

Building Relationships

Relationship-building skills, also known as “people skills,” are the foundation of successful careers and thriving workplaces. These skills enable collaboration and foster trust, respect, and understanding. They encompass effective communication, active listening, empathy, networking finesse, and conflict resolution.

Mastering these professional relationship-building skills can transform an ordinary workplace into a hub of creativity and innovation, where every employee feels valued and inspired to contribute to the collective vision.

Building Effective Relationships with Colleagues

Effective relationships with other professionals and team members make you more likely to enjoy your work. Building relationships in the workplace is also important for career success. Not only do relationships with colleagues in the workplace assist with networking, but they can also offer you the guidance and encouragement you need to succeed in your role.

Workplace relationships provide the following benefits:

- ✓ Increased satisfaction with your career
- ✓ Increased comfort with presentations and team meetings
- ✓ Improved productivity for all team members
- ✓ Moral support and assistance with meeting challenging timelines
- ✓ Higher retention rates

Building Relationships as a Leader

Company culture has a much bigger influence on employee well-being than salary and benefits — studies have shown that employees perform better when they feel respected and cared for.

- Leaders who prioritise relationships with their employees lead from a place of positivity and kindness
- The most effective leaders are value-driven, transparent, compassionate, humane, and recognise employees as unique individuals

- Employees, in turn, are more engaged, less likely to turn over, more loyal, and more productive.
- Such companies enjoy higher client satisfaction, a better bottom line, and boosted shareholder returns.

Elements of a Strong Workplace Relationship

Trust & Reliability:

Example: A software engineer who consistently delivers high-quality code on time earns the trust of both their manager and team, ensuring smooth project execution.
Acceptance & Understanding:

Example: A senior marketing executive mentoring a junior colleague by patiently explaining industry trends and company expectations, making them feel valued.
Team Player Mindset:

Example: In a group project, one member voluntarily stays late to help a struggling teammate meet a deadline, ensuring overall team success.
Open Communication:

Example: During a brainstorming session, an intern confidently shares an idea, knowing that their manager encourages open dialogue without fear of criticism.

Elements of a Sound Workplace Relationship

Understanding the elements of a good workplace relationship can assist you in evaluating your relationships and identifying the areas in which you want to improve. Good workplace relationships tend to have the following characteristics:

Trust: Trusting your coworkers and feeling that you can rely on them is important when building a workplace relationship.

Acceptance: Acceptance and understanding of one another and your role in the workplace relationship are important elements of a cordial relationship.

Being a team player: Individuals who work well in a team setting, doing their fair share of the work and giving credit when it is due, tend to have stronger relationships.

Open communication: Open communication is crucial to any relationship, including one at the workplace. One of the first steps toward a working relationship is encouraging open communication, asking questions and getting to know your coworkers.

Traits among People Who Are Good at Relationship Building

Some common attributes observed among people who are great at building relationships include:

1. **Smiling demeanour:** They have a pleasant personality, are optimistic, and have a cheerful attitude, not only about work but also about life.
2. **Appreciative:** To get the best out of their teams and peers, they are always generously appreciative of the work they do. They do not lose an opportunity to encourage their people and give a pat on the back to increase their team's enthusiasm to encourage further contributions.
3. **Empathy:** This implies understanding the position of someone from one's own position.

In other words, such people put themselves in the other's shoes and try to understand how they would feel if they were in the same position.

Example: A front-desk receptionist at a hospital who always greets patients with warmth, helping to ease their anxiety before appointments.
Appreciative & Encouraging

Example: A team leader at an IT firm who publicly acknowledges an employee's effort in fixing a major system bug, boosting team morale.
Empathy & Conflict Resolution

Example: A restaurant manager who notices tension between two chefs and arranges a private meeting to address concerns before it affects service.
Respect & Professional Conduct

Example: A senior lawyer who listens patiently to a junior associate's viewpoint in a case discussion, even if they ultimately decide on a different approach.
Strong Social & Interpersonal Skills

Example: A sales executive who remembers a long-time client's personal preferences and family details, strengthening business relationships through thoughtful engagement.

Traits of Relationship-Builders

Smiling & Optimistic Attitude

4. ***Effective conflict resolution skills:*** All employees need to know how to build and encourage congenial relationships even in the most difficult and critical situations. By connecting with others effortlessly, interpersonal skills can reduce stress and conflict and enhance understanding.
5. ***Respect for etiquette and conduct:*** People who are good at sustaining relationships also understand the importance of decorous conduct, which is why they speak politely, value time and remain respectful.

10 Key Relationship-Building Skills to Develop

1. Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

Example: A salesperson using confident speech and open body language to make a great pitch.

Your ability to articulate your thoughts and ideas clearly and your proficiency in reading and responding to others sets the tone for your relationships. Mastering both verbal and non-verbal communication is vital to relationship management.

Effective verbal communication involves:

- Speaking with clarity and brevity
- Tailoring your message to your audience
- Using appropriate tone and pitch

Non-verbal cues can amplify or contradict your message

- Maintaining eye contact
- Using gestures to reinforce points
- Using posture and body language that signal openness

2. Active Listening

Example: A doctor attentively listening to a patient's concerns before diagnosing them.

Those who truly understand and value their team often turn out to be active listeners. Active listening involves more than just hearing; it requires your full attention and a willingness to understand the speaker's perspective.

Practice the following active listening techniques:

- Give undivided attention to the speaker
- Paraphrase what you've heard to ensure understanding
- Provide feedback that acknowledges the message

3. Empathy

Example: A leader understanding an employee's stress and offering a workload adjustment.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. As an employee, empathy is an interpersonal skill that helps you connect with your team members on a human level. Empathetic leaders foster a more inclusive and supportive work environment where individuals feel valued and understood.

Examples of cultivating empathy:

- Putting yourself in your team's shoes
- Acknowledging and validating their feelings
- Actively supporting their well-being

4. Conflict Resolution

Example: A restaurant manager resolving a disagreement between a chef and a server.

Conflicts are inevitable in the workplace, but how they are handled makes all the difference. Effective leaders address conflicts head-on and seek to find mutually beneficial solutions. By mastering conflict resolution, you foster a culture of transparency and fairness that builds stronger, more resilient teams.

Strategies for conflict resolution include:

- Encouraging open discussion
- Identifying the root cause of the conflict
- Seeking compromises that address all parties' concerns

5. Networking Skills

Example: An entrepreneur attending industry events to connect with investors and clients.

Strong networking skills allow you to create a web of professional relationships that can offer support and opportunities for growth. Cultivating these skills not only expands your professional horizons but also opens up resources and knowledge that can benefit your entire team.

Tips for effective networking include:

- Attend industry events and conferences
- Engage in social media networking
- Always follow up to maintain connections

6. Adaptability

Example: A teacher adjusting their lesson plan to accommodate different learning styles.

In a dynamic work environment, adaptability is crucial. Adaptable people can navigate change more easily and offer their team members the same flexibility.

Ways to develop adaptability include:

- Stay informed about industry trends and changes
- Be open to new ideas and processes
- Keep a positive and flexible attitude

7. Emotional Intelligence

Example: A team lead staying calm and motivating their team under tight deadlines.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is a significant factor in building relationships. Leaders with high EQ understand their emotions and can navigate the intricacies of working with others. This can help you create comfortable, expressive work environments where emotions are recognised as a natural part of human interaction.

To enhance your emotional intelligence, try:

- Practising self-awareness and self-regulation
- Understanding and manage your stress
- Building upon your empathy and social skills

8. Collaboration and Teamwork

Example: A group of designers brainstorming together to create an innovative product.

Promoting collaboration and teamwork emphasizes that every team member is heard and respected. It paves the way for a culture where ideas are freely shared and built upon.

You can foster a collaborative environment by:

- Setting shared goals and visions
- Encouraging inter-departmental cooperation
- Celebrating team achievements

9. Problem-Solving

Example: A software engineer quickly fixing a critical bug before a product launch.

People who are approachable and contribute to the problem-solving process earn the trust and respect of their colleagues as well as their superiors. Effective problem-solving requires clarity of thought and a systematic method to address issues.

To master problem-solving, follow these steps:

- Identify the problem and its underlying causes
- Encourage brainstorming for solutions
- Evaluate and choose the best course of action

10. Constructive Feedback Example: A manager providing specific, actionable suggestions rather than vague criticism.

To build positive relationships, one must be able to give constructive feedback that is both informative and supportive. This business communication skill helps to guide and mentor team members toward professional growth.

Key components of constructive feedback include:

- Be specific and timely
- Offer actionable suggestions for improvement
- Recognise and reinforce positive performance

Effective feedback can foster an environment of continuous learning and development, where feedback is seen as a tool for improvement rather than criticism.

The Personal Implication of Professional Skills

Example: A parent fostering teamwork at home by encouraging siblings to work together on chores, just like a manager builds team collaboration in the office.

When we speak of Teams, we normally think of teams at work. However, teams should not be viewed simply from a professional lens. Relationships with our friends and family are also examples of teamwork. A family set up of parents, grandparents, relatives and children all are part of a family team. Friends and acquaintances come together to foster life-long networks, which are also teams.

By extension, the same principles of cooperation and companionship apply at work and beyond. Success results for those who can be dependable team players in whatever situation: challenging or happy, professional or personal. It is very essential to foster teamwork in all aspects of one's everyday life.

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