

# Can You Relate?

## Fostering Positive Working Relationships

**L**aura is having a typical morning. When she woke up, she ran into her brother in the hallway. He was also heading for the bathroom. “You go first,” he told her. “It takes you longer to get ready anyway.” After breakfast, Laura’s friend Imani picked her up and gave her a ride to school. When Laura got to her European history class, she realized she had forgotten her homework. She explained this to her teacher, Mr. Ruiz, who agreed to give her an extra day since she had never been late with her homework before.

Can you see the significance of human relationships in Laura’s life? Her day has already been affected by at least three people, and it’s not even 9:00 a.m. Think through your day so far—how have your relationships with others had an impact on it already?

As you can see, human relationships are important to each and every one of us. **Human relations** are the ways that people create and manage relationships with one another. Having good human relations skills is very important for your personal life as well as for your career. Read on to learn how you can develop and expand the human relations skills necessary for positive relationships at work.



## People Who Need People

**Y**ou already know how important human relationships are to your daily life. Each day is shaped by your interactions with your family, friends, teachers, classmates, and even the strangers with whom you come into contact. If you have a job, each day is also influenced by your interactions and relationships with your supervisors and coworkers. However, getting along with supervisors and coworkers does not always come easily or naturally. That’s why learning how to cultivate positive working relationships is such an important skill. With determination and practice, you can build positive relationships with everyone on your work team.

### Interdependence

Interdependence is an important concept in human relations. But what does this term mean? Any two (or more) things are said to be **interdependent** if they need or rely upon one another for some reason. This is a phenomenon that you can easily see all around you.

For instance, think about the seesaws that you played on when you were younger. For the person on one end of a seesaw to go up, the person at the other end must go down. Then, for the other to go up, the first must come back down to the ground. Each person is dependent on the other—s/he relies upon the other person—to make the seesaw work. Remember how sad you were when there was no one to play with on the seesaw? It’s very difficult to use that type of playground equipment alone.

**M**any mechanical devices (cars, computers, cell phones) are made up of a number of interdependent parts that work together for a common purpose.

## Objectives

**A** Describe the importance of positive working relationships.

**B** Describe three basic management styles commonly encountered by employees.

**C** Demonstrate how to foster positive working relationships.

## Interdependence among people

You are dependent upon other people! This statement should not surprise you. People are generally dependent upon one another for many different things. It is a normal part of the human condition. While you are certainly independent in many ways, you also need other people for a wide variety of reasons. Rarely, if ever, is anyone completely self-reliant. Think about it—what would we do without farmers? Bankers? Teachers? Police officers? Mail carriers?

Not only are you dependent upon many people in your life and in your community, they are also dependent upon you. You can probably think of many important responsibilities that you have to your family, friends, classmates, employers, and fellow citizens. They rely on you, just as you rely on them. None of you want to let down, or be let down by, the others. This is the essence of interdependence among people—people needing one another, depending on each other, and cooperating to achieve mutual benefits or common goals.



▲ You depend on others in your community, and they depend on you, too!

## Interdependence among workers

Interdependence is especially important at work. The primary reason why many workers lose their jobs is poor human relations skills—the inability to get along with other people in their work environment. A place of business is one of the clearest examples of the mutual dependence of group members. In a business, everyone works toward one or more shared goals, such as making a profit, branding a product, or achieving sales goals.

Your behavior at work affects, directly or indirectly, almost every other employee in the business. Everything counts—the way you perform your job, the way you interact with others, your attitude, and so on. All these things influence, in one way or another, the general effectiveness of the work group. There isn't room for inadequate performance or frequent personality conflicts. It is your responsibility to carry out your job tasks properly and to develop positive relationships with coworkers, supervisors, and customers.



▲ Your behavior at work affects everyone on your team.



**R**ead this article by Dianne Crampton for more information on how interdependence contributes to work culture success: <https://corevalues.com/interdependence/work-culture-needs-interdependence/>.

## Effective human relations at work

Interdependence among workers makes effective human relations at work a vital ingredient for success. Positive working relationships result in many benefits, including:



- Increased cooperation
- A comfortable working environment
- High employee morale
- Increased productivity
- A good business image
- Increased customer loyalty
- Increased employee loyalty



▲ Positive working relationships often result in increased productivity and customer loyalty.

## Summary

Human relationships are very important to your daily life. As an employee, each day is significantly influenced by your relationships with others on your work team. Making those relationships positive ones is very important. Interdependence is a term that refers to two (or more) things needing or relying on one another. You are dependent upon other people, just as they are dependent upon you. Interdependence is especially important at work. Your behavior at work affects everyone else on your work team.

### TOTAL RECALL

1. Why is it important to cultivate positive working relationships?
2. What is interdependence?
3. Explain the concept of interdependence among people.
4. List at least three benefits of effective human relations at work.

## THE GRAY ZONE

Janelle and Kim are good friends as well as coworkers. They usually eat lunch together, go to the gym together for a Pilates class once a week, and sometimes catch a movie together after work. Yesterday during their lunch break, Janelle told Kim that one of their employer's biggest competitors had contacted her and offered her a job. She explained to Kim that the job offer was very tempting because she would receive a significant pay raise and have a shorter commute to work. "What do you think I should do?" Janelle asked Kim. "Should I take the new job or stay with our current employer?"

If you were Kim, what would you say? Would you recommend that Janelle take the new job or keep her present one? Also, would you keep Janelle's secret, or would you let your supervisor know that Janelle is seriously thinking about leaving the company?

# Supervisors: That's How They Roll



Frederic Chiosea/  
iStock/Getty Images Plus

**Y**our success at developing positive working relationships largely depends upon your ability to get along with coworkers, supervisors, and managers. Supervisors and managers are expected to guide and direct the efforts of their employees. They are responsible for ensuring that the workers under their supervision are performing their jobs in the most efficient and productive manner.

**T**he following are some general guidelines for employees to build positive working relationships with supervisors and managers in any type of work environment:

- Accept criticism professionally, without becoming defensive.
- Take all work-related complaints to a supervisor first, before discussing them with anyone else. This demonstrates loyalty to the company—a valuable trait in an employee.
- Ask questions if you don't understand something. A supervisor would much rather answer a question than have a task performed the wrong way or an employee who doesn't know what s/he is doing.
- Be trustworthy and honest. It's impossible to maintain good relationships with your coworkers, supervisors, or managers without trust.
- Accept responsibility for your own actions. Don't make excuses for your mistakes or try to shift the blame to others. Accepting responsibility demonstrates maturity as a person and employee.
- Be dependable. Others on your work team should never have to wonder if you'll follow through on your word.
- Be flexible. In most businesses, plans and goals are constantly evolving and changing. Managers appreciate employees who can go with the flow.
- Work hard!



Tera Vector/iStock/Getty Images Plus

▲ Being dependable and following through on your word is one way to build positive working relationships.

**Management styles**, which are managers' approaches to the task of supervising, often vary. These management styles are affected by prior experiences (both as an employee and as a supervisor), personality traits, and attitudes regarding motivation.

Although management styles differ, it is possible to talk in general terms about some of the more common management styles you may encounter. By being aware of the major characteristics associated with each of these styles, you will be better able to understand the behaviors of supervisors and better prepared to respond in the most appropriate way. This will help you adapt to different work situations in which you might find yourself.



**W**hat's your leadership style? Take this quiz and find out:  
<https://www.idealists.org/en/careers/quiz-leadership-style>.



## Authoritarian managers

Supervisors who lean toward the authoritarian style of management prefer to exercise a high degree of control over their employees. This may be due to the demands of the work situation, lack of confidence in the employees, overanxiety about work outcomes, or a number of other reasons. You can identify **authoritarian managers** by the following characteristics:

- Enjoy being in command
- Rely almost completely upon their own judgment
- Create detailed plans and procedures for employees to follow
- Give very specific orders and instructions to employees
- Handle all major work-related problems themselves
- Make all significant decisions themselves

Personality traits that are usually desirable, such as initiative, creativity, and assertiveness, can cause problems for workers under authoritarian managers. These characteristics can be viewed as threatening to these supervisors and may produce negative reactions. Under authoritarian supervisors, employees should be cautious when displaying these characteristics.

To work well under authoritarian management, employees should cultivate a certain “followership.” By being patient, accepting, cooperative, and reliable, employees can function more successfully in this type of work environment. It’s also important to follow rules and directions carefully. Although this management style is not ideal, you may still interact with authoritarian managers, and it’s best to be prepared. The more employees embrace the security that comes with close supervision, the more positive the relationship is likely to be with an authoritarian manager.



▲ Listen carefully, be patient, and cooperate to work well with an authoritarian manager.

## Democratic managers

Supervisors who practice the democratic style of management exercise only a moderate degree of control over their employees. They generally believe that people are interested in and enjoy their work. **Democratic managers** often:

- Seek input from employees
- Encourage employees to participate in planning and decision-making
- Discuss possible solutions to work-related problems with employees
- Explain reasons behind changes in work policies, procedures, etc.
- Share authority
- Form committees and call frequent meetings

Under democratic managers, employees are often able to develop their creativity, interest, enthusiasm, initiative, cooperation, empathy, and leadership. Employees who take a personal interest in their work, contribute ideas, help solve problems, and feel they are important members of the team are often very satisfied working with a democratic supervisor. This style of management is also referred to as the participative management style.



▲ Take initiative, contribute ideas, and help solve problems to succeed with a democratic manager.

## Laissez-faire managers

Laissez-faire is a French term that refers to a philosophy of noninterference. A supervisor who uses a laissez-faire management style takes a hands-off approach to managing employees. These supervisors exercise very little control over their workers. While this could bring chaos in some work environments, it is excellent for others, especially those requiring maximum creativity from employees. The following behaviors are common among **laissez-faire managers**:

- Provide only general guidance
- Avoid giving specific, detailed directions
- Permit employees to function independently
- Encourage creativity
- Encourage initiative

Employees who display high levels of creativity, initiative, self-confidence, self-discipline, assertiveness, and the ability to set their own goals often do well working for laissez-faire supervisors. Employees who act independently, devise their own solutions, and make plans and decisions can easily adapt to this management style. Keep in mind that, even if you are working for a laissez-faire supervisor, you will still need to check in occasionally to make sure you are meeting expectations.



▲ Be assertive, set goals, and use your creativity to make the most of a laissez-faire manager.



**H**ow did Steve Jobs manage his employees to grow Apple as an industry leader? Watch this video to find out: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQKis2Cfpeo>. What type of management style did Jobs use?

## Summary

Your success at developing positive working relationships largely depends upon your ability to get along with your supervisors and managers. There are some general guidelines for getting along with supervisors in any work environment, including accepting criticism professionally, working hard, and being trustworthy. A supervisor's approach to the job is his/her management style. Three general management styles are authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire. Each style has its defining characteristics, and employees can learn certain ways to work effectively under each.

## TOTAL RECALL

1. List at least four guidelines for getting along with supervisors in any work environment.
2. What is a management style?
3. Describe authoritarian leadership.
4. Describe democratic leadership.
5. Describe laissez-faire leadership.

# Why Can't We All Just Get Along?

Learning to foster positive working relationships should be a priority for every employee. The following guidelines can help you achieve this goal.

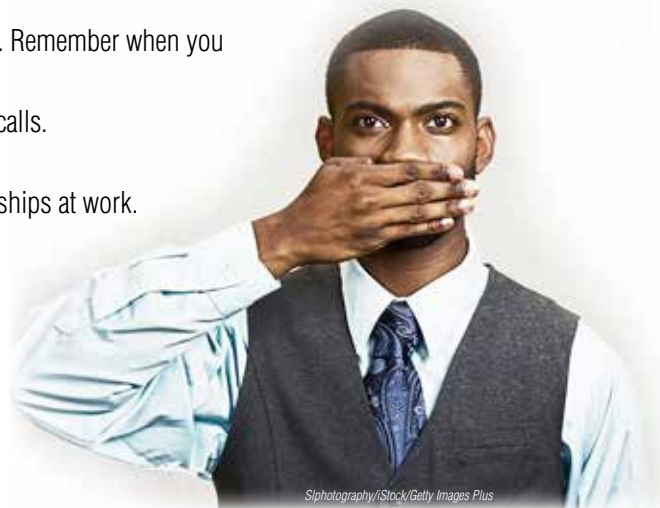


## Demonstrate courtesy and respect toward others on your work team.



Some ways to demonstrate courtesy and respect include:

- Being humble. Few things can do more to damage working relationships than a coworker with an arrogant attitude. Every member of the work team is important, not just you.
- Being patient when explaining processes or procedures to new coworkers. Remember when you were a new employee, and put yourself in their shoes.
- Respecting privacy. Don't eavesdrop on personal conversations or phone calls. The same principle applies to emails and computer files.
- Avoiding gossip. It's unprofessional and can permanently destroy relationships at work.
- Being empathetic when a coworker is experiencing a crisis or a problem.
- Being tolerant of the differences between you and your coworkers. Everyone is different. Accept people the way they are.
- Being tactful. Think before you speak.
- Being on time for work, meetings, etc. Don't make others cover for you—it can cause resentment.
- Using common courtesy. Don't forget to say, "Please," "Thank you," and "Excuse me."
- Offering appropriate congratulations when someone has done an excellent job.
- Dressing appropriately for your work environment, whether it's formal or business casual attire.
- Having a sense of humor while also maintaining respect for others.



▲ Gossip is unprofessional and destructive—do your best to avoid it.

You'll find that the more respect and courtesy you show your coworkers, the more you will receive in return. Just as in other areas of your life, treat others the way you would like to be treated yourself.



## Get to know others on your work team.

You don't necessarily have to become best buddies with all your coworkers, but getting to know them as people will go a long way toward building positive relationships with them. Be friendly to your coworkers—call them by name and look them in the eyes when speaking. Take time to talk to them, and find out more about their hobbies, interests, and goals (but be careful not to pry with too many personal questions). The more you get to know your coworkers, the less likely you will be to make incorrect assumptions or judgments about them that could harm relationships.

A good way to get to know your coworkers and supervisors better is to participate in activities outside the office. Many companies offer excellent opportunities for doing this—everything from softball leagues and company picnics to charity events and community involvement activities. Spending time with coworkers in a nonwork environment is a great way to build positive relationships. Can you think of some good team-building activities that would help employees get to know one another?



Check out this article by Emily Bonnie to help you get started:  
<https://www.wrike.com/blog/ultimate-guide-team-building-activities/>.

### 3 Carry your own weight.

Do your job—even on the days you don't feel like it! Don't expect your coworkers to pick up the slack for you. Sure, everyone gets behind every once in a while and needs some help catching up, but you shouldn't make a habit of imposing on others to finish your job tasks. Call in sick only if you are truly sick. Always meet your deadlines. Reach out if you find yourself falling behind or needing help. If a coworker helps you with your assigned tasks, be sure to thank him/her.

### 4 Be cooperative.

A work team can run more smoothly with cooperation and teamwork. A spirit of cooperation means that you value the work of others as much as you value your own work. If someone else needs help or is falling behind, you do your best to support him/her. Cooperation also includes:

- Sharing with your coworkers (equipment, information, materials, etc.)
- Being a good listener
- Going above and beyond your basic job requirements
- Being willing to go with another person's idea if it's better than your own
- Celebrating when something good happens to a coworker rather than being jealous or resentful
- Sharing both praise and constructive criticism with your coworkers

### 5 Have a good attitude.

No one likes to be around a person with a negative attitude, let alone work with that person all day long. Displaying a positive attitude will help you become the type of coworker or manager with whom others desire to build a relationship. A positive attitude on the job means many things, including being enthusiastic, developing an optimistic mindset, and refusing to grumble or complain. Positive people are also open-minded and willing to learn from others, even when things are difficult or it's easier to complain.

By following these five simple guidelines, you will be well on your way to learning how to cultivate positive working relationships at your place of employment.



▲ Teamwork, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude will take you far—both at work and in life!

## Summary

Five simple guidelines can help you foster positive working relationships with your supervisors and coworkers. Demonstrate courtesy and respect toward others on your work team, get to know them, carry your own weight, be cooperative, and have a good attitude.

## TOTAL RECALL

Describe five techniques for fostering positive working relationships.