Listening: C1 – Challenges at work

Before listening

Listen to four people talking about different business challenges to practise and improve your listening skills. Do the preparation task first. Then listen to the audio and do the exercises.

Preparation task
A. Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary Definition

1. …… to make an assumption

2. …… to get on the same page

3. …… to commit

4. …… to do overtime

5. …… to feel awkward

6. …… capacity

7. …… a virtual team

8. …… a rough patch

a. to feel uncomfortable
b. to believe something is true without having any real proof
c. a team of people who are not in the same physical place
d. to agree about how something should be done
e. a difficult period of time
f. to promise that you will do something
g. to do more working hours than is agreed in your contract
h. the amount of space available

Listening

Task 1: Are the sentences true or false?

1. Speaker A wanted to show respect by shaking somebody's hand.

True False

2. Speaker A recommends always greeting people in the same way, no matter where you are.

True False

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3. For Speaker B, working in a virtual team is not so different from working in the same location.

True False

4. Creating a team charter helped Speaker B's team to avoid misunderstandings and confusion.

True False

5. Speaker C says the SMART acronym for goal setting stands for: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely.

True False

6. If you're feeling stressed, Speaker C recommends just dropping the tasks that are overloading you.

True False

7. According to Speaker D, flights at the end of each day have a higher chance of being delayed.

True False

8. Speaker D suggests taking your time if your flight is cancelled, since the airline will have to rebook you on another flight anyway.

True False

Task 2: Choose the best answer.

1. How did Speaker A feel during the meeting?

a. offended

b. disappointed

c. unsure about what to do

2. How has Speaker A responded to this experience?

a. He has decided to copy the other man's way of greeting people.

b. He has reflected on it and realised something.

c. He has researched different ways of greeting people.

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3. How did Speaker B feel about the international project?

a. It was an entirely negative experience.

b. It was exhausting, but there were positives too.

c. It was challenging, but there were positives too.

4. How does Speaker B feel now about working on international projects?

a. She would like to do it again in the future.

b. She wouldn't like to do it again.

c. She isn't sure whether it would be a positive or a negative experience.

5. How did Speaker C feel during his difficult time at work?

a. stressed

b. embarrassed

c. calm

6. How does Speaker C feel now?

a. still overloaded

b. ready for a break

c. more in control

7. What did Speaker D do when the flight was cancelled?

a. She took time to consider her options.

b. She acted quickly.

c. She asked for someone's advice.

8. How does Speaker D feel about what happened?

a. fortunate

b. annoyed

c. furious



After Listening

Discussion

Do you ever face challenges at work? How do you overcome them?

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Transcript

A

I'll never forget the first time I met our new contact from Retrolink, one of our top five customers. I had travelled to their office to meet him in person, talk about the history of our companies together and define a shared vision for future co-operation. I wanted to focus on building a good relationship with him which would be a good foundation for working together. So, when we met I wanted to make a good impression and also show him respect. I greeted him with a handshake and addressed him by his surname. When I put my hand out I realised he had been moving in to give me a hug, so we did an awkward mixture of the two! Also, when I greeted him by his surname, he responded politely, though he used my first name. It was all a little uncomfortable.

In this situation, I guess I made assumptions about the level of formality he expected. Even though he had never met me before, he knew our two companies had been doing business with each other for years and he wanted to build on that history by being less formal with me from the beginning. The real learning here for me was that I shouldn't assume we all have the same ideas about meeting people for the first time.

B

I'd never worked with a virtual team on an international project before. It was quite exciting, though also challenging to work with people from different countries, many of whom I would never actually get to meet in person. There were a lot of things that were different about working in the same office and it was quite challenging at the beginning.

For example, there were different time zones, different IT systems and even different local regulations, which impacted on what each person was allowed to, or able to, do for the project.

There were also interpersonal differences, such as different ways of working, approaches to deadlines and when to reply to emails. And we shouldn't forget the fact that English was the project language and that most people on the team had to work in a language which wasn't their first. A positive of this was that it meant that everyone, including the native English speakers, had to make the effort to communicate clearly and clarify their own and everyone else's understanding.

To help us all get on the same page, we defined the communication norms and the rules the team would follow, as well as the meeting dates and deadlines. We laid this all out in a document called a team or project charter. This was really useful and in the end the project was a great success. I'm looking forward to working on my next international project.

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C

I went through a bit of a rough patch last year at work. I was already committed to too much and then we lost a team member through restructuring and I quickly became overloaded. This led to me doing too much overtime and feeling very stressed. My boss was really helpful and

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she pushed back against the unrealistic targets that had been set for our department. She also introduced me to the smart approach to goal setting. It's an acronym, S-M-A-R-T. You use it to create goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely.

I used this approach to deal with all of the things that were overloading me. It helped me to prioritise some tasks, to do some later and to drop some completely.

I often use this approach now and feel much more in control of my time and workload.

D

Have you ever missed a flight or had one cancelled? I did. It happened to me last week. My flight home from a business trip was the last one of the day and we were told it was going to be delayed. That's always a risk at the end of each day. The ground crew kept extending the delay until eventually they cancelled the flight completely. They then told us to go back through the airport to the departures area to talk to their agent who would organise hotels for everyone and rebook us on the following day's flight.

As soon as they made the announcement about the cancellation, I knew I had to think quickly as it would not be likely that the flight would have capacity to take everyone from my cancelled flight. I hurried back through the airport and was one of the first to make it to the desk. That turned out to be a good idea, as there were only nine seats available on the flight the next morning. Everyone else had to fly to a different airport and then continue back to our destination airport in coaches. Lucky me! Right?

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