Interviews, Reviews, and Other Business Conversations

Inquire: Communication at Work

Overview

In a business setting, you will engage in several forms of professional communication. This lesson focuses on interviewing skills first, so that you are able to best get in the door. After interviewing skills, you will learn about writing a business review. Knowing what to include in your review is important, and this lesson will help with that. From there, you will learn what to do when receiving feedback on a business review. It is important to learn from the feedback, whether positive or negative. Finally, you will learn about small talk in the office — an underrated, yet crucial, office skill.

Big Question: Are you good at small talk?

Watch: Making Communication Work at Work

No matter where you find yourself working, you’ll have to talk to other people during your work day. This lesson covers some types of professional communication, ranging from job interviews, to business reviews, to everyday small talk.

The first step to landing your dream job is the interview. Spend some time researching the company and the position so you can convince the employer that you’re the best person for the job. Being able to explain how you would fit into the company based on their values and products is a big bonus in an interview setting. Knowing what the job requires allows you to explain your strengths and how they relate to the position directly. This can be the difference between getting the job and getting no response from an employer.

Next in the lesson, you’ll learn about business reviews. Business reviews allow your supervisor to explain what you do well, what you don’t do as well, and give advice for you to improve. This lesson talks about reviews in two ways: how to write them and how to learn from them. You’ll learn that feedback should be both professional and constructive. When you receive feedback, be open-minded and learn from it. It might sting, but it will be for the better. If you think it’s unfair, get a second opinion to figure out whether the feedback is missing the mark.

Lastly, you’ll learn about small talk. Small talk is a part of life that you’ll use almost every day. It consists of polite conversations about unimportant or irrelevant topics. It allows coworkers to connect in a
low-stakes environment. This lesson offers tips on how to make the most out of small talk at work, and how to approach small talk for people who aren’t as confident.

As you go through this lesson, think about your daily work life. What communication happens there? What type of communication is a strength for you? What parts of your communication can you improve?

Read: Practical Professional Speaking

Overview

Professional speaking involves many facets. This lesson will look at several of these highlighting how to prepare for an interview, write and receive feedback from a business review, and small talk at the office.

How to Prepare for an Interview

Good interviewing skills can be the difference between landing or missing out on your dream job. This lesson will provide ways to ensure you do better in interview environments. The first thing to know is that good interviews come from good preparation. That means you want to research the company you have applied to. You also want to research the specific job you are applying for. When interviewing, you are selling yourself as a good fit for the company and the job, so knowing this information helps you to be the best candidate.

The next thing to do is update your resume. A resume is a brief document — usually one page long — that summarizes your educational and professional background. You want your resume to be as current as possible, so before you submit it anywhere, make sure it has the most current information. Ensure that you cater your resume to each specific job opening by making your information relevant to the position. Finally, practice interviewing. Get someone to ask you common interview questions and practice upselling yourself when asked about yourself.

How to Write a Business Review

A business review is a written report explaining how your business is doing and what needs to be improved on. When writing a review, be sure to give useful feedback. These are formal documents for the benefit of the company. Don’t leave petty comments like a person might in a Yelp review. Your comments should have enough detail to specifically identify issues on a broad range of topics. Once you identify the problems, provide recommendations the business can take to resolve the issues. Throughout this process, it is important to be honest. Do not exaggerate. Provide adequate context so that any reader can understand the problem and how you recommend it be resolved. Finally, comment on things that are going well. A review should be helpful and constructive, but also highlight positive things a business should continue doing.

How to Receive Feedback from a Business Review

Business reviews are meant to improve the efficiency of a business and its employees. When you receive feedback from a review, it’s important to know how to handle that feedback and what to do with it. First and foremost, take it to heart. This feedback is not meant to be mean or rude; it is meant to make you and those around you better at your jobs. Take the feedback as a constructive comment, and learn from the information you receive. In the same vein, do not take the feedback personally. It is not a personal attack.
against you or your performance. The sooner you learn how to take feedback well, the quicker you can be a positive force in your workplace.

If you ever receive feedback that you are unsure about or think is wrong, seek out a second opinion. Go to someone with sufficient context of your work so they can understand if the feedback is fair or if it goes too far. Finally, no matter what advice you receive — good or bad — find ways to learn from it. That might mean learning how to let go of things, or it might mean learning how to get along better with people around you. Whatever the feedback says, there will always be something to learn from it.

How to Maintain Professionalism in Casual Interactions

Watercooler talk is small talk that happens in a work environment. Whether or not your office contains a watercooler to gather around, “watercooler talk” is a phrase describing situations when coworkers talk about things unrelated to work.

When in these situations, there are a few things to keep in mind. Generally, remember that you are still at work, and these are still your coworkers. Be kind and polite, don’t say rude things, and avoid being difficult just to be difficult. Pay attention to what people say so you can positively contribute to conversations without distracting from or repeating anything. Also pay attention to social cues signaling that someone wants to talk, leave the conversation, or dislikes a topic of conversation. When you notice any of these things, be accommodating to the person sending cues to the group. Work can be a stressful place, and often, people relieve that stress by telling jokes. When these situations arise, you should be sensitive with the jokes you tell and avoid subject matter that might be distasteful or crude.

Reflect Poll: How Do You Prepare?

How much do you prepare for interviews?
- Prepare? What’s that?
- I read the job description. What more do I need?
- My resume looks new and improved every time!
- I know everything about a business by the time I interview.

Expand: Small Talk at Work

Overview
Small talk is a crucial part of day-to-day work interactions, but for some people, small talk can be difficult. This section will walk you through the basics so you can begin to feel better about your small talk skills.

Small Talk 101
Small talk consists of polite conversations about unimportant or irrelevant topics. It might be the weather, a movie, a book, a song, or the morning’s headlines. Whatever the topic, small talk serves an important purpose — building social relationships. Serious topics of conversation such as the origins of life or heated political discussions can be draining. Not everyone wants to engage in that kind of a conversation all the time. Small talk offers a way for people to talk to others with low stakes. These low stakes let people open up in a way that other forms of conversation might prevent. When people open up, you get to learn about them — what they care about, what annoys them, or what they do for fun just to name a few. Keep in mind, however, there are things to avoid when talking. Primarily, don’t show off. Mental break
time is important, so don’t feel the need to always talk about work or something that sounds “smart.” The weather really can be interesting. You don’t have to talk about differential equations or some other complex topic just to seem smart.

There are a few things you can do to make small talk easier. First, have topics prepared based on where you are. If you’re at work, you might want to ask people when they started. At a party, ask how someone knows the host. Wherever you are going, have topics of conversation ready. A great way to do this is to ask questions. These prompt the other person to speak. Don’t go overboard asking too many questions.

Once you have asked a question, engage in active listening where you pay attention entirely to the person you are talking to. Asking questions and paying attention to the person’s answers are great starting places to improve your small talk skills in no time!

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

An article providing tips for small talk in a work environment

- Link to resource: https://www.forbes.com/sites/christinapark/2015/03/30/an-introverts-guide-to-small-talk-eight-painless-tips/

An article providing tips on how to best prepare for a business interview

- Link to resource: https://careerservices.princeton.edu/undergraduate-students/interviews-offers/preparing-interviews

An article providing tips on how to write a business review

- Link to resource: https://bizfluent.com/how-4964642-write-business-review.html

Lesson Glossary

resume: a brief document — usually one page long — summarizing your educational and professional background

business review: a written report explaining how your business is doing and what needs to be improved

watercooler talk: small talk that happens in a work environment

small talk: polite conversations about unimportant or irrelevant topics

Check Your Knowledge

1. Small talk serves no purpose in a work environment.
   a. True
   b. False

2. Your resume should be updated each time you apply for a job.
   a. True
   b. False

3. You should try to learn something from any feedback you receive in a business review.
   a. True
   b. False
Answer Key:

Citations

Lesson Content:
Authored and curated by Alexander Amos, Elizabeth Amos for The TEL Library. CC BY NC SA 4.0