Chapter 1

SOLUTIONS

Succeeding in the Social and Mobile Workplace

Critical Thinking Discussion Guide

Note: Solutions to Chapter Review questions 1-10 appear in the Annotated Instructor’s Edition.

11. What could be the career fallout for someone who is unwilling or unable to train to become a better communicator? Can workers today be successful if their writing is and remains poor? (L.O. 1)

Each of us probably knows at least one example of a highly successful dyslexic person or a poor writer who is admired and thrives in the world of work. However, such cases are the exception rather than the rule. Surveys of employers find over and over again that woefully unprepared young job applicants will fall behind in their careers and not be promoted if they are even hired in the first place.

12. Why do executives and managers spend more time listening than do workers? (L.O. 2)

Before they can make decisions, executives must listen to feedback from supervisors, specialists, and others. They must also listen to their bosses—boards of directors and owners—as well as to customers, especially when handling serious complaints. Minds are like parachutes; they work well only when open. All three levels of workers should have good listening skills; but because the decisions coming from executives may be more critical, their listening skills should perhaps be most highly developed.

13. What arguments could you give for or against the idea that body language is a science with principles that can be interpreted accurately by specialists? (L.O. 3)

Although few would argue that body language does send silent messages, no scientific principles have evolved explaining exactly what those messages mean. Most researchers agree that nonverbal cues contain much information, but specifically what those cues mean is unknown. In Nonverbal Communication, authors Hickson and Stacks wrote, “The nonverbal message by itself may be ambiguous; in almost every instance it needs the verbal message to complete the process of communication.” [Madison, WI: WCB Brown & Benchmark, 1993, p. 8.] Julius Fast, author of the precedent-setting Body Language, stated that “nonverbal language is partly instinctive, partly taught, and partly imitative.” [New York: Pocket Books, 1970, p. 14.] But it is not a science with principles that always hold true.

14. Imagine that businesspeople from a high-context culture (e.g., Japan or China) meet their counterparts from a low-context culture (the United States) for the first time to negotiate and sign a manufacturing contract. What could go wrong? How about conflicting perceptions of time? (L.O. 4)

Misunderstandings are almost assured if both sides are not aware of their diverging perceptions and willing to accommodate each other. A businessperson who prefers directness and relies mainly on precise written information (low context) will be impatient with a businessperson who avoids saying no, seemingly doesn’t get to the point, or communicates in what appear to be ambiguous messages (high context). Moreover, the person raised in a low-context culture will expect a quick decision and is “ready to do business,” whereas the member of a high-context culture will want to consult with other managers, and the group may say yes only after lengthy deliberations. In turn, because low-context communicators may be perceived as pushy and rude, their foreign counterparts may not want to do business with them. As for time orientation, Americans tend to live by the clock. Time is a commodity that can be spent or wasted. Punctuality is a generally accepted virtue. In other parts of the world, time is not such a high priority and is kept approximately at best. Smart negotiators can test Americans’ patience and throw them off balance simply by strategically dragging out negotiations.

15. It is quite natural to favor one’s own country over a foreign one. To what extent can ethnocentrism be considered a normal reaction, and when could it become destructive and unproductive? Provide examples to support your answer. (L.O. 5)

The love of country can express itself in healthy patriotic sentiment or in potentially hateful jingoism or nationalism. Ethnocentrism can be defined as putting one’s own culture first and making it central to one’s world. Most Americans would probably describe themselves as patriotic. This means recognizing the great accomplishments of one’s country of origin and being proud of them without, however, dismissing other countries contemptuously and viewing the rest of the world as inferior. Ethnocentrism turns into a negative trait once closed-mindedness or even hatred of other cultures sets in. The key is openness, tolerance, and empathy.

Activities and Cases

1.1 Introduce Yourself (L.O. 1) This e-mail or memo is an excellent way to assess students’ skills and, at the same time, get to know them. Don’t grade this assignment, but be sure to write a friendly comment on all papers or send friendly e-mail replies to demonstrate that you have an interest in them as students and as individuals. You may want to use the profile function in your institution’s learning-management system to have students create professional profiles covering the information requested or additional information you may want to gather. This assignment may be revisited later in the term to practice professional online presence (e.g., in a LinkedIn profile) when you cover employment communication. If you are tech savvy and teach smaller classes, you may want to try introductions by tweet in 140 characters or fewer. These messages might include a tiny URL taking the recipient to a profile, website, or other virtual location. More information about using LinkedIn is provided in Chapter 13.

1.2 Small-Group Presentation: Introduce Team Members (L.O. 1, 2) Decide whether you wish each student to (a) interview a group member and introduce that person to the group or (b) introduce himself or herself to the class. Class size may help you decide. Encourage students to consider this a casual introduction. However, it is a good opportunity for students to not only learn about each other but also start to develop the skill of speaking in front of a group.

This informal oral assignment induces students to become aware of their employability skills. You could make it more structured by asking them to record in writing the information they learn in the interview to create a short biographical sketch. The main purpose of this assignment is to encourage students to start thinking about presenting themselves well on professional social media platforms such as LinkedIn and in other forums of public opinion. If students are not on LinkedIn yet, impress upon them that it’s about time they created an account! Many students are now urged to join LinkedIn in high school.

1.3 Social Media Inventory (L.O. 1, 3, 4) The generalization that young people today are digital natives and as such must all be extremely tech savvy may not apply to all students, not even the millennials among them. Taking stock of students’ social media and technology use can be important for getting to know the class and its members’ preparedness. Assign the inventory activity to small groups or collect written responses from individuals if you fear that students might hesitate to admit that they do not fit the stereotype of the hyperconnected contemporary and do not own the latest electronics, particularly given that gadgets tend to be expensive. You may also want to ask about attitudes: how important are smartphones and staying connected with friends via text or Facebook to the students? Do they see any disadvantages in being connected nonstop?

1.4 Soft Skills: Personal Strengths Inventory (L.O. 1) Your students should submit a list of four categories of soft skills. Encourage them to frame statements that will be useful when they prepare a résumé later in the course. For example, under “Thinking and problem solving,” a student might write, “Learned new spreadsheet program and prepared cost projection for remodeling office,” or “Learn new software applications quickly and with little training.”

1.5 Rating Your Listening Skills (L.O. 2) This quiz focuses on good listening techniques as presented in the textbook. Although some of the answers are obvious, an interactive quiz presents an alternative learning mode that can pique student interest and reinforce good habits.

1.6 Listening: An In-Person or Virtual Social Media Interview (L.O. 2) The answers will vary. Students could brainstorm and discuss their interview questions in class or prepare questions at home. Then they could approach their interviewees in person, by phone, by e-mail, or via LinkedIn or Facebook. A special word of caution when contacting professionals on LinkedIn: Warn students not to relentlessly pursue random strangers, but to work from within their own established LinkedIn circle of professional acquaintances or their acquaintances’ contacts. This assignment could be done orally or in writing (e-mail, memo) individually, in small groups, or in class. The task could be expanded to a group oral presentation or written report.

1.7 Listening and Nonverbal Cues: Skills Required in Various Careers (L.O. 2, 3) Student teams should generate lists of listening and nonverbal cues that include some of the following: good eye contact, avoiding being distracted by others, not interrupting, taking notes, paraphrasing instructions, asking pertinent questions in a nonthreatening manner, leaning forward, and showing empathy and compassion. Critical listening involves judging and evaluating what you are hearing. Discriminative listening is necessary when you must identify main ideas and understand an argument. Teams should generate cues and behaviors to reflect these forms of listening in relation to the professional roles they are analyzing.

1.8 Nonverbal Communication: How Do You Come Across? (L.O. 3)

Answers will vary. Ask students to review the aspects of nonverbal behavior discussed in this chapter and to focus on specific cues. Remind the class to look for aspects of professionalism, such as a straight but not rigid posture, and steady yet not staring eye contact. Students might observe slouching, playing with pens and pencils, or nervous gestures such as tugging at necklaces and ears, or running fingers through hair.

1.9 Nonverbal Communication: Reading Body Language (L.O. 3) These

body movements do not necessarily mean the same thing when used by different individuals. Remember that to a certain degree nonverbal communication can be culture or subculture specific, and context always plays a major role in the interpretation of this type of communication. Students may have other interpretations, but these body movements can be construed to mean the following:

a. Whistling, wringing hands: nervous or fearful

b. Bowed posture, twiddling thumbs: bored

c. Steepled hands, sprawling sitting position: contemplative or relaxed

d. Rubbing hand through hair: frustrated or nervous

e. Open hands, unbuttoned coat: relaxed

f. Wringing hands, tugging ears: upset or nervous

1.10 Nonverbal Communication: How Best to Signal I Messed Up (L.O. 3) This is a good exercise for teams. Suggest that team members take turns demonstrating each of the nonverbal messages. They should then discuss how effective each would be. Of course, some would be quite dangerous if they require taking your hands off the steering wheel. Be sure to discuss with students the difficulty of cultural implications. Although a gesture might be effective in one country, it might not work in another.

1.11 Nonverbal Communication: Signals Sent by Casual Attire (L.O. 3) This activity can be expanded into a research paper topic. A variation on this activity relies on student experiences. Instead of conducting interviews in the community, they can conduct a forum among students who work, asking them to comment on casual-dress policies in the jobs they have had.

1.12 Nonverbal Communication: Gestures From Around the World (L.O. 3, 4) Students should be able to find a number of gestures and their meanings discussed at various websites. Here is one example: “The fingertip kiss, in which the tips of the thumb and fingers are kissed and quickly moved forward away from the face, is a sign of affection and may be used as a greeting in Sicily and Portugal. The fingertip kiss is not used often in Italy and the British Isles, but it is common in France, Germany, Greece, and Spain to signify praise.” [See Martin, J., & Chaney, L. 2006. Global business etiquette. Westport, CT: Praeger, p. 53.]

1.13 Intercultural Communication: Watching Those Pesky Idioms (L.O. 4)

a. thinking out of the box having creative, unconventional ideas

b. bottleneck a slowdown or congestion

c. connect the dots being able to see a relationship between discrete features

d. hell on wheels an extremely difficult person

e. drop the ball handle things badly, make a mistake

f. get your act together get more organized

g. stay the course pursue a goal regardless of obstacles

h. in the limelight at the center of attention

i. low on the totem pole the last person in a chain of command, least important

1.14 Intercultural Communication: Probing Cultural Stereotypes (L.O. 4, 5) This activity drives home the limiting nature of stereotypes, even positive ones. Very few of us are comfortable representing our entire culture, although others may perceive and designate us as “ambassadors” of our countries of origin. Students may find some stereotypes flattering, but most will recognize that they are ambivalent at best. Few Jewish students, for example, would enjoy being called good with money because it’s an old anti-Semitic prejudice couched in positive language. Likewise, being seen as a Latin lover is a mixed blessing, and not all Asian students are studious and nerdy. Students should also recognize that we may be amused by positive and even negative stereotypes leveled at others, but we may react with less humor once the barbs of prejudice are pointed at us.

1.15 Intercultural Communication: Negotiating Diversity in Job Interviews (L.O. 4, 5)

Role-playing relies on a solid knowledge of the workplace and interviewing techniques. If role-playing is too advanced for students, a discussion of differences between the interviewer and interviewee and how they could be bridged might be productive. In the first example, students should recognize the preconceived notions that come with gender expectations. A female boss interviewing a male assistant is still in a minority.

1. Students should recognize that explicit references to gender roles would be inappropriate and that the sex of the applicant has no bearing on the qualifications for the job.
2. Any questions about the candidate’s national origin should be avoided unless the interviewee volunteers such information. If the accent does not hinder communication, only the skills, experience, and ability of the candidate should be considered.
3. In the last decade, turbans and other religious symbols have been perceived negatively because some Americans associate them with radical Muslims and even terrorists. Yet in a job interview, turbans and other forms of religious garb should not be addressed, nor should they be considered relevant to the hiring decision.
4. Age discrimination against people over forty is outlawed in the United States. Any question making age a factor in the hiring process would be illegal and should be avoided. Questions should be kept relevant, referring solely to the requirements of the job posting.
5. Disability cannot and should not be used against the candidate applying for the job. The interviewer could put the candidate at ease by extending common courtesy to him or her and making sure to speak with the person at eye level. Patronizing behavior should be avoided.

Communication Workshop: Technology

Exploring Career Prospects in Your Field With LinkedIn

This first Communication Workshop encourages students to visit LinkedIn and potentially similar social media networks and job boards, such as Indeed or CareerBuilder. The goal is to motivate students early in the semester to recognize the value of this course in developing the communication skills that many job placement advertisements require.

Students should become familiar with using Internet job-search tools, LinkedIn in particular. This activity takes them through the steps of locating positions in their career fields. They should find three advertisements and print them. They should analyze the skills required, tasks to be performed, and salary ranges for the listed jobs. You may ask them to discuss these findings in groups or submit them in a report.

Alternatively, student teams could be asked to examine other popular job boards, such as CollegeGrad and Monster. Besides the largest professional networking site, LinkedIn, Glassdoor is potentially eye-opening as it offers accurate salary estimates and anonymous reviews from within organizations, written by current or former employees.

Because students sometimes need gentle nudging to go beyond what is assigned, direct them to LinkedIn’s Learning tab; Monster’s Resumes, Jobs, and Career Resources links, which offer a wealth of job-related information; or the popular iPQ Career Planner app. A simple Google search yields links to websites and news articles that also provide job-seeking advice.