

Paul Elling, COM6303.E1, Exercise 1

1) What are the different kinds of relationships that occur on the job?

The different kinds of relationships that occur on the job include those of a professional nature, mentoring, friendships, romances, and even marriages. With people spending much of their lives in the workplace, it is natural for them to develop kinship with coworkers. Most people do not operate within a vacuum completely isolated from others. To be successful, individuals must work with one another to accomplish organizational goals. Much of the collaboration requires effective communication and the ability to work in teams, which create professional relationships among coworkers.

Professional relationships are an obvious part of the workplace. It is the responsibility of both the employees and managers to make their relationships conducive to accomplishing the necessary work. While in the past, managers ruled over employees, according to DeWine (2001), in today's world of uncertainty, employees are more willing to "question" their superiors, take advantage of flex time, demand a better "work life", and require "recognition as individuals" (p. 420). As professional relationships develop between managers and employees or with clients, it benefits the employee more so than the manager or client to establish an informal level to the relationship. Doing so helps the employee to negotiate compromises with a familiar face (DeWine, 2001, para. 421). When dealing with clients or a boss in a social setting, maintaining a professional relationship is of utmost importance. Among the suggestions for the social setting are to limit alcohol consumption; keep personal information private; avoid criticizing staff; and keep the roles of colleague and friend separate (DeWine, 2001, para. 422).

The uncertainty of the global economy means that employees must be more fluid in that they need to be able to accept and embrace change. This change renders many professional relationships as temporary (DeWine, 2001, para. 420). Individuals must maintain solid reputations among other professionals as they are linked in a vast network. Professional relationships are staked on integrity above all else, as loyalty depends on one professional being able to trust another professional.

Mentoring is one form of professional relationship that can lead to more of a personal relationship in terms of friendship. Mentors guide protégés in their careers, providing helpful insight through various methods. According to DeWine (2001), types of mentors include “parent”, “white knight”, “mentor-to-friend transformation”, “the badger”, “the seductive manipulator”, “the guilt trip producer”, “the king/queen”, “the self-promoter”, “cheerleader”, and “groom” (p. 425). In these types of mentor roles, a manager, executive, or more experienced employee motivates a less experienced employee through varying tactics that may be positive or irritating. Every employee is different, and the motivational tactics that work will be different per the individual. In the professional relationship between a superior and a subordinate, the conduct required is not always clear. A subordinate does not always know how much they should relate to his or her superior. It can be a fine line between maintaining a professional relationship and becoming friends. Anyone in the work environment is advised to proceed with caution.

Friendships can easily form between coworkers, as people spend their days at work during their adult lives. Individuals must determine for themselves how much to limit their non-work-related interactions with friends at work, especially if the organization does not have a policy. Each person must consider how vulnerable they make themselves by what,

how much, and with whom they communicate personal information at work (DeWine, 2001, para. 428). Oftentimes, friendships form along the lines of each gender. In a gendered organization, especially one that is blue collar, it may be perceived as odd for men and women to form friendships at work. Men who exhibit a masculine persona may feel uncomfortable “piss taking” with female coworkers, yet are perfectly fine relating in this manner with their male work friends (Eisenberg, Goodall, Trethewey, 2010, p. 186).

When friendships develop at work, they can blossom into romances, which, in turn, can lead to marriage. Office romances can be controversial depending on various factors. If two coworkers become attracted to one another and pursue a romance, but they are already married or in relationships, the situation can be problematic at work and at home. If two coworkers in the same department enter into a romance, their relationship can become a distraction for them and their other coworkers. Of course, if an office romance impacts one or both individuals’ performance on the job, then it can be difficult to balance the personal and professional aspects of their lives in the same location. If the organization maintains a policy against workers dating, the policy can make dating especially difficult for the parties involved. If a couple gets frustrated enough, one or both of them may leave the organization to pursue new employment. If either or both individuals are valued workers, then the organization is affected negatively by the result of the relationship. Furthermore, if the couple breaks up and both of them stay with the organization, their negative feelings for one another can also negatively affect the organization. Not all work romances create precarious situations though. Coworkers in separate departments, who are not already married or in relationships, can successfully navigate through the daily routine without harming themselves, their coworkers, or the organization. If coworkers are able to pursue a romance with maturity, they most likely

care enough about the work environment to prevent their relationship from having any impact. It is wise for leaders in an organization to be aware that work romances are certainly possible and that their potential impact cannot be ignored (DeWine, 2001, para. 431).

2) How does gender affect relationships in the organization?

In the organization, gender can have a great effect on relationships, sometimes negatively but also in a positive manner. Gender's affect on relationships in organization can be inevitable. Even if employees try to treat coworkers with respect and equality, they may subconsciously judge others based on their prejudices regarding gender. In addition, employees may consciously or subconsciously put themselves into behavioral patterns of their gender. The gendered organization supports traditional behaviors of men being masculine with women having to embrace feminine patterns (Eisenberg, Goodall, Trethewey, (2010, para. 186). Women may be offended by the environment at their place of employment, considering it to be sexist. These attitudes can negatively affect a woman's professional relationships as well as any friendships she has established at work. One woman may persuade other female workers to embrace her perception of the environment. Alternatively, gender can play a role in positively affecting relationships in organizations. Women can develop a sense of camaraderie amongst each other on the job. Their gender gives them security in their work friendships that they might not necessarily embrace with their male coworkers.

Gender can play a role by allowing stereotypes about the opposite sexes to have a subtle effect on relationships among employees. Cultural norms hold that women tend to help others deal with relationship issues, and these somewhat subconscious expectations cause women to

get involved in “relationship maintenance at work” (Eisenberg et al., 2010, p. 193). Women have been seen as nurturers for a very long time, which carries over to the workplace. The problem with being a nurturer at work is that it can cause employees to become subjective about their coworkers’ relationships and introduces favoritism. Women in a position of power may consciously or subconsciously use this favoritism to benefit their career. Becoming involved in others’ relationships can also become a drag on women’s careers by causing them to lose focus on their assigned work.

Gender affects workplace relationships by allowing emotional sentiments to develop among employees. When individuals successfully complete projects together, the sense of achievement can make them become attracted to each other (DeWine, 2001, para. 429). People of the opposite sex can develop relationships, or office romances, in the presence of success and the compassion that they develop for each other over the course of a certain time period. In the cases of individuals attracted to others of the same sex, they can also develop affection for coworkers through intense project work.

Work friendships can be jeopardized when members of the opposite sex are prevented from rising in the organization due to their gender. Women have had to deal with the “good old boy” network in the workplace, which is an informal system by which men help each other in their work and career progression (DeWine, 2001, p. 420). Women have largely been denied access to this network of male workers. If women maintain friendly working relationships with their male superiors and male workers on the same hierarchical level, their professional relationships can suffer when they are prevented from pursuing the same opportunities as men. For coworkers on the same level, females may be excluded from extracurricular activities, like attending sporting events or guys’ night out (Eisenberg et al.,

2010, para. 187). Women may feel left out, especially if they are in a very small minority of other women around several male coworkers.

- 3) Identify one difficult person on your job and explain why he or she is difficult. You may use a personal example if you cannot think of one on your job.

My coworker, Terry, is very committed to her work, putting in long hours on a regular basis. Terry is a devoted wife and mother, but since her husband is on the road a lot as a truck driver and her younger children are in bed by 9:00 every night, she is almost always working late into night. Although some employees have a difficult time with “work-life conflict”, Terry is quite capable of maintaining a proper balance (Eisenberg, Goodall, Trethewey, 2010, p. 177). She has been with the company for nearly twenty years, having worked several years as a customer service representative and more recently as a business analyst. She is very knowledgeable about the product lines and customer service procedures. As a customer service representative, Terry became familiar with product lines, specific customers, and particular business rules that now serve her well in her business analyst role. The problem with Terry is that she is probably too passionate about her job, presents herself as unprofessional at times, and makes coworkers feel uncomfortable. Terry wears her emotions on her sleeve. Instead of composing herself when things don’t go well, she becomes very emotional and visibly frustrated. Rather than calmly discussing ideas, Terry becomes negative and shoots down ideas that she considers to be ridiculous. When Terry goes on the offensive and belittles other people’s ideas, she fits the difficult personality type of the “Bullheaded Blocker” (DeWine, 2001, p. 322). She is very argumentative and believes herself to be the most knowledgeable person about the business. Terry has frequent clashes

with employees in different departments, such as information technology, customer service, and project management. In addition to her disposition, Terry dislikes change, especially that which is out of her control. At those times, Terry fits the description of the “Machiavellian Manipulator”, as she is unable to manipulate situations as she sees fit (DeWine, 2001, p. 321). When the company experienced a merger, Terry became very stressed and demonstrated as much by continuing to debate constantly with coworkers. People value Terry for her knowledge and contributions to the business. However, her personality has been a source of frustration to many employees for a long time. Terry exhibits several “characteristics of disruptive communication”, such as “aggressiveness”, “poor listening”, “complaining”, “negative verbal behaviors”, “negative non-verbals”, “uncooperative behaviors”, and “defensiveness” (DeWine, 2001, p. 321). These characteristics and work habits have defined Terry as a capable, yet complex, individual, which according to Eisenberg, Goodall, and Tretheway, is the “identity” she has carved out for herself (p. 173).

4) Describe the listening skills of the difficult person and yourself.

The listening skills of Terry, my coworker, are frustrating and at times disruptive. In meetings, Terry has interrupted speakers to point out incorrect statements about product lines or business rules. Terry possesses a vast knowledge in these subject matters, and her coworkers consult her for this knowledge on a daily basis. However, Terry is sometimes incorrect when she interrupts people in meetings. Rather than listening to the speaker until they finish, she jumps to conclusions about what they are about to say. These actions intimate that Terry is an “emotional listener”, misunderstanding the speaker based on her perception of a word or phrase (DeWine, 2001, p. 196). Although Terry is knowledgeable, she does make

mistakes when she interrupts fellow employees in meetings as well. Terry has the potential to be a very good “critical listener”, comprehending and evaluating messages and providing valuable feedback (DeWine, 2001, p. 193). However, she does not usually choose to embrace the qualities of the critical listener.

Although I like to think of myself as a good listener, I have to recognize that my listening skills leave something to be desired. When someone speaks, I refrain from interrupting them and try to give my full, undivided attention to the speaker. However, when a statement is made, I have a tendency to focus on that one statement and think about its impact, which causes me to lose focus on the next few statements. I find myself having to catch up to where the speaker is at in their dialogue. This tendency sometimes renders me as an “unaware listener”, as the words and statements of the speaker escape me (DeWine, 2001, p. 196). In addition, if I am tired or have a lot on my mind, I tend to drift to other thoughts while listening to other people. Although my eyes and head do not necessarily “wander” while listening, with my mind on other matters, I could be described as an “unfocused listener” or a “fake listener” (DeWine, 2001, p. 196).

References

- DeWine, S. (2001). *The Consultant's Craft: Improving Organizational Communication*. Boston: Bedford / St. Martin's.
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