decades as America ages. Wisconsin has excellent technical college and public university systems. For more information, try <http://www.witechcolleges.com/> or <http://www.wisconsin.edu/>

Inspire Your Workplace

We all know that breaks in our routines are welcome in the working world. After checking with your boss, plan some activities that might help strengthen your team, make work fun or provide a respite from daily stressors. Here are some ideas others have used to brighten their days:

- Spiff up your break room, your locker or other employee space. It doesn't have to cost a penny. Replace those year-old magazines with newer ones from home or friends; ask a few co-workers to contribute a coffee mug to replace the stained and chipped collection;

look for free, colorful posters to replace the tattered versions on your walls.

- Establish a lending library of used books, CDs, movies, etc. Don't contribute anything you expect to get back, however. There won't be a "librarian" on duty.
- Bring a food treat on a day no one expects it or plan a pot-luck where everyone brings a dish to pass.
- Dress up or decorate for holidays.
- Exchange unwanted items with co-workers. Use a small bulletin board in an employee area to post items that someone else might need: used furniture or small appliances, children's or baby items, uniforms, etc.
- Plan a "compliment" day. Use tickets, poker chips or pennies. Staff make a special effort to "pay compliments" to co-workers by handing them a token and offering a word of praise. If you wish, provide a small prize to the person who earns the most compliments that day.

As you can see, celebrating your journey requires extra effort on your part, but can provide great rewards to you, your colleagues and those in your care.

As you travel along the path to professional success, keep in mind the 5 steps we just reviewed. And most of all -- enjoy the trip!

Resources

Goleman, D. "Working with Emotional Intelligence"

Neilson, S., Thaelke, S. "Conflict Resolution through Winning Colors®"

UCLA WRC-Effective Communication:
www.thecenter.ucla.edu/assertmid.html

UW-Eau Claire Counseling Services
www.uwec.edu/Counsel/pubs/assertivecommunication.htm

National Council of State Boards of Nursing, "Professional Boundaries"
www.ncsbn.org

Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, "Professional Boundaries for Registered Nurses: Guidelines for the Nurse-Client Relationship"
www.nurses.ab.ca

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