

Interpersonal Skills—Playing Together Well

Imagine yourself watching a group of small children playing together. Which ones play well with others? Which ones won't share? Do some sit off to the side instead of joining in? Do one or two cause the most friction? Which children smile mostly? Which ones frown frequently?

Now think about people you hang out or work with. Do some get along with everyone, while others give off negative vibes or become aggressive? Which ones are you drawn to? Which do you avoid? Where do you fit between these two groups?

The ability to develop good relationships comes down to your non-technical, interpersonal skills—like empathy, patience and ability to adjust to different people. These skills related to your personality are often called "emotional intelligence."



You will not be able to ignore coworkers and supervisors with challenging personalities, so you must use interpersonal skills on the job. While you can't change people, you can develop ways to approach different personalities in order to maintain good relationships.

Avoid taking everything personally. A coworker's negative reaction may have nothing to do with you.

- A person who comes across as hostile may be worrying about something in his personal life, or a coworker could be stressed about her work deadlines.
- You may feel annoyed by a coworker whose manner is negative when you ask a question, yet the person's behavior may have nothing to do with you. If you respond negatively, you will contribute to the problem.

Relationship advice: Analyze the personalities and behaviors of the people you work with and apply these methods to improve work relationships.

- **Learn to handle coworkers' egos.** Ego is about self-image and self-worth. People who come across as having a "big" ego may, in reality, lack confidence. They cover up their shortcomings with bragging or pushiness. Listen to them and occasionally praise things they do well.
- **Stop the judging.** Because people are different does not make them wrong. Avoid pre-judging coworkers. Get to know them before forming an opinion.
- **Communicate to fit coworkers' styles.** Everyone does not take in information the same way. For those who like facts only, talk less and listen more. For those who want explanations, provide details.
- **Avoid venting about work at work.** Everyone gets frustrated sometimes, but venting at work is dangerous. Vent your job concerns to a family member or a non-work friend.
- **Show support and professionalism, even when disagreeing.** Be friendly and positive.
- **Offer to help.** Stress caused by too much to do in too little time affects behavior. If a coworker seems overloaded with work, offer to pitch in.

Action: Analyze yourself and list five words that describe your personality. From Relationships Advice above, identify the items you need to correct to improve your chances for success at work. Explain why the items cause you problems.

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