



**CAPRICORN**

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## Workshop Communications

Good communication is the lifeblood of any successful workshop.

Communication can be defined as the exchange of ideas or information and the sharing of feelings. This definition implies a two-way process. Putting a notice on the workshop noticeboard is not considered communication. It is simply providing information rather than an exchange of information.

Information must reach the receiver at the right time, in the right format and in language that can be understood by the receiver. Whether a workshop is large or small, the objectives will remain the same, although the communication tools may vary.

### Benefits of good communication

Everyone in a workshop benefits from good communication and the business benefits because it becomes a more productive and safer workshop.

Other benefits are that the workshop is healthier and happier, customer relations are greatly improved and good relationships develop between co-workers.

Poor communication will usually have the opposite outcome. Productivity may drop and relationships between management and employees can become strained.

People communicate differently, so it is important to consider how to communicate with each person.

For example, explaining a technical problem to a fellow worker will be different from the way the same problem is explained to a customer, who has no technical background.

The main communication used in a workshop is verbal or spoken. The other, and equally important, is non-verbal communication in documents such as a job card, or a workshop process.

Verbal communication is the most effective way to convey information and ideas and can be done face-to-face with an individual or groups, over the telephone or by video link. On the other hand, verbal communication can quite often be the one that causes the most problems, if not handled correctly.

### **Questioning skills**

There are subtle differences in questioning techniques which can dictate how the answer is delivered.

The most common use of questions in the workplace is to gain information.

There are closed questions and open questions.

A closed question is used when a limited answer is required. For example, 'Was the engine hot or cold when the warning light came on?' This type of question keeps the conversation focused on the topic and can generate a lot of information quickly.

An open question allows a longer and more detailed response. 'What do you think of the new engine analyser?' will get a different answer from 'Do you think the new engine analyser is easier to use than the old one?' The first question allows more information to be communicated than the second question, which requires only a yes or no answer.

### **Using the telephone**

A telephone call is often the first contact a person will have with a workshop. Every caller should be treated as a potential customer, so it is important to make a good impression.

When using the telephone always:

- speak clearly
- use a polite and friendly tone of voice
- write down and repeat important information
- record the time of the call
- let the caller know you are listening by saying 'yes, I have got that' or 'I understand' occasionally
- if you cannot answer the inquiry, make sure it is followed up
- inform the caller what will happen next

- let the caller hang up first.

## **Listening skills**

Active listening is a technique in which the listener provides feedback to the speaker. The feedback can be verbal – ‘I understand’, or non-verbal – nodding of the head to show the speaker that you are listening. Active listening is a skill that can be practised and developed by using some or all of the following techniques:

- maintain eye contact with the speaker when possible
- take written notes of important points
- don't be distracted
- ask questions to clarify anything that is not fully understood
- summarise the main points when the speaker has finished.

## **Barriers to good communication**

Communication breaks down when it is obvious the message is not getting through to the right person at the right time. Some of the more common mistakes that happen in the workshop are:

- not clarifying or checking the main points
- use of inappropriate language and that includes use of abbreviations that might be understandable among mechanics and technicians, but mean zip to the customer.
- poor body language, sending mixed signals to the receiver
- not listening or being distracted during a conversation.

Identifying why communication has broken down is essential to resolving any problems.

## **Workplace documents**

All important information in the workplace needs to be documented and filed. Documents may need to be kept for up to seven years for taxation or warranty purposes.

The following forms are commonly used in automotive workshops for the service and repair of vehicles.

- job card
- repair orders that record all of the essential information relating to the repair, which is then accessed for the final invoice. This information would include:

- business name and details
- reference number and date
- customer's name and contact details
- vehicle details including registration and VIN
- odometer reading and fuel level
- description of the job to be carried out
- extra work required
- parts and labour used
- discounts and promotions.

## **Invoice**

An invoice is a request for payment for the goods or services provided by the repairer. The invoice details the repairs and materials used. It also states the method and terms of payment. For example, 'A discount of 5% will apply if the account is paid in cash when collecting the vehicle' or 'Payment is due within 30 days'.

At the end of the day, good communication is vital for the smooth and profitable running of any workshop. Mistakes made in a workshop can, in most cases, be traced back to poor communication.

We might be good technicians, but are we good communicators?

The place to start is [www.tatbiz.net.au/capricorn](http://www.tatbiz.net.au/capricorn)

*Just go for it!*