



[Exemplars] Activities from aPHR

Course 4 - Employee Relations

This document serves as a guide for learners in the Merit America HR track, offering sample responses (exemplars) to the various activities included in the aPHR training materials. These exemplars are designed to illustrate one possible approach to addressing the prompts and demonstrate the application of HR concepts.

Think of these exemplars as a learning tool to inspire and guide you, but remember that your own critical thinking and application of the course concepts are key to your success in the program.

Important notes:

- These exemplars are just one way to approach the activities; there are certainly others! Rely on your own unique experiences, insights, and understanding of the material to craft your responses.
- Please note that AI was used to generate these exemplars. While every effort has been made to ensure their accuracy and completeness, they may contain imperfections or require further elaboration.
- It's imperative that you use only your own words and ideas when completing your project submissions. Do not copy or plagiarize any part of these exemplars or rely on AI to generate your work.

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Week 1 Exercise: [Activity: Writing a Mission Statement](#)

Activity Instructions

For this activity, you will write a mission statement based on a provided scenario. Remember that a mission statement is a one-sentence statement that explains the three components of an organization: what your company does, why it does it, and how it gets done. The mission statement you write should be simple, captivating, measurable, and relevant.

There are three required parts of this activity: Answer Questions about the Company; Write the Mission Statement; Write a Description.

1. **Answer Questions:** Dissect the Company information ([below](#)) to answer key questions and understand the “what,” “why,” and “how.”



2. **Write the Mission Statement:** Write a mission statement for Connective. A mission statement should be a statement that is simple, captivating, measurable, and relevant.
3. **Describe Your Mission Statement:** After you write the mission statement, write a brief description that answers the following questions: (a) Why is this a good mission statement for Connective?; (b) Why is it relevant?; and (c) How does the mission statement you wrote address the questions about what Connective does?

[Supporting Material] Connective Company Information

Connective: Company Information

Connective is a modern communication organization that helps businesses stay connected. They specialize in helping distributed workforces collaborate with a suite of software tools like video conferencing and cloud-based phone systems.

Connective's solutions enable teams to stay connected and collaborate effectively, no matter where they are located. Whether it's through advanced video conferencing software, cloud-based phone systems, or other cutting-edge communication tools, Connective empowers businesses to stay connected and productive.

In an age where remote work is becoming increasingly common, Connective is committed to providing businesses with the tools they need to stay connected and thrive. With Connective's innovative solutions, your team can work from anywhere without missing a beat.

Exemplar (Possible Answer)

1. **Answer Questions:** First, answer the following questions to help write your statement:

What does Connective do?

Connective empowers distributed teams to collaborate seamlessly.



Why does Connective do this?

To foster innovation and productivity.

How does Connective do this?

By providing a suite of software tools, including video conferencing and cloud-based phone systems, that enable effective communication and collaboration.

2. **Write the Mission Statement:** Write your mission statement below. Make sure that it is concrete, action-oriented, and addresses the questions you answered above.

Connective Mission Statement:

To empower distributed teams to collaborate seamlessly, fostering innovation and productivity.

3. **Describe Your Mission Statement:** In a few sentences, answer the following questions: (a) Why is this a good mission statement for Connective?; (b) Why is it relevant; and (c) How does it address the questions about what Connective does?

Description of Connective Mission Statement:

This mission statement is relevant to Connective's core purpose as a modern communication organization that specializes in helping distributed workforces collaborate effectively. It also fulfills the criteria of being simple, captivating, measurable, and relevant:

- **Simple:** It uses clear and concise language that is easy to understand and remember.
- **Captivating:** It conveys a sense of purpose and aspiration, highlighting the positive impact of Connective's solutions.
- **Measurable:** The statement focuses on outcomes such as seamless collaboration, innovation, and productivity, which can be tracked and evaluated.



- **Relevant:** It directly reflects Connective's core business and its commitment to empowering distributed teams.

The statement answers the key questions:

- **What does Connective do?** Connective empowers distributed teams to collaborate seamlessly.
- **Why does Connective do this?** To foster innovation and productivity.
- **How does Connective do this?** By providing a suite of software tools, including video conferencing and cloud-based phone systems, that enable effective communication and collaboration.

Week 1 Exercise: [Activity: Sharing a Mission Statement](#)

Activity Instructions

For this activity, you will write three different messages to introduce the new mission statement you wrote in the previous activity. All three will probably have overlapping content, but each communication channel serves a specific purpose as you've learned in this lesson.

There are three required parts of this activity:

1. **Write an Email Introduction:** Using the Connective mission statement you created ([above](#)), write an email that could be sent out to Connective introducing the new mission statement and the reasoning why this mission statement is appropriate for Connective. Your email should be between 150-200 words, and it should give a hypothetical reader information about why the mission statement was written and how it is applicable.
2. **Write A Statement for the Employee Handbook:** Next, again using your mission statement from the previous activity, write the mission statement section for the Connective employee handbook. Similar to the email you wrote, this statement should provide insight into why and how the mission statement was created.
3. **Write a Brief Description of Mission for Onboarding Training:** Lastly, using the same mission statement from the previous activity, write an introduction to the



mission statement that could be used in the Connective onboarding process. This introduction should be focused on a new employee's perspective; someone who is less familiar with Connective than a current employee.

[Supporting Material] Connective Company Information ([above](#)) and Mission Statement ([above](#))

Exemplar (Possible Answer)

1. **Email Introduction about Connective's New Mission Statement:** This email will be sent out to all employees. The email should be brief, but introduces the new mission statement and the reasoning why this mission statement is appropriate for Connective. This email should describe why the mission statement was written and how it is applicable.

Email to Connective Employees:

Subject: Unveiling Connective's New Mission Statement

Dear Team,

I'm excited to share Connective's refined mission statement: "To empower distributed teams to collaborate seamlessly, fostering innovation and productivity."

This statement encapsulates our core purpose and reflects the evolving landscape of work. As remote and hybrid teams become the norm, our mission is to equip them with tools and solutions that break down barriers and unleash their full potential.

We believe that seamless collaboration is the key to unlocking innovation and driving productivity, regardless of location. This mission statement will guide our efforts as we continue to develop cutting-edge communication solutions and provide exceptional support to our clients.

Let's embrace this mission and work together to create a future where distance is no longer a barrier to collaboration and success.



Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[Your Title]

2. **Write A Statement for the Employee Handbook:** Write an introduction to Connective's mission statement that can be included in the mission statement section of the employee handbook. This introduction, like the email, should include why the mission statement was written and how it is appropriate for Connective.

Introductory Statement for Employee Handbook

Our Mission

At Connective, our mission is "To empower distributed teams to collaborate seamlessly, fostering innovation and productivity."

This statement reflects our dedication to providing the tools and technologies that enable teams to connect, communicate, and collaborate effectively, regardless of their physical location. We strive to create an environment where innovation thrives and productivity soars, empowering businesses to achieve their goals in an increasingly interconnected world.

3. **Write a Brief Description of Mission for Onboarding Training:** Introduce the mission statement to new employees during the onboarding process. Remember that unlike the previous introductions, this one is aimed at employees who are not as familiar with Connective and so may need more details to understand why it is relevant.

Onboarding Training Introduction to Mission:

Welcome to Connective!

As a new member of our team, we want you to understand the core of what we do. Our mission is "To empower distributed teams to collaborate seamlessly, fostering innovation and productivity."



This means that we're not just about building communication tools, we're about making a real difference in how people work together. We believe that when teams can connect and collaborate effortlessly, amazing things happen. Ideas flow freely, problems get solved faster, and businesses thrive.

Your role at Connective is crucial in helping us achieve this mission.

Let's work together to build a more connected and productive future!

Week 2 Exercise: [Activity: Creating an Inclusive Culture](#)

Activity Instructions

In this activity you will make suggestions to make Connective a more inclusive workplace based on **all three** Inclusive Culture Scenarios ([below](#)).

Your suggestions should include policy changes and/or initiatives aimed at improving Connective's culture. You'll also need to make sure to describe why you made the suggestion you did.

[Supporting Material] Inclusive Culture Scenarios

Inclusive Culture Scenarios

As a reminder, Connective is a modern communication organization that helps businesses stay connected. They specialize in helping distributed workforces collaborate with a suite of software tools like video conferencing and cloud-based phone systems.

Scenario A

An employee has come to you and mentioned that they will be taking some time in the next month to celebrate their religious holidays. They are somewhat frustrated that they



will need to use PTO time for these holidays even though they and their family do not celebrate Christmas, which is a holiday that Connective closes for.

Scenario B

An employee has come to you and mentioned that they don't feel totally comfortable working with their new team members. Everyone has been cordial, but not particularly friendly. This employee is a person of color and the new team they have joined is all white. When you ask the team leader about this, they say: "We're just a really tight-knit group and anyone would have a hard time for the first few weeks."

Scenario C

You and the rest of the HR team have recently completed an audit of all the employees at the company. After some recent transfers and retirements, it has come to your attention that there are no women working in the marketing department at all. There is an opportunity to fill a few roles in the department and one person who was considering a transfer to the department mentioned that they're not particularly interested in working in "the boys club."

Exemplar (Possible Answer)

Inclusive Culture [Scenario A:](#)

Policy or Initiative Suggestion(s):

[Scenario A:](#) Religious Holiday Accommodation

Policy Change:

- **Implement a Floating Holiday Policy:** Allow employees a set number of floating holidays per year that they can use to observe religious or cultural holidays not included in the company's standard holiday schedule. This provides flexibility and recognizes the diversity of religious and cultural practices within the workforce.

Description: Why Did You Make These Suggestion(s)?



Reasoning:

- **Promotes Inclusivity:** Acknowledges and respects the diverse religious and cultural backgrounds of employees.
- **Enhances Employee Satisfaction:** Allows employees to celebrate important holidays without sacrificing their PTO, leading to increased morale and engagement.
- **Demonstrates Fairness:** Ensures that employees who don't celebrate Christmas are not disadvantaged compared to those who do.

Inclusive Culture [Scenario B](#):

Policy or Initiative Suggestion(s):

[Scenario B](#): New Team Member Integration

Initiatives:

- **Diversity & Inclusion Training:** Conduct mandatory D&I training for all employees, focusing on unconscious bias, microaggressions, and creating an inclusive team culture.
- **Team Building Activities:** Organize team-building activities specifically designed to foster connections and build trust among team members.
- **Mentorship Program:** Assign a mentor to new employees to help them navigate the team dynamics and provide support during the onboarding process.

Description: Why Did You Make These Suggestion(s)?

Reasoning:

- **Addresses Bias and Promotes Understanding:** D&I training can help raise awareness of unconscious biases and equip employees with the tools to create a more inclusive environment.
- **Facilitates Connection:** Team-building activities can break down barriers and help new team members feel welcome and included.
- **Provides Support:** Mentorship can offer guidance and support to new employees, particularly those who may feel isolated or excluded.



Inclusive Culture [Scenario C](#):

Policy or Initiative Suggestion(s):

Scenario C: Gender Disparity

Initiatives:

- **Targeted Recruitment and Outreach:** Actively seek and recruit qualified female candidates for open marketing positions. This can involve partnering with organizations that support women in tech or marketing, attending diversity-focused career fairs, and utilizing inclusive language in job postings.
- **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Establish or support ERGs for women at Connective, providing a safe space for networking, mentorship, and professional development.
- **Unconscious Bias Training:** Provide training to hiring managers and interviewers in the marketing department to help them identify and mitigate unconscious biases during the recruitment and selection process.

Description: Why Did You Make These Suggestion(s)?

Reasoning:

- **Addresses Gender Imbalance:** Actively seeking and recruiting female candidates can help correct the current gender disparity in the marketing department.
 - **Creates an Inclusive Environment:** ERGs and unconscious bias training can foster a more inclusive workplace culture where everyone feels welcome and valued.
 - **Enhances Company Reputation:** Demonstrating a commitment to diversity and inclusion can attract a wider pool of talent and improve Connective's reputation as an employer.
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Week 3 Exercise: [Self-Review Activity: Performance Appraisal](#)

Activity Instructions

For this activity, you will read a conversation between a manager and a sales associate at Urban Attire. After reviewing the transcript, you will provide your feedback. Then you will describe what you would do differently if you were conducting the appraisal.

Remember what you've learned about performance appraisals and how they can be done successfully when providing feedback. You can ask yourself a few questions, such as:

- Is this an appropriate rating method for the role?
- Should the manager have provided any additional feedback?
- Are there questions that the sales associate should have asked?

[Supporting Material] [Performance Appraisal Transcript](#)

Exemplar (Possible Answer)

What did you think of this performance appraisal? What feedback do you have for Taylor, the manager who conducted the appraisal?

Overall, the performance appraisal was generally positive, but there's room for improvement in a few areas.

Positive Aspects:

- **Clear Communication:** Taylor provided clear and specific feedback about Sloane's performance, highlighting both strengths and areas for development.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Taylor acknowledged Sloane's accomplishments and contributions to the team, which can help boost morale and motivation.
- **Focus on Growth:** The appraisal focused on Sloane's development, offering suggestions for improvement and setting goals for the future.



Areas for Improvement (Feedback for Taylor):

- **Rating Scale:** While the rating scale provides a quantitative measure of performance, it might be beneficial to include more qualitative feedback to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Sloane's strengths and weaknesses.
- **Specific Examples:** Taylor could provide specific examples of situations where Sloane excelled or struggled, making the feedback more actionable and impactful.
- **Two-Way Communication:** The appraisal felt a bit one-sided, with Taylor primarily providing feedback. It would be beneficial to encourage more dialogue and allow Sloane to share their perspective on their performance and development goals.
- **Avoid Comparisons:** Taylor mentioned that Sloane could have Taylor's job one day, which could create unnecessary pressure or competition. It's better to focus on Sloane's individual growth and potential within the company.
- **Goal Setting:** Setting clear and measurable goals for the next review period would provide Sloane with specific targets to work towards.

What would you do differently if you were conducting the appraisal?

- **More Collaborative Approach:** I would create a more collaborative atmosphere, encouraging Sloane to actively participate in the discussion and share their own self-assessment.
- **Strengths-Based Focus:** While addressing areas for improvement is important, I would also emphasize Sloane's strengths and how they can leverage those to further excel in their role.
- **Specific Examples and Actionable Feedback:** I would provide specific examples of Sloane's performance, both positive and negative, and offer concrete suggestions for improvement.
- **Goal Setting and Development Plan:** I would work with Sloane to develop a personalized development plan, setting SMART goals and identifying resources and training opportunities to support their growth.
- **Regular Check-ins:** I would schedule regular check-ins with Sloane to monitor progress, provide ongoing feedback, and adjust the development plan as needed.



Week 3 Exercise: [Activity: Healthy Workplace Conversations](#)

Activity Instructions

For this activity, you will read a conversation between a manager, a sales associate, and a cashier at Urban Attire. After reviewing the transcript, you will provide your feedback. You will then pinpoint moments in the conversations that would stand out to you if you were an HR professional overhearing the conversation.

Remember what you've learned about healthy workplace conversations and how to ensure everyone is comfortable when providing feedback. You can ask yourself a few questions, such as:

- Is this conversation appropriate for work?
- Should the manager have steered the conversation in a different direction?
- Is there anything in this conversation that could be construed as leading to a hostile work environment?

[Supporting Material] [Workplace Conversation Transcript](#)

Exemplar (Possible Answer)

Was this a healthy workplace conversation?

Overall, the conversation was mostly healthy with a positive and friendly tone. The colleagues engaged in casual chat, shared information about the upcoming staff party, and even brainstormed a fun idea for a "crazy socks" day. This demonstrates camaraderie and a comfortable atmosphere among the team.

That said, there were a few problematic components of the conversation which could indicate a lack of workplace respect and the need for sensitivity and inclusivity training for these employees.



Were there any parts of this conversation that would stand out if you were an HR professional overhearing it? Which parts and why?

- **Microaggression/Assumption about Chris's heritage:** Taylor's assumption that Chris would "love" the Italian restaurant because of his last name and hair perpetuates stereotypes and can be considered a microaggression. It's crucial to avoid making assumptions about someone's background or preferences based on their appearance or name.
- **Comment about Sloane's socks:** While likely intended as lighthearted banter, Chris's comment about Sloane's socks being "ragged" could be perceived as crossing a line into personal appearance commentary. It's important for employees to feel comfortable and respected in their workplace, and comments about their personal appearance, even if meant in jest, can be uncomfortable.
- **Surprise at Taylor's window display skills:** Chris's surprise at Taylor's ability to create a window display, along with the joking about the lightbulb, could be interpreted as subtly undermining Taylor's competence or relevance. While likely unintentional, it highlights the importance of being mindful of how comments, even in a casual setting, can impact others' perception of their skills and abilities.

Why these parts stand out:

These instances, while seemingly minor, can contribute to a less inclusive and respectful workplace environment. HR professionals are attuned to such nuances in communication, as they can potentially lead to discomfort, misunderstandings, or even contribute to a hostile work environment if left unchecked. It's important to create a workplace culture where everyone feels valued and respected, and that includes being mindful of how casual conversations can impact individuals.



Week 4 Exercise: [Self-Review Activity:](#) [Organizational Structures](#)

Activity Instructions

For this activity, you will learn about the various tasks and functions of the Urban Attire organization. After reviewing this information, you will suggest a potential organizational structure and provide your reasoning.

Remember what you've learned about organizational structures. You have specifically covered: functional organizations, divisional models, matrix organizations, and network (or cluster) organizations. You will determine which of these structures would fit best for Urban Attire and include your reasoning.

[Supporting Material] Urban Attire Company Information

Urban Attire Company Information

There are three primary parts of the Urban Attire organization. First, Urban Attire manufactures clothing. There is a large factory which produces the majority of the clothing that is sold in Urban Attire stores. The factory managers, logistics managers, workers, and support staff are all Urban Attire employees.

After manufacturing the clothing, it is then sold in Urban Attire retail stores. There are more than 20 locations in the United States with an international expansion in the planning stage. The retail locations have cashiers, sales associates, support staff, managers, and regional managers. These workers are all Urban Attire employees as well.

Finally, there is an Urban Attire headquarters which handles many different tasks. There are marketing, design, research, human resources, and legal teams all working from a central office. Everyone at Urban Attire works under the executive team including a chief executive officer, chief financial officer, chief marketing officer, chief operating officer, and chief information officer. The members of the "C-suite" all oversee department heads and teams of workers.



Exemplar (Possible Answer)

What organizational structure would work best for this company?

Divisional Structure

Why did you make this suggestion?

Reasoning:

- **Diverse Business Units:** Urban Attire operates in three distinct areas: manufacturing, retail, and headquarters functions. A divisional structure allows each division (manufacturing, retail, headquarters) to operate as a semi-autonomous unit, with its own functional departments (e.g., marketing, HR, finance) tailored to its specific needs. This enables each division to focus on its core competencies and respond quickly to market changes.
- **Clear Accountability:** Each division has its own leadership team responsible for its performance. This promotes clear accountability and enables the company to track the success of each division individually.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** The divisional structure allows for greater flexibility and adaptability in responding to changes in the external environment. For example, the retail division can quickly adjust its product offerings or marketing strategies based on customer feedback or local trends, without needing extensive approval from the headquarters.
- **Supports Growth and Expansion:** As Urban Attire plans for international expansion, a divisional structure can facilitate this growth by creating new divisions for specific geographic regions or product lines.
- **Specialized Expertise:** Each division can develop specialized expertise in its respective area, leading to improved efficiency and effectiveness.

Additional Considerations:

- **Coordination and Communication:** While divisional structures offer autonomy, it's essential to establish effective communication and coordination mechanisms between divisions to ensure alignment with the overall company strategy and goals.



- **Potential for Duplication:** There might be some duplication of functions (e.g., HR, finance) across divisions. This can be mitigated by creating shared services or centers of excellence to leverage economies of scale and expertise.
- **Culture and Collaboration:** It's important to maintain a strong company culture and encourage collaboration across divisions to avoid silos and promote a sense of unity.

Overall, the divisional structure seems most appropriate for Urban Attire given its diverse business units, focus on growth, and need for agility in responding to market changes. It provides the necessary autonomy and flexibility for each division to thrive while maintaining overall organizational coherence and alignment.