

Tactical communications can help all round

A senior sergeant from the New Zealand Police attended the recent Ministerial Educators' Seminar to discuss tactical communications.

As a consequence of providing a public service, Justices interact with a number of difficult clients. Police training places an emphasis on the use of tactical communications to gain compliance and de-escalate situations and some of these strategies may be of use to JPs dealing with upset or difficult clients.

Communicating tactically is a learned skill that you must practise consciously.

Safety first

Difficult people can be emotional, angry or agitated so your own safety is a priority and is something that should be at the back of your mind at all times. It is okay to disengage from dealing with difficult people by making your own judgement around safety, rather than persisting with attempts to de-escalate through tactical communications.

Model the behaviour you want others to adopt

Your own behaviour and attitude directly affect the person you are dealing with.

Speaking calmly, in a composed and controlled manner with respect, can assist in calming the person you are speaking to. As a result of staying calm, this can assist you in speaking clearly and slowly.

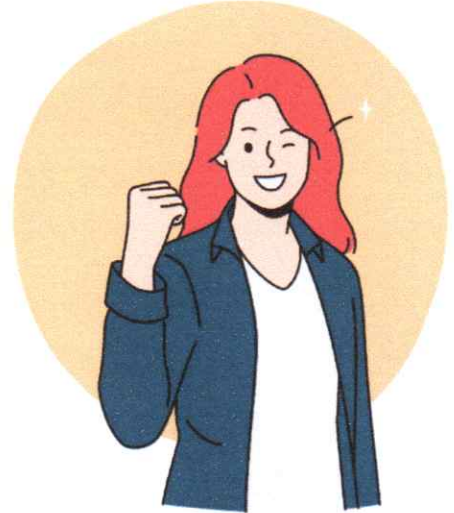
It can be difficult to yell at or get upset with a person who remains calm and in control of their own emotions.

A useful mindset is to adopt a "professional self" when undertaking JP duties, detached from your "personal self". If a client insults you or speaks in an unpleasant manner, tell yourself that they are directing those words at your professional self, not you personally.

Use positive messaging

Adopt an "I'm here to help and I'm listening to you" message when talking to clients.

Finish requests with a thank you/ thanks to ensure positive messaging. For instance, "If you could explain the purpose of the document, that would assist me in understanding how I can help you, thank you."



Adopt a low-key and interested response to difficult or demanding people and be prepared to use tactical patience.

Use venting

Allowing people to vent (let off steam) is a good thing. It can be frustrating to take the time to listen to someone vent when the issue may not be relevant to you, but your patience may be what helps the client most in this situation.

Use active listening

Use active listening as an opportunity to understand people's motivation and point of view, all the while determining what assistance you can offer.

Maintain positive body language such as nodding, eye contact and a positive stance, when listening to the client.

After listening to the client, use paraphrasing to summarise the person's position in your own words and ask them "Is that correct?" This can assist by forcing them to stop and think, engaging



the rational part of their own thought process and hopefully agreeing with you. Paraphrasing also shows that you are listening and are cognisant of their point of view.

Use empathy. It always helps to acknowledge the other person's point of view and passion for their issue, even though you may not agree with it yourself. Combine empathy with the offering of a possible solution.

The 80/20 rule suggests that you should only do 20% of the talking. The tone and speed of your voice and your body language can be just as important as the words you use.

Blocking

This is a technique requiring you to assert yourself but in a respect manner - for example, asking someone to stop or change a particular behaviour, such as asking someone to lower their voice or to refrain from swearing, giving a reason for your request and essentially appealing to their sense of reasonableness. It works with some people!

Verbal redirection

Acknowledge what others are focused on, but respectfully steer them onto a different topic or an alternative area of discussion, for example "I hear what you are saying but tell me about . . ." or "Have you tried . . . ?"