

Development Suggestions for Interpersonal Skills

Suggested Reading

Title	Author/Publisher	Learning Mode
Interpersonal Skills for Leadership	Fritz, Susan, Browns, William, Lunde, Joyce and Bassett, Elizabeth.	Book
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People	Covey, Stephen A./ 1990/ Free Press	Book + AudioCD
People Smart: Developing Your Interpersonal Intelligence	Silberman, Melvin L.PhD. and Hansberg, Frieda/ 2000/ Berrett-Koehler Publishers	Book

Activities

1. Assess your current ability as an effective listener. Rate each item listed below by placing a dot in the appropriate box. When you have rated all the items, draw a line to connect the dots. This will give you an “effective listener profile.” The more your profile leans toward the right, the more able you are to listen effectively to others.

Do I:	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Interrupt?					
Show impatience?					
Misunderstand what someone has said?					
Have people correct my interpretation of what they've said?					
Daydream and miss what was said?					
Make suggestions before a problem is fully explained?					
Think about my response instead of listening to the speaker?					
Talk more than I listen?					
Avoid eye contact?					

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2. Follow the two key steps in listening effectively.

Step 1: Listen to the words being expressed.

As you listen to the words being expressed, try to grasp both the content and the meaning of the words from the speaker's perspective. While this may sound simple, external and internal distractions often distract us and compete with our ability to listen.

Step 2: Paraphrase what was said to demonstrate your understanding.

Paraphrasing to demonstrate your understanding requires you to verbally interact with the speaker. This interaction is either to get additional information you're missing or verify with the speaker what you think was said.

Use a phrase such as "As I understand it ..." or "It seems that ..." before you restate in your own words what the speaker said. If you paraphrase the information correctly, the speaker can confirm that you have understood. If you paraphrase incorrectly or miss important details, the speaker can give you the information you need to understand.

3. List your biggest barriers to listening effectively. Create the worksheet shown below. Once you have listed your internal and external barriers, identify ways to eliminate or reduce these barriers. For example,

Internal Barriers	External Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Preconceived notions due to prior experience with individual- Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Phone interruptions- Email/Blackberry

4. Show appropriate nonverbal behaviors when listening. Use the following suggestions:

- Remove any physical barriers between you and the speaker. Don't sit behind your desk.
- Face the speaker and lean slightly toward him or her.
- Nod occasionally to convey that you understand or agree.
- Maintain eye contact. But don't stare.
- Smile when appropriate, such as when the speaker uses humor.
- Avoid distracting behaviors such as shuffling papers, answering the phone, or looking elsewhere.

5. Identify people whom you consider to be effective listeners. Watch closely to see how they convey interest, understanding, and empathy. What nonverbal behaviors do they demonstrate? What type of questions do they ask?
6. Increase buy-in by adapting content and detail to the listeners and the situation. Consider the following questions to help you meet their needs and guide what you say and how you say it:
 - What kind of information do people want or need?
 - Why do they need this information?
 - Do they need to make a decision or simply need more background?
 - Do they need more information to help them implement the decision? If so, what specifically do they need?
 - What can I do so that they will be more receptive to my message? How will they benefit?
7. Exuberantly acknowledge the successes of your employees.
8. Recognize the things that a person has done well and encourage them to build on these strengths.
9. Describe in detail the behavior that you are praising when giving positive feedback so that the employee knows what behavior to continue.
10. When there is mixed performance, clearly separate the positive from the negative, reinforce the positive, and provide factual corrections to the negative.
11. Document and remember both positive and negative aspects of individuals' performances.
12. Positive and negative feedback should be provided promptly. Do not wait for the performance review.
13. Provide personalized ways of acknowledging excellent performance among employees, such as personalized notes, letters for-the-record, notations in the performance appraisal, or acknowledgment in front of senior management.

Tips

1. Demonstrate interest in your employees by using active listening techniques and responding positively.
2. Talk with each of your subordinates to learn what their interests and personal goals are. Keep a record of these and periodically review them with the employee.

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3. Help the employee deal realistically with business opportunities and personal qualifications.
4. Help translate these ideas into specific development plans.
5. Without engaging in any preferential treatment or bending performance rules, show compassion by spending time with or listening to all employees who experience personal difficulties.
6. Consider having all members of your work unit take an interpersonal style inventory so that everyone understands and develops a healthy respect for style differences within the group.
7. Help employees deal realistically with business opportunities and personal qualifications. Help translate these ideas into specific, personal development plans.
8. Consider employees' special interests and abilities.
9. When an employee appears to have a performance problem, point out the performance defect and first ask if the employee has an explanation for the problem. Actively listen to hear the employee's explanation.
10. Be specific, avoiding general comments such as "that was awful."
11. Recall instances of when you were given feedback from your managers trying to model aspects that worked and eliminating behaviors that affected you adversely.
12. Take responsibility for the feedback that you are providing instead of suggesting the unanimous opinions of others. Use "I think" or "in my opinion" instead of "you are."
13. When there is mixed performance, clearly separate the positive from the negative, reinforce the positive, and provide factual corrections to the negative.
14. Document and remember both positive and negative aspects of individuals' performances.
15. Positive and negative feedback should be provided promptly; do not wait for the performance review.
16. Before giving the feedback, weigh the pros and cons of changes that may or may not result from the feedback.
17. Ask the recipient whether they agree with your feedback and whether he or she has ever been given similar feedback.

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18. Set a goal to review performance and provide feedback on a regular basis. For example, decide to review a subordinate's work every 2 weeks and provide feedback within 24 hours of the review.
19. Let employees know that you are willing to provide feedback so that they will come to you for advice before mistakes are made.
20. To learn to give good feedback, practice observing the behavior of others. Concentrate on description instead of evaluation or judgment. Give the employee a chance to explain his or her side of the issue.
21. Listen to your employees and try to understand their points of view.
22. Accept that the demands for change are often met with resistance or even resentment. Give the other person an opportunity to accept or reject your feedback and to give their side.
23. Demonstrate interest in your employees by using active listening techniques and responding positively.
24. Enjoy the diversity of dispositions and capabilities in your work unit. Capitalize on the diversity by thinking of ways in which each individual's unique talents and preferences can be drawn into the work process.
25. Take advantage of the skills of different employees in assigning work; at the same time, make assignments with an eye toward stretching employee abilities even further.
26. Do not do other tasks while you are listening. Focus on the speaker and what he or she is saying.
27. Practice listening skills by listening to a news broadcast and testing yourself on how much you can remember.
28. Identify those people to whom and situations in which you find it difficult to listen. Determine why and list three things you can do to listen more effectively.