

The New Advisor Guidebook: Mastering the art of advising

Chapter 11 - Effective Communication Skills

Reader Learning Outcomes

Readers will:

- Identify effective communication skills occurring in video production of advising session.
- Apply effective communication skills in one-on-one advising interactions, as displayed by video or audio tape of advising session.
- Determine appropriate referrals in a case study.
- Evaluate his or her own listening, interviewing and referral skills, using the Applications and Insights Advisor Checklist on pp. 226-228.

Aiming for Excellence discussion questions and activities

Self-reflection

- What is your best communication skill? How did you learn it or develop it?
- Which of your communication skills needs the most improvement? How did you learn or develop it? What are your plans to enhance it?
- What part of advising is the most difficult for you to relate to students?
 - Which aspect of listening is most difficult for you?
 - Which aspect of interviewing is most difficult for you?
 - Which aspect of referring is most difficult for you?
 - Which could be improved?
 - What strategies would you use for improvement?
- Ask a colleague or supervisor to answer the above questions about you.

Make a plan for change based on the feedback you receive. Consider attending a NACADA workshop, researching the NACADA Clearinghouse for more information, shadowing another advising professional, and other enrichment activities.

Recall

Think about a verbal interchange you experienced with a teacher (college or high school), advisor, administrator, or supervisor in which you felt genuinely understood. Think about the behaviors the listener displayed to make you feel understood. Do you currently incorporate these behaviors in your own communication with advisees? Add those and other actions of your mentor to create a communication skill bank.

Pick a Model

Interview an individual whose communications skills you admire to gain a better understanding of effective communication techniques. The following questions may yield important insights:

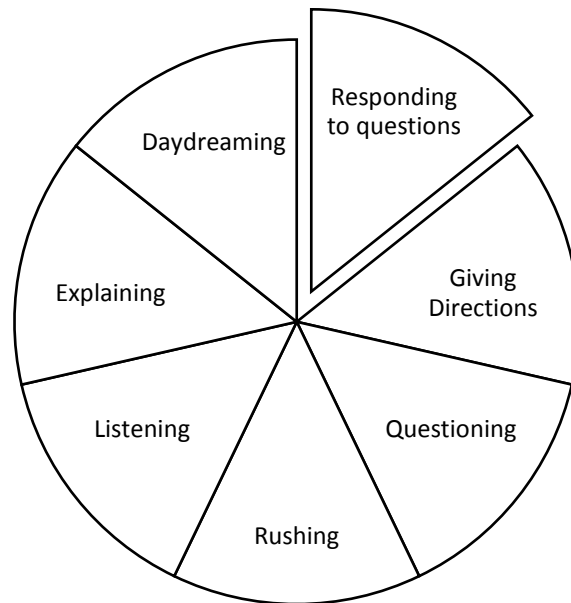
- How did you learn the communication skills you practice?

- What do you keep in mind when communicating with others?
- Do you still struggle with some aspects of communicating?
- What strategies do you use to continue improving your communication skills and outcomes?

Ask to shadow the person to study his or her interactions. Afterward, write a personal reflection listing behaviors you would like to incorporate into your own interactions.

Communication Circle

Write 7 to 10 words or phrases that describe your communication style. Then draw a circle and divide it, as in the following example, according to the amount of time you spend using that aspect of communication in a typical advising session (the segments will not be equal):



Did any pattern surprise you? What would you like to change about your circle?

Telling Lies (Group Exercise)

- Create a set of lies to describe yourself as an advisor.
- Share the lies about yourself as an advisor with a partner, creating as much of a false persona as possible.
- Explain your feelings about the persona you depicted in the created lie.
- With other participants discuss the following questions:
- What similarities exist between the real and created persona?
- What characteristics of the real or made-up advisor may describe expectations for advising, the institution, or society?
- To the extent you feel comfortable, share the lies that may reflect professional goals or setbacks.

Advising Award

Imagine you were nominated and received a national advising award (NACADA's Outstanding New Advisor Award or Outstanding Advisor Award) based on your superb relational skills. Write mock letters of recommendation from the perspective of a student, peer, and supervisor who knows your communication skills. Are there important skills not mentioned in the letters which you lack or upon which you could improve? How will you learn to improve or expand your competencies?

Some institutions offer professional development programs or have diversity offices that present workshops dealing with relational issues. Workshop topics may include handling difficult people and mediating disputes, among others. Try to attend one workshop a semester even if it does not directly address academic advising situations. For example, Dealing with Difficult People may be designed for supervisors or managers; however, the skills addressed may be directly applicable to advising. After attending a workshop, make a list of the skills and ideas to implement in short- and long-term practice. Record the ways in which your new relational tools are working. Revisit your list on a monthly basis and continue to implement skills and ideas until you have gone through your entire list.