

## Improving Communication Effectiveness *Pennies Exercise*

*This is an exercise that you can use with your team to practice how to communicate in a focused, succinct manner, and how to listen. It may help you identify areas where your team members can develop stronger communication skills.*

**Objective:** To practice communicating in a focused, succinct manner

**Materials required:** 5 pennies per team member

**Instructions:**

Have team members sit in a circle facing each other.

Distribute 5 pennies to each.

State the rules for the exercise:

Each time a participant makes a comment s/he has to toss a penny into the circle.

Participant may only speak once s/he has thrown a penny into the circle.

Each participant must speak during the discussion.

At least three pennies should be used by each person; ideally, all 5 will be used.

No long speeches are allowed.

Pennies cannot be loaned to other participants.

Once a participant has spent all 5 pennies, they must remain quiet for the rest of the exercise.



**Conduct the exercise:**

Choose a topic for discussion, preferably one that will engage the participants in vigorous manner and is likely to create a lot of discussion. For example, "What is our biggest challenge regarding communication with doctors?" Or "How can we come together as a team when we are working so independently?"

Begin the exercise by asking the question or by making a statement related to it ("I think our biggest challenge in communicating with our physicians is X"). The floor is then open for all to participate.

Remember, it is important that all participants speak and that each person uses at least 3 pennies.

All group members are responsible for following the rules and for holding other team members accountable for following the rules.

Stop the exercise when you determine that either all members have contributed 3 pennies or at a time after that that makes sense.



**Debrief the exercise with your team. Questions to consider:**

- 1) What was the greatest challenge for you as you participated in this exercise?
- 2) How did you decide when to speak?
- 3) What is the most important thing you feel you learned from this exercise?
- 4) What is the practical application for you and others on your team for communicating more succinctly at work? With physicians?
- 5) What was the most useful part of this exercise?
- 6) What did you notice about others' participation?
- 7) What did you learn about your own communication style?

**Communication tips from the pennies exercise**

- 1) Determine what message you wish to communicate prior to speaking with a colleague or client.
- 2) Identify the appropriate amount of context and what level of detail is important for the receiver to hear.
- 3) Be aware of how the receiver communicates and adjust your style to that person's style of communication – be sensitive to verbal and nonverbal communication from the receiver.
- 4) Ask clarifying questions often to ensure you understand what the receiver is saying.
- 5) Practice active listening; formulate your response AFTER the receiver has responded to your information.
- 6) Anticipate what the receiver may say to you and what questions may be asked.
- 7) Deliver the message successfully by slowing down the communication process with the receiver.
- 8) Think through what is the most relevant information you need to communicate.