

## Interpersonal skills for FOI Co-ordinators

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## Personal communication style and preferences

- Preferences and prejudices – we all have them!
- Fight, flight, freeze
- Conflict avoider
- Argumentative – need to be right
- Submissive – ‘anything for a quiet life’
- Assertive – positive, confident and clear

## Today we will cover...

- Personal communication styles and preferences
- Active listening skills
- Some written and verbal communication techniques
- Key elements of a successful encounter with an access applicant

## Awareness of personal preferences

Be aware of:

- Potential bias
- Our natural preferences
- Treating all parties fairly with equal attentiveness
- Own comfort zone

## Active listening skills

- Make and maintain eye contact
- Consider non verbal communication – gestures, seating arrangements, mirroring
- Open ended questions
- Be genuinely interested in the response
- Paraphrase or reframe responses

## A word about email communications

### Advantages:

- quick
- convenient
- permanent record

### Potential disadvantages:

- style and tone may be misinterpreted by reader
- less flexible for dialogue than telephone or face to face communication

## Written and verbal communication techniques

### Communication – a simple process?

1. Need information or action
2. Purpose - what you want, and by when
3. Expression – writing
4. Message sent
5. Message received
6. Message understood
7. Response prepared

## Communication blockers

### Parties can sometimes block effective communication by:

- Criticising – especially ‘you always...’ or ‘you never...’
- Diagnosing – ‘the problem here is...’ (and I’ve got the solution)
- Ordering – ‘what you need to do is...’, ‘if you/he/she would only...’
- Advising – ‘if I were you I would...’, ‘as an expert in the field I suggest...’
- Closed questions – ‘how much do you want?’
- ‘yes but...’ agreeing and then ‘un-agreeing’
- Stereotyping – ‘people like him/her...’
- Past experiences, own past history of similar disputes or same parties
- Own preferences

## Overcoming communication blockers

- Review own communication style and identify potential communication blockers
- Be aware when a communication blocker is happening and respectfully but firmly draw attention to it, in private.
- Invite the talking party to listen.
- Refocus the discussion. Ask open ended questions.
- Understand that the behaviour may be driven by anxiety or fear and try to identify and understand the cause.

## Consider release outside FOI

- What does the access applicant actually want?
- Is it readily available?
- Consider what may be publicly available and help the access applicant to find it
- Not every member of the public understands the TRIM or Objective systems!

## Some key elements of a successful encounter with an access applicant

- Have a clear understanding of the applicant's requirements
- Consider release outside FOI at earliest opportunity
- Build rapport and seek to understand
- Be courteous and do what you say you'll do, especially with regard to timing

## Build rapport and seek to understand

- Make contact as early as possible
- Phone, in person or email?
- Listen first!
- Ask open ended questions to clarify
- Can documents be provided outside the FOI Act?

## Be courteous and do what you say you'll do

- Easy to talk about; hard to do
- Cultural considerations
- Managing emotions – yours and theirs
- Managing expectations – under promise and over deliver
- Act with integrity, build trust

## FOI in WA Conference

Recognising and building our FOI capacity

## Summing up...

- Personal communication styles and preferences – *know yourself*
- Active listening skills – *enquiring mind*
- Some written and verbal communication techniques – *build rapport and trust*
- Key elements of a successful encounter with an access applicant – *clarity about what the applicant wants and how it best can be provided.*