

BC3 educator: Active listening can improve workplace productivity

Lunch & Learns' downtown training helps busy professionals, administrator says

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Patricia Pritchard, a Butler County Community College faculty member, will teach active listening skills that can improve workplace productivity during BC3's June 12 Lunch & Learn Series session. Pritchard is shown Thursday, May 2, on BC3's main campus in Butler Township.

(Butler, PA) Butler County Community College's inaugural series of Lunch & Learn workshops, which conclude June 12 with an "Active Listening" presentation by BC3 educator Patricia Pritchard, have provided busy professionals with an opportunity to receive training after a catered meal, a BC3 Workforce Development administrator said.

Additionally, said Kelly McKissick, BC3's coordinator of professional education and certificate programs, the Lunch & Learns, presented in the city of Butler as part of BC3's 2017-2022 strategic plan, have "brought awareness of the options available in the downtown community."

Pritchard's "Active Listening" professional skills workshop will be held at The Chop Shop, 108 N. Main St., which will also cater the event scheduled from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. "Active Listening" follows sessions hosted since October by five downtown Butler businesses and organizations as part of the first open programming in the city by BC3's Workforce Development division.

Previous subjects educated participants about "Office Safety-Slips, Trips and Falls"; "Grief in the Workplace"; "Outside the Box-Creative Thinking"; "Goal-Setting"; and "Hands-Only CPR-Save a Life."

"We selected topics that we felt would meet both professional and personal interests and needs and many were different from what we have traditionally offered through Workforce Development," McKissick said. "With the sessions being held over a lunch break, each was designed to cover the topic broadly so that participants could apply what they learned to their individual situations or possibly spark interest for more in-depth training."

BC3's 2018-19 Lunch & Learns represent the implementation of an objective in the college's 2017-2022 strategic plan in that they are intended to build relationships to advance economic development and quality of life in the community, McKissick said.

The series also follows the realization of 2017-2022 strategic plan initiatives that include the creation of a coordinator of community leadership initiatives position and, by moving that office in August 2018 to a South Main Street location, establishing BC3's first presence in the city of Butler.

"Thinking ahead" a hindrance

Signs in the workplace that employers, or employees, are not actively listening to one another can be identified by nonverbal communication, interruptions and a lack of communication, said Pritchard, a faculty member in BC3's humanities and social science division who teaches public speaking, intercultural communication, technical writing and public relations.

Indications of nonverbal communication, Pritchard said, can be a "lack of direct eye contact, crossing arms, looking away, checking a cell phone." One person interrupting another shows "that he or she is thinking more about what he or she wants to say versus listening, or thinking ahead."

Thinking ahead, Pritchard said, is the most common impediment to active listening.

"We are more focused on ourselves, how we want to respond, than in being an active listener," she said.

Another sign, Pritchard said, is that “He or she didn’t ask any questions or offer comments after you spoke.”

“The work gets done faster”

Improved listening skills can benefit production and efficiency in the workplace, Pritchard said.

“If you listen with intention, or purpose, you have a greater understanding, or clarity, of what needs accomplished and how to accomplish tasks,” Pritchard said.

Effective listening results in a more rapid work rate with fewer errors, Pritchard said.

“When employees listen to one another, the work gets done faster,” resulting in more productivity, Pritchard said. “When employees listen to one another, their comprehension improves and they can confidently complete tasks without making mistakes.”

Pritchard will also discuss with participants active listening skills that include self-awareness, openness and clarity.

Lunch & Learn participants interested in additional information or training on the topics can contact BC3’s Workforce Development division, McKissick said.

The cost of the Lunch & Learn is \$10 per person. Seating is limited, and registration is required. To register, visit bc3.edu/lunch-learn or call 724-287-8711, Ext. 8476 for corporate billing.