

Stephen Covey 2

Working with other people



Working with other people

Interpersonal relationships are the defining medium of management. How you relate to superiors, colleagues, and subordinates governs your ability to succeed — and often theirs as well. The desire to serve mutual interests, good communication techniques, and the appreciation of opposing views result in increased trust and synergistic teamwork.

ESTABLISH GOOD RELATIONS

Internal relationships need to be fostered just as carefully as the decisive connections outside the firm. Treat everyone you relate to — suppliers, bosses, peers, and other employees in the same way you treat external customers; as people with specific (if unexpressed) demands, which they expect you to serve. Some companies identify the internal customers of departments and carry out customer satisfaction surveys, on the same lines as those conducted externally, to help appraise a particular department's effectiveness. It can then correct any faults that have been identified.

SATISFY ALL PARTIES

The most desirable outcome with any customer inside or outside the company is benefit to both parties. Your object with an external customer is to give perceived value. Pursue that aim just as vigorously inside the organization. Adopt the six-stage cycle of customer satisfaction with each relevant individual or group.

THE SIX-STAGE CYCLE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

- 1 Discover customer wants by asking the customers.
- 2 Find out how well you are currently supplying the wants.
- 3 Take decisive action to eliminate deficiencies.
- 4 Identify and install added customer value.
- 5 Re-check customer satisfaction.
- 6 Repeat stages 2-5 and continue the cycle.

1. Serving Mutual Interests

The barriers to finding mutually acceptable and beneficial solutions are very often emotional. Hold both yourself and the other party in high esteem, act accordingly, and you greatly improve your prospect of achieving a mutually satisfactory result in any negotiation.

ENCOURAGE EMOTIONAL SECURITY

Covey describes a satisfactory result for both parties as Win/Win, which equates to the top level of emotional security (“I’m OK, You’re OK”) described by the school of psychology called transactional analysis (TA). He identifies three other common outcomes to any negotiation. You must be high on both personal courage and consideration for others to effect a Win/Win outcome.

ACHIEVING WIN/WIN

Both sides in a negotiation must display a high level of courage and consideration to achieve a Win/Win outcome.

PERFORMANCE AGREEMENTS

Win/Win is essential to the success of any performance agreements created by manager and subordinate. To form a Win/Win agreement, follow Covey’s four step action plan.

THE FOUR-STEP ACTION PLAN TO WIN/WIN

- 1 Establish what the other person’s interests really are.
- 2 Identify the key issues and concerns involved.
- 3 Determine what results both sides would accept.
- 4 Find possible new options to achieve those results.

2. Mastering Communications

Effective communications depend mainly on trust. Learn how to establish and sustain trust by avoiding hidden agendas and ill-considered actions. Focus also on developing your ability to handle disagreement, listen empathetically, and be understood yourself.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST

Covey makes the important point that trust must be built over time, and that its level will rise and fall as different experiences have different effects. The greater the trust between two parties, the greater the degree of cooperation.

ESTABLISH TRUST

Full trust is never easily achieved. But it can be earned. To make effective the time and effort spent on creating, enhancing, and restoring trust, you must abide by the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." Therefore:

- Do not "give a dog a bad name". If you treat individuals as incompetent, you will get incompetence. Treat them as competent, encourage what they do well, and they will excel.
- Do not make a promise that you cannot keep. If you are forced to dash an individual's hopes, apologize and make amends at the first opportunity. Their trust will be hard to recapture.
- Do not disappoint expectations. Remember that expectations can only be fulfilled by actions. To quote Covey: "Honesty is telling the truth... conforming our words to reality. Integrity is "conforming reality to our words".

FACE UP TO DISAGREEMENT

At times your message will be met by disagreement or even outright confrontation. Sometimes a subordinate will say that they agree when in fact they do not, resulting in only half-hearted cooperation, if that. To deal with such situations you need to master four essential communication skills.

THE FOUR ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- 1 The ability to put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- 2 The ability to communicate your understanding of the opposing view.
- 3 The ability to listen carefully.
- 4 The ability to interpret the meaning of body and facial language.

USE EMPATHY

The first two skills are different aspects of empathy. Ask yourself why the other person is thinking and acting in a contrary manner. By understanding their reasoning, and the underlying emotions, you can rescue communication from failure, and even strengthen it.

To demonstrate your understanding, play back to the other party their own view, putting their case as strongly and accurately as you can. Then present your case from their point of view. Now ask the other party to explain your position as best they can. This will lead to better understanding on both sides and to a greater chance of reaching agreement.

SEEK THE FULL MEANING

Be very sure to listen carefully. People commonly start thinking about their reply well before the other party has finished speaking. Hear the other person out. Watch them intently, too. Facial gestures and body language often contradict the words. If so, it will be the accompanying words that are misleading.

Try watching somebody talking on television with the sound turned off, while you record the programme. What do the person's gestures communicate? Now rerun the programme with the sound on, and check your analysis. How misleading are the words?

3. Winning Synergy's rewards

The most effective solutions to issues are often achieved by group effort. Organize brainstorming sessions to promote the discussion of ideas, the interchange of views, and the exploration of alternatives so as to achieve synergistic agreement on the best way forward.

USING THE DIALECTIC

To bring about synergy, use the dialectic of philosophy — ensure that opposing views are aired, and that individuals are committed to finding a satisfactory solution for the group.

DIALECTICAL SYNERGY

- Put forward a thesis.
- You propose the antithesis.
- We agree on a combined synthesis.

DEBATING IN A FORCE FIELD

The conflict between positive and negative forces is as natural and as essential to synergy as the opposition of views. When you are debating an issue, you will find yourself in a force field, in which driving forces are opposed to restraining forces.

OPPOSING FORCES IN DEBATE

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| – Driving forces | – Restraining forces |
| – Positive thought | – Negative thought |
| – Reason | – Emotion |
| – Logic | – Illogic |
| – Consciousness | – Unconsciousness |
| – Economics | – Social factors |

You will find that trying to strengthen the driving forces is not enough. So long as the restraining forces are there, they will push back, and the harder you drive, the harder they will push. But take a Win/Win attitude; try to understand the opposing point of view, and make sure you are understood yourself. Then a constructive interaction will take place — and synergy will be achieved.

TWO-BRAINED THINKING

Synergy sessions require the use of both sides of your brain. The division is similar to the opposition of driving and restraining forces. The analytical, logical, verbal left brain — which is full of driving forces — does not generate the creative, contrarian, exciting ideas. You generate these in the emotional right brain, which is intuitive, creative, and visual.

Your left brain provides the framework and the facts. The right brain provides the insight and inspiration. As Covey points out, getting the two sides of the brain to work together is synergy in itself - psychic synergy.

GROUP SYNERGY SESSIONS

To achieve two brained working in a group, first ask: "Is everybody with a potential contribution involved?" Actively seek out people with different points of view. When you have the right group together, the leadership defines the issues (let the group to debate and agree the agenda items, all of them, then review the agenda.

REVIEW THE AGENDA

- What is the objective of this agenda?
- Are those the right aims?
- Have the right issues been selected?
- Have they been properly defined?
- Do any issues need to be added or taken away?
- Is any more information needed?

With these matters settled, you can start to generate' alternatives and choices. Encourage everyone to speak. Aim to achieve an atmosphere in which no-one feels threatened – use humour but outlaw ridicule. Ask people to speak in rotation. When each participant has made his or her point, questions are allowed, but do not. have an adversarial debate. Use agreed time limits and checkpoints to re-focus the group on the main objective of the meeting. Then restart the discussions — and work together to achieve that objective.