

How to Build your People and Social Skills

How would you like to get along even better with others in your personal relationships and in the workplace? Getting along well with people sounds kind of general and is difficult to do much about, so let's break it down into some manageable and specific skills. By building the following skills, you will get along well with others:

1. Build others' self-esteem.
2. Show empathy for others.
3. Encourage people to cooperate with each other.
4. Communicate assertively.
5. Ask productive questions and demonstrate listening skills.
6. Respond productively to emotional statements.

People skills (which are also known as *emotional intelligence*) can be thought of as six specific skills. Let's take a brief look at each one.

1. *Build others' self-esteem.* When you are in a situation where you are made to feel good about yourself, you feel good. You can do the same with others by doing the following kinds of things:
 - a. Make eye contact with others.
 - b. Call others by their names.
 - c. Ask others their opinions.
 - d. Compliment others' work.
 - e. Tell people how much you appreciate them.
 - f. Write notes of thanks when someone does something worthwhile.
 - g. Make people feel welcome when they come to your home or workplace.
 - h. Pay attention to what is going on in people's lives. Acknowledge milestones and express concern about difficult life situations such as illness, deaths, and accidents.
 - i. Introduce your family members to acquaintances when you meet them in public.
 - j. Encourage your loved ones to explore their talents and interests.
 - k. Share people's excitement when they accomplish something.
 - l. Honor people's needs and wants.
 - m. Take responsibility for your choices and actions, and expect others to do the same.
 - n. Take responsibility for the quality of your communications.
2. *Show empathy for others.* Empathy means recognizing emotions in others. It is the capacity to put yourself in another person's shoes and understand how they view

their reality and how they feel about things. Being aware of our emotions and how they affect our actions is a fundamental ability in today's people-intense workplaces. People who are cut off from their emotions are unable to connect with people. It's like they are emotionally tone-deaf. No one wants to work with such people because they have no idea how they affect others. You have probably met a few people who fit this description.

3. *Encourage people to cooperate with each other.* Whether you are managing a family or a work group, there are some specific things you can do to create an environment where others work together well:
 - a. Don't play favorites. Treat everyone the same. Otherwise, some people will not trust you.
 - b. Don't talk about people behind their backs.
 - c. Ask for others' ideas. Participation increases commitment.
 - d. Follow up on suggestions, requests, and comments, even if you are unable to carry out a request.
 - e. Check for understanding when you make a statement or announcement. Don't assume everyone is with you.
 - f. Make sure people have clear instructions for tasks to be completed. Ask people to describe what they plan to do.
 - g. Reinforce cooperative behavior. Don't take it for granted.

4. *Communicate assertively.* Assertive communication is a constructive way of expressing feelings and opinions. People are not born assertive; their behavior is a combination of learned skills. Assertive behavior enables you to:
 - a. Act in your own best interests.
 - b. Stand up for yourself without becoming anxious.
 - c. Express your honest feelings.
 - d. Assert your personal rights without denying the rights of others.

Assertive behavior is different from passive or aggressive behavior in that it is:

- e. Self-expressive
- f. Honest
- g. Direct
- h. Self-enhancing
- i. Constructive, not destructive

Assertive behavior includes both *what* you say and *how* you say it.

5. *Ask productive questions and demonstrate listening skills.* Listening skills help you show that you are hearing and understanding another person and are interested in what he or she has to say.

6. *Respond productively to emotional statements.* A communication skill called *active listening* is especially useful in emotional situations because it enables you to demonstrate that you understand what the other person is saying and how he or she is feeling about it. Active listening means restating, in your own words, what the other person has said. It's a check of whether your understanding is correct. This demonstrates that you are listening and that you are interested and concerned.

Active listening responses have two components:

- a. Naming the feeling that the other person is conveying
- b. Stating the reason for the feeling

Here are some examples of active listening statements:

- c. "Sounds like you're upset about what happened at work."
- d. "You're annoyed by my lateness, aren't you?"
- e. "You sound really stumped about how to solve this problem."
- f. "It makes you angry when you find errors on Joe's paperwork."
- g. "Sounds like you're really worried about Wendy."
- h. "I get the feeling you're awfully busy right now."

Actively listening is *not* the same as agreement. It is a way of demonstrating that you intend to hear and understand another's point of view.

The ability to get along well with people in your personal relationships and in the workplace is a set of learned skills. No one is born knowing how to build others' self-esteem, show empathy, encourage cooperation, communicate assertively, ask productive questions, or respond productively to emotional statements. These skills can be learned and developed with some practice. By taking the time to develop these skills, you will be able to build better relationships at home and at work.