

## Verbal and Nonverbal Communications: Role-Play Exercises

### Scenario 1:

You are the CED for a small FSA office in a rural county. Mr. Jones comes in and asks about the Crops Disaster Program, saying he lost most of his cotton crop because of the early summer flooding. He wants to know how he can be paid for this loss.

You don't know Mr. Jones personally. You explain the program and the general eligibility requirements. Mr. Jones is anxious for payment soon because he has bills to pay. When you tell him it could be some time before he actually sees payment – if he qualifies – he becomes frustrated.

In this exercise, the CED must get Mr. Jones to leave the office feeling more at ease about the application requirements and the timeline.

### For this scenario:

2 people will participate in this exercise: the CED and Mr. Jones.

The rest of the group should watch, listen, and note the strengths and the weaknesses. Pay attention to both what the CED says as well as how he or she “reads” non-verbal cues from Mr. Jones and presents non-verbal cues to Mr. Jones.

Take about 10 minutes for the role-play, and then discuss.

### Scenario 2:

Mr. Jones has filled out his application and provided the documentation for Crop Disaster Program. You have reviewed the application and documentation and determined that his losses do not meet the requirements and he is therefore ineligible for the program. You have called him and told him this, and he is very upset. You have scheduled a meeting to go over the details. Mr. Jones is visibly angry when he arrives at the office.

The CED has to present the facts as well as the options to Mr. Jones, and the challenge is to have Mr. Jones calmer when he leaves the office.

### For this scenario:

2 people will participate in this exercise: the CED and Mr. Jones.

The rest of the group should watch, listen, and note the strengths and the weaknesses. Pay attention to both what the CED says as well as how he or she “reads” non-verbal cues from Mr. Jones and presents non-verbal cues to Mr. Jones.

Take about 10 minutes for the role-play, and then discuss.

### **Scenario 3:**

You are an FLM at a busy FSA office. You have set up a meeting with your customer, Ms. Pickles, who has been turned down for a \$200,000 loan to finance equipment for a new dairy operation because of a poor credit history and a poor feasibility plan. Ms. Pickles has little farming experience; she married into a farming family whose credit history is also poor. You presume she is trying to get this loan to help pay family debt on existing operations. However, Ms. Pickles is known around town as someone who “gets what she goes after.” She doesn’t want to hear about the reasons why she is being turned down; she wants you to change your mind.

Over the course of the conversation, Ms. Pickles’ behavior is charming and persuasive, then dramatic, and then resigned to the outcome.

#### **For this scenario:**

2 people will participate in this exercise: the FLM and Ms. Pickles.

The rest of the group should watch, listen, and note the strengths and the weaknesses. Pay attention to both what the FLM says as well as how he or she “reads” non-verbal cues from Ms. Pickles and presents non-verbal cues to Ms. Pickles.

Take about 10 minutes for the role-play, and then discuss.

### **Scenario 4:**

You are an FLM who is working with a producer whose understanding of English – and ability to communicate well in English – are lacking. You are trying to explain that he does not have an adequate feasibility plan – that his plan will not generate adequate income – and so you have turned down his loan request.

Frustration grows as you and Mr. Lu try to discuss the issues. How will you overcome the language barrier – and the mounting frustration – to communicate this adverse decision effectively.

#### **For this scenario:**

2 people will participate in this exercise: the FLM and Mr. Lu.

The rest of the group should watch, listen, and note the strengths and the weaknesses. Pay attention to both what the FLM says as well as how he or she “reads” non-verbal cues from Mr. Lu and presents non-verbal cues to Mr. Lu.

Take about 10 minutes for the role-play, and then discuss.

## **General Evaluation Tips for Role-Play Exercises**

These role-play exercises were designed to give you practice discussing difficult issues and dealing with customers in a range of situations. “Spectators” should watch and listen to the FSA employee and to the FSA customer and evaluate the following:

### **1. Is the FLM or CED using “active listening” skills?**

Active listening involves hearing what another person is saying, understanding what they are saying, and making them know you are listening. Active listening requires a conscious effort on your part to paying attention and eliminating distractions during the conversation. Is the loan officer or program manager displaying these active listening guidelines?

- Pay attention. Give your customer your full attention. When you are meeting in person, watch as well as listen.
- Show your customer that you are listening. Use gestures or short comments to convey that you are fully engaged.
- Provide feedback. Your goal is to understand what your customer is saying, without being quick to make assumptions, judgments or conclusions.
- Don’t judge. Interrupting your customer will limit your understanding of the message.
- Respond appropriately. Active listening shows respect and garners understanding. It also gives you valuable information and perspective. You will gain nothing by putting your customer down.

### **2. What “tone” is the FLM or CED using? Is it argumentative, condescending or harsh, or is it friendly, straightforward and professional?**

### **3. What body language behaviors are being displayed (by either player), and are they being read by the other?**

Body language and non-verbal communications include:

- Flippant or condescending “looks”
- Eye-to-eye contact – or lack of it
- Boredom or lack of focus on what a customer is saying
- Slouching, crossing arms, etc.
- Long pauses (indicating you’re unprepared)

### **4. Overall, how well did the FLM or CED resolve the issues?**

### **5. What could the FLM or CED do differently to improve?**