

Language Modelling During Onboarding

Leading by example often goes further than written or verbal instruction. Employers can harness language modelling to demonstrate how clear, respectful workplace communication sounds in everyday situations and how it contributes to the functional culture of a workplace. Language modelling provides newcomers with usable vocabulary and a safe chance to practice and adapt to the communication style of their workplace.

Workplace Communication Phrases to Include in Onboarding:

Asking For Clarification

“I don’t think we have the same understanding. Can you please repeat that as I didn’t understand the first time?”

Confirming an Instruction

“To confirm, you would like me to _____ by _____, is that correct?”

Stating Uncertainty

“I am not sure about this step. Can you show me?”

Asking for More Time

“I understand the task, but I need a few minutes to check the instructions.”

Offering an Idea

“I have a suggestion that may make this easier. Is now a good time to share it?”

Disagreeing Respectfully

I see it differently because _____. Can we look at both options?”

Raising a Safety Concern

“I am concerned this may not be safe. Can we stop and review it?”

Ensure that employees are aware these are communication tools, rather than a script they must recite perfectly.



Managers and experienced employees should consistently demonstrate communication that is easy to follow.

This may include:

- Using short sentences and giving one instruction at a time.
- Speaking at a measured pace and pausing between ideas.
- Using plain words, explaining acronyms, and avoiding slang, idioms, sarcasm, and unexplained workplace jargon.
- Giving instructions in chronological order: “First..., then..., after that...”
- Supporting spoken instructions with a written checklist, photo, diagram, sample, or demonstration.
- Summarizing decisions, responsibilities, and deadlines.
- Asking the other person to repeat their understanding of what was communicated.

Sources: www.cmu.edu/student-success/other-resources/handouts/lang-supp-pdfs/quick-tips-nnes-new.pdf | www.mdsg.umd.edu/fellowship-experiences/three-tips-effective-communication-non-native-speakers-%E2%80%94-and-everyone-else | trainingindustry.com/articles/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/7-effective-communication-strategies-for-teams-with-non-native-speakers/

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