Objectives

Upon completion, you will be able to:

- **Analyze** the scenario using the information from the Communications and Giving and Receiving Feedback knowledge courses

- Recognize the communication **skills** and **deficiencies** exhibited by the various individuals

- Recommend behaviors/strategies for the individuals in the case study that would reflect **greater abilities** in communicating and giving and receiving feedback
The Organization

SuperSmart, Inc. is an after-school learning center for kids ages 5-12. The company has been in existence for 15 years and is headquartered in St. Louis.

It currently has 125 franchises in 30 states, primarily in the Midwest. Expansion plans include adding 25 new locations in the next year and entering California and Texas for the first time.

The company is doing well but is always looking for ways to minimize operating costs and maximize profits.
George: Stacy and Henry’s boss, who has been with the company for eight years. Most of the time he’s an easygoing guy, very customer-oriented, and tries to avoid conflict whenever possible. In fact, he has developed a reputation for always siding with the customer (internal or external) and not supporting his team enough.
The People

Cynthia: George’s boss, who has been with SuperSmart for less than a year, but has had other management positions. She took this job because she believes in the concept and enjoys working for growing organizations.

Henry: One of George’s employees, who is a project manager and has been with the company for just under two years. He does a good job, but is still perceived as the “new guy” since everyone else in the department has been there longer, and he is self-conscious about that.
Stacy: A project manager who has worked at SuperSmart for three years. George has been her boss the entire time. She excels at the task side of her job, but is often perceived as having a condescending attitude.
George is meeting with his boss, Cynthia.

**Cynthia:** “George, I’ve noticed you spend a lot of time in your office with your door closed. I understand the need to concentrate, but it makes you appear inaccessible to your staff. I have your people coming to me instead of you for advice and guidance. You need to take a more active hand in managing your department — get out there and see what’s going on for yourself.”
George: “I had no idea — things seem to be running smoothly. I don’t hear any complaints and we’re making money.”

Cynthia: “I’m not saying things aren’t running smoothly, just that there’s some opportunity to improve communication and relationships.”

George: “You want me to be best friends with my staff?”
Cynthia’s Advice

Cynthia: “No, that’s not what I mean. But I do think you should meet one-on-one with each of your employees regularly — and besides staying up-to-date on their work, find out what’s on their minds, where they’re dissatisfied and what you can do to help keep them motivated and happy at work. You’ll build a strong, loyal team that way.”

George: “Well, OK, I’ll give it a try.”
The next day, George calls Henry into his office.

**George:** “How’s it going?”

**Henry:** (fidgeting and shifting in his seat) “Fine.”

**George:** “Good. Well, as you may know, I’m starting to have regular meetings with everyone, just to keep myself up-to-date and make sure I hear about anything that’s going wrong.”
Henry’s Response

Henry: “What have you heard? What’s wrong with my work?”

George: “That’s not what I meant. I just want to know what’s on your mind; if there’s anything bothering you.”

Henry: “Why should anything be bothering me? If you have a problem with me, just say so!”

George: “Henry, calm down. You’re misunderstanding me. I’m just trying to make things better for you and for the department.”
Trying to Save the Conversation

**Henry**: “Calling me in here to *dig* for dirt is making the department better? Not in my world!”

**George**: “*I agree*—digging for ‘dirt’ wouldn’t make the department better. It sounds like you’re worried that I’m using these meetings to gather negative information about people.”

**Henry**: “If the shoe fits …”
George: “I’ll tell you what. This is not at all the conversation I wanted to have. Why don’t we break for now, and meet again tomorrow morning.”

Henry: “Fine. Whatever you say …”

After Henry leaves, George sits back in his chair. He thinks, “What a disaster.”
George thinks to himself: “This is never going to work. Maybe it works for Cynthia to be buddy-buddy with her staff, but it’s just not my style. I can’t change who I am. I’ll meet with Stacy tomorrow, but I doubt it will make any difference. On the other hand, maybe Stacy will be easier to talk to — I can only hope.”
George: “Thanks for coming in. This is a new process for me, and knowing the ‘water cooler’ talk around here, you’ve probably heard it didn’t go well with Henry.”

Stacy: “Yeah, I heard a bit about it. But Henry doesn’t confide in me, so I really don’t know the full story.”
George: “That is something I need to work out with Henry; it isn’t the focus of our conversation today. Maybe it would help if I shared my goal for the conversation. What I’d like to accomplish today is to get a sense from you about what is going well in your job, and what obstacles you may be facing.”
Stacy: “OK.” (She is skeptical and thinks to herself: “This is a first for George. Does he have an ulterior motive?” but decides to take him at face value.)

Stacy: “As you know, I had an issue with Caitlyn, but we got that ironed out and we’re on good terms now. Working through that actually helped me with some other budgets.”
George: “I know you resolved it without me, but is there something I could have done to help you out more?”

Stacy: “Well, I went to Anita for help because she is our budgeting expert, but as it turned out, she actually gave me some good advice about working with Caitlyn. I guess that’s something that you could do for me — you know, help me with people problems.”
George (laughing): “I could use some of that myself right now. But seriously, I hear you, and I actually think I could be of some help — I know the people you work with, and can be objective.”

Stacy: “That would be a big help. But I have to tell you, if you really want to know, that I’ve gotten the impression you don’t want to hear about problems.”
George: “Really? How come?”

Stacy: “Are you sure you want to talk about this?”

George: “Yes, I really do.”

Stacy: “Well, for example, when I had that problem with Henry, you told me I had better take care of it or else.”

George: “I was really busy and didn’t have time to deal with it.”
George is Faced with Reality

_Stacy_: “That’s what I’m talking about. You don’t want to make time for the unpleasant stuff.”
How effective was the feedback Cynthia gave George?

Why was George unsuccessful communicating with Henry? What can he do to repair the relationship?

How did Henry contribute to the negativity of the conversation?

George’s conversation with Stacy was more productive. Why? On the other hand, it ended on a note of reproach and uncertainty. Why?

What should George do now?