

# Instructional Scenario

## Solve Workplace Problems



**Course/Duty Area:** Office Specialist I: Developing Communication Skills

### **Scenario:**

Jim, Justin's manager, just got frustrated when Sandra had a list of personal questions at their daily team meeting. Jim asked Sandra, "Can we talk about this at a more appropriate time?" Sandra responded, "I have a problem that needs immediate attention." Justin wants to ask Jim about a work issue, but he also wants to be sensitive to Sandra. What should Justin do? Justin reflects on the following:

- 1) Consider workplace behaviors and workplace culture.
  - a. When someone has an issue, is there a process or procedure that one should follow?
  - b. How do personal needs balance against workplace issues?
  - c. What is a professional way to ask for help?
- 2) Consider if there is enough information, skill, or knowledge to solve the problem.
  - a. Is there enough information to make a decision without a manager?
  - b. Who might be able to help?
  - c. What information is needed to proceed independently?
- 3) Consider groups of people who may be able to assist.
  - a. Who are others who have similar responsibilities to me?
  - b. Are there other leaders or managers who have time to support questions?
  - c. When and how is it appropriate to ask questions of the manager?
- 4) Consider different approaches to problem solving.
  - a. How does the manager often go about addressing or solving problems?
  - b. Why might the manager get frustrated with personal questions at a team meeting?
  - c. How might Sandra better communicate problems in the future?

### **Big Question:**

What are some effective communication strategies when problems arise in the workplace?

### **Focused Questions:**

- Why is it important to share concerns or problems in a professional and timely manner?
- How do cultural differences influence problem-solving techniques?
- Why is it important to have small- and large-group communication in problem solving?

### **Project-Based Assessment:**

Create a sheet with three columns: "**workplace problems,**" "**critical questions,**" and "**possible solutions.**" Create a list of 5-10 workplace problems and write them in the first column. In the second column, generate questions that would help employees gather information and make decisions. In the third column, record possible solutions that address the problem.

*Instructional scenario submitted by Kendal Swartzentruber, Co-State Coordinator, I'm Determined Project, James Madison University, Harrisonburg*