

August 2024

Becoming a people manager can be an exciting challenge no matter where you work. You'll need to learn how to communicate with your team, set expectations, delegate and manage your team's priorities and performance.

One of the key aspects of being a manager is communication. All communication has a purpose, whether it's sharing information, trying to change a behaviour, working to solve a problem, or building a stronger relationship with a new team member or setting and maintaining standards. As a manager, you spend your day talking, listening, presenting, and sharing information with people both inside and outside the Force.

### Here are some tips to improve your communication skills:

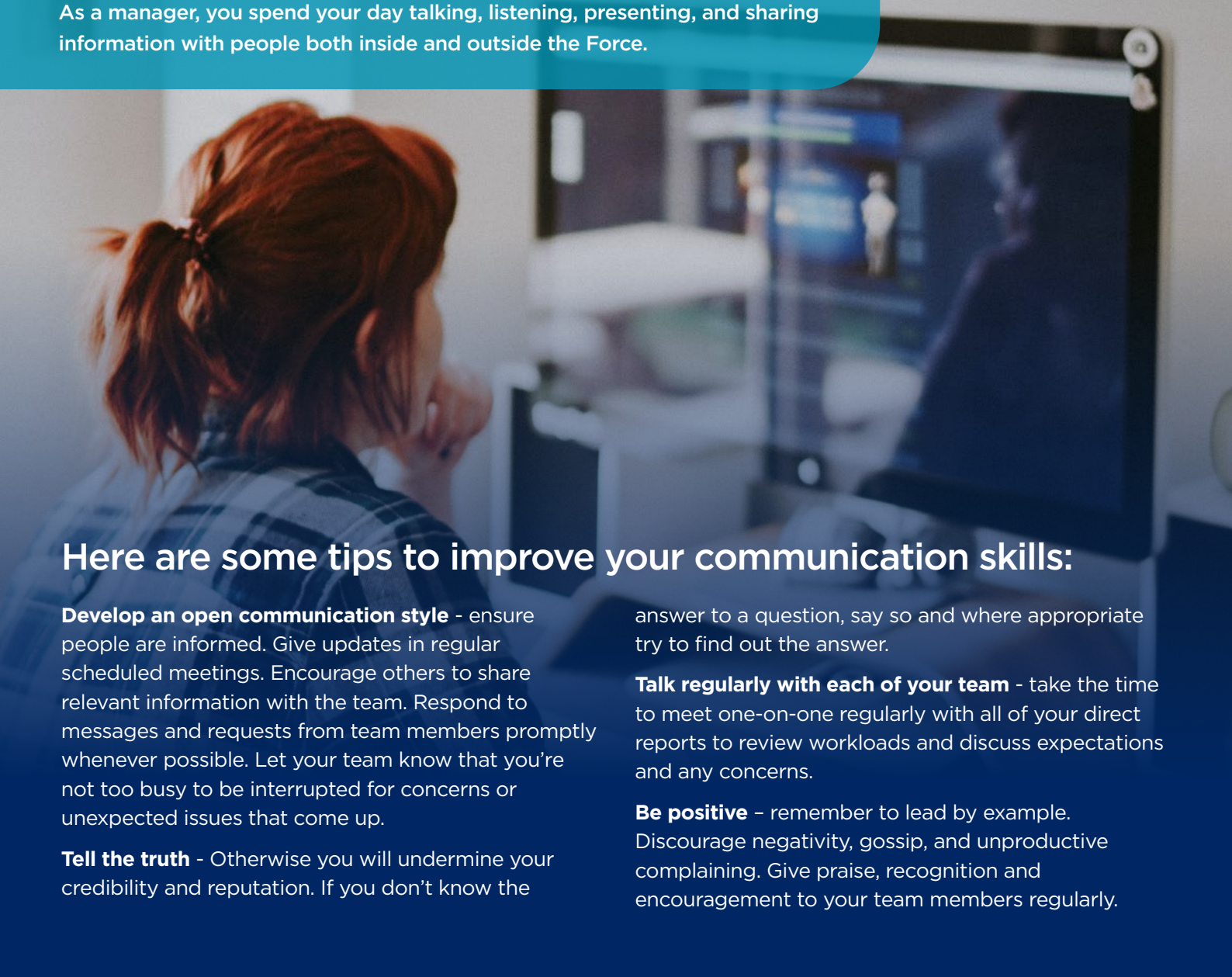
**Develop an open communication style** - ensure people are informed. Give updates in regular scheduled meetings. Encourage others to share relevant information with the team. Respond to messages and requests from team members promptly whenever possible. Let your team know that you're not too busy to be interrupted for concerns or unexpected issues that come up.

**Tell the truth** - Otherwise you will undermine your credibility and reputation. If you don't know the

answer to a question, say so and where appropriate try to find out the answer.

**Talk regularly with each of your team** - take the time to meet one-on-one regularly with all of your direct reports to review workloads and discuss expectations and any concerns.

**Be positive** - remember to lead by example. Discourage negativity, gossip, and unproductive complaining. Give praise, recognition and encouragement to your team members regularly.





**Respond to messages promptly** - if you don't have time to respond today, send a quick reply saying when you will have time to respond. And then be sure to respond by that time, if not sooner.

**Explain your decisions** - giving reasons for your decisions demonstrates respect for your team members and minimises misunderstandings, misperceptions, hurt feelings, and the spread of rumours. Explain as much as you can. Speak simply and clearly and avoid jargon so you won't be misunderstood.

**Don't make promises you can't keep** - avoid making promises to your team that you then have to retract. Use language that does not over-promise, for example, 'based on what I know now' or 'as far as I'm aware'.

**Give and ask for feedback** - we all need immediate and specific feedback to ensure that we're successful. Always focus on a team members actions, not their personalities. Giving feedback in person is best. At the same time, ask for feedback from team members and your own manager.



**Communicate with respect** - your team is probably diverse and is made up of people of different ages and backgrounds. Everyone's way of communicating may be different from your own. Be respectful of these differences.

**Keep in mind that people have different communication styles** - some people aren't comfortable responding on the spot to their manager; they need to reflect on what they have been told before responding. Some people need lots of detailed data and information, while others want to understand issues from a big-picture perspective or only want to talk about the human impact. Observe people's individual differences in communication styles, and where possible try to engage with them in their preferred way. Try to understand the unique job challenges of each person in your team.

**Avoid communicating when you're feeling emotional** - it's always best to take some time before responding to an email if you are feeling upset or angry. Draft the email and then come back to it the next day when you are feeling less emotional. If your communication is to clear any confusion or resolve a conflict, it's best to do this face to face or over the phone not by email.



**Actively listen** - make the effort to fully understand what another person is saying, before you respond. You need to pay attention and not let your mind wander. To do this, make eye contact and don't interrupt, check your email, or take calls while you are having a conversation with them. In order to ensure you understand what you have been told, clarify by paraphrasing what the other person has told you.

**Apologise** - if you say something you later wish you hadn't, follow up with a personal response and an apology. If you can it's best to do this in private and in person.

# Having difficult conversations



A difficult conversation is one whose primary subject matter is potentially contentious and/or sensitive and may cause strong emotions that can be hard to predict or control.

From time to time all managers will face conversations which they anticipate will be difficult and they may feel they aren't equipped to handle. These could include; poor performance, unacceptable behaviour, investigating reports of bullying, turning down a team members request, dealing with sensitive personal issues, handling a grievance or disciplinary process, or telling a team member that their job is at risk of redundancy.

Starting a difficult conversation can feel overwhelming. It is always best to tackle problems at an early stage as this will help to prevent the situation from deteriorating.

## Here are some tips to handle difficult conversations:

**Be tactful** - if you have personal or confidential information to share with a member of your team, arrange a time to talk when you can speak together privately and devote both the time and the attention needed. Ensure you always respect the team member's privacy.

**Be honest and direct** - delay can provide time for tensions to grow and rumours to spread, especially when delivering bad news.

**Choose the right time and place** - find a quiet, private place where you won't be disturbed. You don't want to be interrupted or called away in the middle of a difficult conversation. If this is not possible, manage the expectations of the person you are speaking to by telling them that you may need to take an urgent call.

**Be prepared** - have all of the facts and information you need on hand. Try to anticipate any questions you may be asked and be ready with answers. Write down what you plan to say and rehearse it, or talk to your manager or someone in HR to get some coaching. This might help if you feel very nervous about having to give difficult news.

**Be clear** - tell the team what's happening and be clear on the facts. Emphasise what will change and what will stay the same. A succinct and to the point summary can help.

**Give people plenty of time** - listen carefully to their concerns. Help them process their concerns and better understand what's likely to happen and what's not.



# Some things to consider when planning for a difficult conversation are:



**Determine the purpose** - basically what is the reason for the conversation and what do you hope to achieve.

**What is the aim** - the aim should be to reach a mutual understanding through a mature exchange of views and ideas.

**Manage your emotional state** - difficult conversations will be stressful for both parties and often emotional. Try to stay calm and be mindful of the words you are using. Whatever the nature of the subject or your relationship with the person concerned, you need to behave professionally, putting the needs and feelings of others first. Always treat people with respect and fairness and focus on the facts.

**Plan the conversation** - it is helpful to plan a basic structure of the conversation to keep it on track. Think about the elements which need to be included. Make sure that you are as well-informed as possible on the topics for discussion. Gather together any relevant reports or information and make a list of the key points you want to make, so that these are not forgotten if the conversation should take a different turn.

**Open the conversation** - to help reduce tension and steady nerves, open the discussion with a simple statement of its purpose before inviting the other person to respond. Make it clear that they will be given ample time to speak and to express their viewpoint and encourage a co-operative approach right from the start.

**Present your side of the story** - explaining what has given rise to your concern and state the facts clearly and concisely as you understand them.

**Listen to their side of the story** - invite the other person to express their own perspective. Listen carefully and demonstrate clearly that you are doing so. Adopt an open posture, using body language. Refrain from interrupting and allow them to finish what they have to say before responding. The person you are talking with may well feel exposed or vulnerable.

**Handle reactions with care** - if you are delivering information which is likely to be unwelcome, be prepared for an emotional reaction. The team member may experience a range of emotions including fear, anxiety, guilt, shock, frustration, vulnerability or sadness. Angry outbursts, tears or silence are all difficult to deal with and must be handled with care.

**Reach an amicable solution** - once information has been shared and views given, it is vital to move on to positive steps to address the situation.



# Managing your team from a distance

**With many people now working from home permanently, you need to think differently about managing your team.**

**When managing a remote team, one of the main concerns for managers is ensuring a balance between being supportive of team members whilst not micro managing.**

**When managing from a distance, the key for managers is to ensure you have clear and regular communications and check-ins with each member of the team.**



**Below are some general tips which may help:**

**Schedule regular catch up's with the whole team using video calling** – don't make it just about work, allow some time for informal talk. Also, plan "virtual" lunches, team birthday parties, or other celebrations and make special efforts to reach out to employees who may feel excluded.

**Encourage team members to connect with each other regularly** – this may be by phone, video conference or instant messaging. This can relieve feelings of stress and isolation.

**Ensure your team members understand your expectations** – explain that you trust everyone to get their work done, whilst checking everyone knows how to approach their work, and has the information and the skills needed to complete it. Encourage people to take regular short breaks during the day and block out time for lunch. If expectations are not being met, find out why and what you can do to help them succeed. If there is a serious performance problem, discuss it with your manager.

**Ask team members to keep their office diaries up to date and give them sight of yours** – this will ensure for both sides that you can see availability. Reassure team members that you're there for them when they need you.

**Make sure that you also have contact with your own line manager when working remotely** - you need to make sure that your needs are met along with those of your team members, so don't forget that you matter too.

**Your team members wellbeing** – encourage your team to make sure they are looking after their own health and wellbeing.

**Support healthy work-life boundaries** – where our home is also our workplace, it can be hard to have boundaries between the two. Encourage members of your team not to work outside of their standard working hours. To help with this, don't schedule meetings beyond the limits of the working day. Be a role model and don't work outside of these hours either.



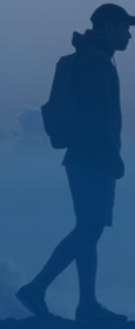
## Taking care of yourself

It's extremely important for you to look after your own wellbeing as well as that of your team.

Supporting someone can be very stressful, so don't underestimate the effect on your own wellbeing. Find ways of reducing immediate stress. Find someone to talk to about your experiences and write your own support list. This should include eating healthily, getting enough sleep, exercising regularly and taking time to do something you enjoy.

Self-care should not be seen as a 'selfish' activity. If we don't look after our own wellbeing, we won't be effective in supporting and helping others. Remember you can't pour from an empty cup.

Resilient managers, like resilient people, are more likely to be able to bounce back from adversity, stay focused and productive and make the best of challenging situations. They're also able to deal with uncertainty and react positively to change.



Worrying about money can be extremely stressful and may lead to mental health conditions. Police Mutual are here to help. We want to break down the stigma surrounding debt and get people talking about money.

We've teamed up with **PayPlan\***, one of the UK's leading free debt advice providers, who offer free and confidential advice to anyone in serious financial difficulties.

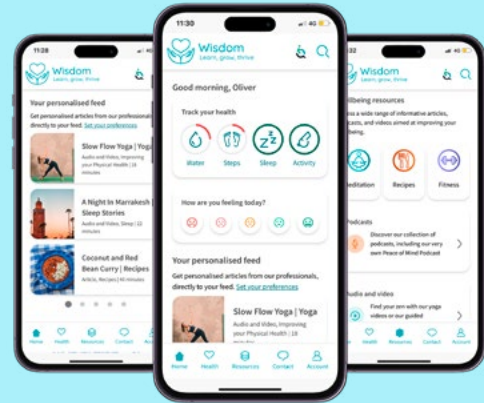
They're able to advise you on a range of debt solutions suited to your individual circumstances, helping to protect you and your family with a sustainable way to manage your debt.

Get free and confidential help to combat your debt, call **PayPlan\*** on **0800 197 8433**.

### Police Mutual Services

Our Care Line Service provided by Health Assured can offer advice and information, helping with a range of concerns including emotional support.

## Wisdom App



Download the **Wisdom App** provided by Health Assured and register today - your code is **MHA107477**



To read more of our wellbeing guides take a look at our **Wellbeing Hub** [here](#).

Call us **0151 242 7640** Visit [policemutual.co.uk](http://policemutual.co.uk)  
We're open from **9am - 5pm Mon - Fri**

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