

MASTERING HUMAN RELATIONS

Richard Wong (not his real name), graduated with a first class degree in civil engineering eight years ago. He had no difficulty in securing a job with a leading construction conglomerate. At the beginning, he gained rapid promotions due to his technical expertise and ability to deliver results. Unfortunately, his performance began to falter when he was promoted last year as a Senior Project Manager. Richard was preoccupied with producing results; he cared very little about the “human side” of management.

Due to Richard’s poor human relations skills, he became extremely unpopular with his subordinates. Richard often reprimanded his subordinates in public and took superior work performance for granted. He also seldom gave serious consideration to the opinions and ideas of his subordinates. Worse still, Richard adopted the “know-it-all” attitude. Recently, three of his highly capable engineers quit the organization because they could no longer tolerate Richard’s “toxic” manner of managing people.

What does Richard’s story tell us? At the workplace, simply knowing how to do a job doesn’t guarantee success. *Management* after all is the art of getting things done with and through other people. Research shows that more careers have been damaged through poor human relations skills than through a lack of technical ability. According to the *Harvard Bureau of Vocational Guidance*, 66% of job firings are due to poor human relations skills and only 34% due to lack of technical knowledge. Additionally, good human relations make an average performer in the workplace appear much better to others. As aptly concluded by Robert Bolton, 80% of people who fail at work do so for one reason: they do not relate well to other people.

Good human relations is a key determinant of success in both our professional and personal lives. Numerous studies reveal that about 85% of success in business can be attributed to people skills and merely 15% to technical knowledge. As stated by L. Weinberg, organizations are made of people, not technology or structure; it’s the process of human interactions that is important. In this regard, managers should take heed that employees are not machines to be knocked about or tools to be made use of; they ought to be treated with respect and dignity.

WHAT IS HUMAN RELATIONS?

Human relations is essentially interrelationships among people as they work together, both in terms of conflict and cooperation. Lowell H. Lamberton defines human relations as “the skill or ability to work effectively through and with other people.” Good human relations exist when people work together harmoniously in groups to attain common goals. It does not involve manipulating others into doing what you want them to do.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN RELATIONS

1. The greatest human craving is to be appreciated or being praised.
2. Everybody likes to feel important.

3. All human interactions should be mutually beneficial or rewarding.
4. Do unto others as you would have them to do unto you.
5. People like to be treated with respect and dignity.
6. People yearn to be recognized for doing a good job.
7. People expect to be treated fairly and impartially.

TEN TIPS ON MASTERING HUMAN RELATIONS

1. Treat everyone with respect and dignity. Make them feel important. Greet people and address them by their name. Keep them informed of relevant information.
2. Look for the good in people and in situations. Accept people as they are. Concentrate on the relationship, not on the individual's personality. Ignore minor irritations. Give credit when credit is due.
3. Show a genuine interest in other people. Encourage others to talk about themselves. Avoid needless arguments and sarcastic remarks. Take heed that nobody ever really wins an argument.
4. Create "win-win" relationships. Seek mutual benefit in all human interactions. Honour commitments; never make a promise that you cannot keep or a decision that you cannot support.
5. Be a good listener; don't interrupt. Listen attentively with the view of understanding what is being said. Be empathetic. Always try to see the other person's point of view.
6. Call attention to people's mistakes indirectly and attack the problem, not the person. Let the other person save face. Avoid calling people "stupid" or "idiotic". Attacking an individual's personality will only engender feelings of resentment and revenge. Do not also bring up old mistakes or grievances which will merely result in the other person becoming defensive and angry.
7. Give honest and specific appreciation. Praise in public. Criticize in private. Avoid giving "plastic strokes" i.e. giving praise in one breath and criticism in the next.
8. Manage your emotions productively; never lose your temper. Avoid being defensive. Admit your mistakes and apologize to those you have inconvenienced. Any good apology has three parts: i) I'm sorry; ii) It's my fault; and iii) What can I do to make it right? Most people forget the third part. Avoid needless arguments and sarcastic remarks. Nobody ever really wins an argument.
9. Speak positively of others or not at all. Pass along the nice things you hear about a person to that person. Smile and act cheerful. Practise the basic courtesies such as saying "please" and "thank you".
10. Maintain confidentiality. Resist the temptation to feel important by leaking secrets.

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