

“*The MainStreet Small Business Assistance Program provides the following communication tips to help effectively deal with potentially stressful situations generated by transportation improvement projects. These tips can assist you and your employees in communicating with each other, your clients/customers, vendors and the general public.*”

1. Develop the Ability to Listen

- To help placate angry employees/customers/vendors, it is critical to try to understand why they are upset. To ignore or invalidate their feelings or opinions will generate negative reactions.
- Ask questions about their concerns and listen to their response, no matter how irrational it may seem.
- Try not to generate solutions on their behalf, rather assist them in developing their own solutions.
- Ask questions beginning with “*when, where, how, what, who*”, effective for gathering facts, which generate actions and solutions.
- Avoid questions beginning with “*why*.” These types of questions can result in the formation of opinions, which generate reaction.
- Disassociate yourself from distress and anger and listen to their concerns. Help clarify their feelings by asking nonthreatening questions.
- Pay close attention to what people say and respond with questions or acknowledgment for clarification.
- Speak little, listen more.

2. Clarify What You Hear by Repeating it Back

- *Example:* Someone says, “*I can’t believe how stupid your business access sign is.*” You might respond “*I understand you’re upset about our sign. Could we have situated it in a more helpful place?*”
- *Example:* Someone says “*How long is this construction going to take? I’m not sure I want to continue doing business with you if it’s such a hassle.*” You might respond “*I understand you’re frustrated with the construction. Please realize that we’re committed to keeping you as a customer. How can we ensure that?*”

3. Once the Person is Calm, Ask Permission to Offer Solutions

- Ask permission to make a suggestion, e.g., “*May I make a suggestion?*”
- If they respond negatively to your suggestions, resume asking questions until they become calmer and more receptive. The calmer they are, the more likely they are to listen to or create a their own solution.
- Never tell someone that they “*should have*” done something. They may perceive this as judgmental and respond negatively. Rather, talk about ways to handle future situations.
Examples: “*I can see that this did not work for either of us. What can we do differently in the future?*” or “*It appears that our ideas haven’t worked. What else can we try?*”

“If you have questions or need assistance, please contact your MainStreet business outreach liaison.”

4. Encourage Ideas for a Joint Solution

- Don't say “*That won't work.*” Instead say “*That's an interesting idea. What could we do better, given (insert what you see as the barrier)?*”
- Develop solutions that work for both of you.
- Overcome common obstacles, e.g.,
 - If it's not their idea, help make it theirs.
 - If it doesn't meet their interests, consider their interests.
 - If it may cause embarrassment, devise solutions that would not.
 - If it is too much, too soon, be encouraging and take baby steps.

5. Don't Lose Your Cool

If you begin to lose your ability to work effectively, take a break to calm down or transfer the situation to another person in your organization.

6. Don't Try to Solve Everyone's Problems

You may not be the person for the job. If you don't have the answers to address the concerns, work to find the appropriate person who can.

7. Focus on Understanding

Focus on trying to understand the concerns and assist in resolving them.

8. Reaffirm Agreements

- Be sure your agreements include the day, date, time, terms and responsibility when possible.
- If necessary, follow up with an appreciative note or memo.

9. Let Them Go

If you can't reach an agreement, wish the person well and let them go.

10. Be Proactive and Stay Informed

- Focus on that which you have control over and not the project itself.
- Don't wait for someone to inform you about the improvement project.
- Understand the potential effects it will have on your organization/business.
- Read all the information that is forthcoming from the municipalities and other project entities involved.
- Take advantage of the confidential MainStreet Business Assistance Program services at no cost.
- If you have questions or need assistance, please contact your MainStreet business outreach liaison.