

Beyond Civility: How to Really Get Along With Coworkers

By Shari Peace

Studies show that tough relationships and disagreements deflate work morale faster than anything else.

It makes sense, then, that working to strengthen relationships can do wonders for your productivity: Fix the conflict, feel better, and get more done. The tougher the relationship, the bigger your payoff in working to make it better. It's probably safe to say that most people want to fix strained relationships and are even willing to invest the time and energy to do so. But here's the tricky part: You may be focusing on how you want the other person to change. If they do change, that's a great bonus. But because that may not happen, a smarter strategy is to select the best tools you can use to navigate through whatever obstacles appear in your path to constructive relationships.

Try these tips to make even the thorniest relationships easier to handle:

- A. Attack the problem, not the person. Imagine that you aren't getting information you need from another department, and it's causing your work to suffer. You may presume the other department is lazy, or doesn't care, or is trying to sabotage your success. Instead of attacking the people involved, attack the problem. Suggest a meeting to determine what the problem is and why you aren't getting the information. The real problem may be short staffing or system problems—or they may not be getting the information they need from someone else. You'll stay solution-oriented and engage others with your professionalism intact.
- B. Look for the good in the people who frustrate you the most. It isn't necessary to like all your coworkers, but it is necessary to treat everyone with respect. The best way to respect someone is to discover their strengths, skills, or contributions; then, focus on those instead of what you *don't* like. The more you can recognize a person's good qualities, the easier it is to show the genuine respect.
- C. Don't let the "crabs" get you down. A crab is the type of person for whom nothing is ever right, nothing is ever good enough, and there's not one single thing they can do to make it better (in their mind, at least). If you stay determined, you can keep a "crab" from pulling you down to their level. Use these 5 steps:
 1. Try to understand why they're negative. They may be dealing with a serious life issue. Understanding may help you be more sympathetic and less frustrated.
 2. Talk to them about it. Tell them you've noticed they have seemed a little down and offer to help. They may exercise their right not to divulge

anything, but it may help just to know someone cares. It also can help them realize how they're coming across (they truly may not realize how much their negativity is affecting others).

3. Avoid them if the situation doesn't show signs of improvement.
 4. Remove them from your environment (if possible and if truly necessary).
 5. Have a "recovery plan." If steps 1-3 above haven't worked, and you can't remove them (which is often the case with a coworker), have a plan for how you'll replenish your good mood after you come into contact with them. A recovery plan will help make sure that even if you can't change the situation, you can at least make sure it won't destroy your mood and your productivity all day.
- D. Give one or more compliments or pieces of praise every day. Studies show that the No. 1 motivator for most employees is feeling appreciated. While that recognition can and should come from managers, every employee can make it a priority to say "thanks" more often.
- E. Keep your attitude as positive as possible, whatever your circumstances. It's easy to think your attitude is determined by other people and by uncontrollable events in your life. But if that's true, you've lost control over your own life. Be resolved to be as happy as possible, for just five minutes at a time. You'll feel better and you'll be easier to get along with.

Shari Peace is president of Peace Talks, a Dayton, Ohio-based professional speaking firm, and is the author of *Crank It Out! How to Get More Done—At Work & In Your Life*. Reach her at peacetalks@msn.com or at 877/808-8520.

Harmony at Work: Getting Along with Your Co-Workers

Tips for Keeping the Peace in a Job Situation



By [Amanda Sposato](#), published Dec 28, 2006

Work takes up a good portion of our lives. For the regular full time employee, a regular work week takes up at least 40 hours and that's not taking overtime into consideration. Even for part timers, a job can feel like a second home. Granted, there are a few out there who work from home and so the co-worker issue doesn't come into play. However, for the rest of us, we spend most of our week with a group of people that are usually not family. Whether or not they're friends though depends on how well you get along with them.

In actuality, you don't have to be friends with your co-workers. But to make the day go by smoothly, it's wise to be on good terms with them. This doesn't mean you have to spend time outside of the office hanging out or talking on the phone with them. But while you're in the same working environment, being able to talk on a friendly (or at least cordial) basis is highly important. Co-workers that don't get along can make the work place tense not only for themselves, but for those around them as well. Even if you don't particularly care for a fellow employee, doing your part to keep the peace can go a long way towards showing true professionalism in your career.

The following is a list of things to keep in mind and try when you're in a situation where getting along with your fellow employees is important. Whether you're new to the company or just experiencing some tension with other workers, these tips can help make going to work everyday a lot less stressful.

- 1. Don't hesitate to be friendly:** Even if you're the new employee, or maybe the one who's never had much to say, don't hesitate to smile and say hello to your co-workers. Even if you have nothing to talk to them about, reaching out even a little bit will let them know that you're not being aloof because you feel "above" them. It will also make you more approachable, and once you make greeting people a habit, you may find yourself being included in more conversations.
- 2. Have a little (or a lot) of patience:** This tip is twofold. If you're a new employee, be patient when it comes to establishing a rapport with your co-workers. It doesn't happen overnight. People have to get used to you and vice versa. Don't give up if you're not making small talk at the water cooler after just a week. Eventually you'll find your voice in the work pool. If you're an established employee who has a hard time dealing with one (or a few) of your co-workers, the patience tip can be useful for you too. You may not like everyone you work with, but have a little tolerance for those who just seem to rub you the wrong way. There's a good chance they don't mean to do it and making an issue of it will only make everyone else in the office tense over the conflict.

3. **Don't gossip:** If you've ever been in earshot of two gossiping co-workers, you know how uncomfortable it can be, especially if you're the kind who wonders if they're talking about you. Even if you can hear what they're saying, many people find it uncomfortable when a colleague is being discussed in a less than flattering way. Do your part and keep any tidbits you might pick up to yourself. Likewise, if you have an issue with another worker, don't complain about them, even to fellow workers you do get along with. Handle any problems professionally by bringing them directly to the employee you have them with or to a manager. By not jumping on the gossip bandwagon, you'll not only be setting an example, you'll also be guarding yourself from saying anything that could come back to haunt you.

4. **Be respectful no matter the situation:** It's easy to form quick opinions of others in the company just based on a couple of quick meetings or even a pre-existing reputation. The problem is that first impressions truly are hard to shake. Do your part to get along with everyone by respecting everyone's ideas, input, and work ethic, even if it doesn't match yours. Show appreciation for the work of your fellow employees and compromise to finish projects or get big jobs done. Working with different personalities can be a learning experience, but only if you respect what others can bring to the office.

5. **Don't throw stones in glass houses:** Most everyone knows what this phrase means, but for those who don't, the basic idea is not to complain about others doing what you may be doing yourself. If you dislike a fellow employee because you believe they're lazy, don't spend most of your time reading emails and passing work off on someone else. If you complain about someone else taking time off or being constantly late, make it a point to be on time and call in as little as possible. While it may not be your place to chastise your fellow workers for their work habits, don't let yourself be hypocritical. Follow your own work ethic and do your part in keeping office harmony.

While it's not easy to predict what every work situation is going to be like or what kind of personalities are going to clash in one office, the universal truth is that work stress not only makes the job harder for those that have to go everyday, but it also decreases work production and morale. Do your part. Make it a point to get along with your co-workers and you might find a positive side to everyone...even those you don't like.

How to Get Along With Your Boss

By Susan M. Heathfield,

Ten Tips to Manage Up for an Effective Boss Relationship

At one point or another in your career, you will report to a manager, the person you fondly - or not - call boss. The relationships that you create and manage, with both your immediate boss, and other company employees, are critical for your work success and career progress.

And, face it, whether you like it or not, you're in charge of your relationship with your boss. No one will ever share as much concern as you do that the quality of the relationship helps you achieve your goals. At the same time, your boss has information that you need to succeed. He can't do his job or accomplish his goals without your help.

So, your manager shares a critical interdependence with you. If you don't accomplish your work, your manager will never shine for his or her overall responsibilities. You won't progress without the information, perspective, experience, and support of your manager.

Despite knowing this, managers do come in every size and with all possible levels of skill and effectiveness.

Some managers are just plain bad bosses; others are unaware of what you need from them. Managing up is challenging, but ultimately, worth your time.

How to Develop an Effective Relationship With Your Boss

These steps will help you develop a positive, ongoing, supportive relationship with your boss - a relationship that serves you well, your manager well, and, as a consequence, your organization well.

1. The first step in managing up is to **develop a positive relationship with your boss**. Relationships are based on trust. Do what you say you'll do. Keep timeline commitments. Never blind side your manager with surprises that you could have predicted or prevented. Keep her informed about your projects and interactions with the rest of the organization.

Tell the boss when you've made an error or one of your reporting staff has made a mistake. Cover-ups don't contribute to an effective relationship. Lies or efforts to mislead always result in further stress for you as you worry about getting "caught" or somehow slipping up in the consistency of your story. Communicate daily or weekly to build the relationship.

Get to know your manager as a person - she is one, after all. She shares the human experience, just as you do, with all of its joys and sorrows.

2. Recognize that success at work is not all about you; **put your boss's needs at the center of your universe**. Identify your boss's areas of weakness or greatest challenges and ask what you can do to help. What are your boss's biggest worries; how can your contribution mitigate these concerns? Understand your boss's goals and priorities. Place emphasis in your work to match her priorities. Think in terms of the overall success of your department and company, not just about your more narrow world at work.

3. **Look for and focus on the "best" parts of your boss;** just about every boss has both good points and bad. When you're negative about your boss, the tendency is to focus on his worst traits and failings. This is neither positive for your work happiness nor your prospects for success in your organization. Instead, compliment your boss on something he does well. Provide positive recognition for contributions to your success. Make your boss feel valued. Isn't this what you want from him for you?
4. Your boss is unlikely to change; she can choose to change, but the person who shows up to work every day has taken years and years of effort on her part to create. And, who your boss is has worked for her in the past and reinforced her actions and beliefs. Instead of trying to change your boss, **focus instead, on trying to understand your boss's work style.**

Identify what she values in an employee. Does she like frequent communication, autonomous employees, requests in writing in advance of meeting, or informal conversation as you pass in the hallway. Your boss's preferences are important and the better you understand them, the better you will work with her.

5. **Learning how to read your boss's moods and reactions** is also a helpful approach to communicate more effectively with him. There are times when you don't want to introduce new ideas; if he is preoccupied with making this month's numbers, your idea for a six month improvement may not be timely. Problems at home or a relative in failing health affect each of your workplace behaviors and openness to an improvement discussion. Additionally, if your boss regularly reacts in the same way to similar ideas, explore what he fundamentally likes or dislikes about your proposals.
6. **Learn from your boss.** Although some days it may not feel like it, your boss has much to teach you. Appreciate that she was promoted because your organization found aspects of her work, actions, and/or management style worthwhile. Promotions are usually the result of effective work and successful contributions. So, ask questions to learn and listen more than you speak to develop an effective relationship with your boss.
7. **Ask your boss for feedback.** Let the boss play the role of coach and mentor. Remember that your boss can't read your mind. Enable him to offer you recognition for your excellent performance. Make sure he knows what you have accomplished. Create a space in your conversation for him to praise and thank you.
8. **Value your boss's time.** Try to schedule, at least, a weekly meeting during which you are prepared with a list of what you need and your questions. This allows him to accomplish work without regular interruption.
9. **Tie your work, your requests, and your project direction to your boss's and the company's overarching goals.** When making proposals to your boss, try to see the larger picture. There are many reasons why your suggestion may not be adopted: resources, time, goals, and vision. **Maintain strict confidentiality.**
10. In your relationship with your boss **you will sometimes disagree and occasionally experience an emotional reaction.** Don't hold grudges. Don't make threats about leaving. Disagreement is fine; discord is not. Get over it. You need to come to terms with the fact that your boss has more authority and power than you do. You are unlikely to always get your way.

Overview of the Gallup Organization's Q-12 Survey

Louis R. Forbringer, Ph.D.

O.E. Solutions

© 2002, O.E. Solutions, Inc.

What do the most talented employees need from their workplace? What do they need to thrive? What do they need to stay engaged and to do their best work? These were some of the questions that the Gallup Organization set out to answer with a comprehensive research study that has spanned the last twenty-five years. The study has produced many important findings, the most powerful of which is that talented employees need great managers. While factors such as daycare facilities, vacation plans, profit sharing, and commitment to employee training may play some role in the attraction and retention of talented employees; research indicates that an employee's immediate supervisor is more important. Locations, branches or stores within a single company can have remarkably different environments and varying productivity, employee retention and satisfaction rates. Cases such as these indicate that a poor manager can derail the efforts of even the best companies.

The Gallup study went further and attempted to determine the minimum number of survey items necessary to accurately measure the environment of the strong workplace. It has been difficult to find a link between employee opinion and business unit performance in the past, but that was the goal. After sifting through a mountain of data

dealing with an enormous number of questions that have been asked throughout Gallup's history the field was narrowed to twelve items. These questions are special because of their ability to differentiate. The only items kept were those where the most engaged employees answered positively, and everyone else answered neutrally or negatively. The twelve questions do not capture everything you may want to know about your workplace, but they do capture the most important information. They measure the core elements needed to attract, focus, and keep the most talented employees. The questions are as follows:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?

8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

At first glance, the questions seem rather ordinary, but a closer examination reveals the characteristics that make them unique. First, the questions contain extremes that make it more difficult to answer with a “5” or “Strongly Agree.” Including extremes was a purposeful act that helps discriminate between the most productive departments and the rest. Removing the extremes weakens the question by eliminating the variability of answers. Second, there is an obvious absence of questions relating to pay, benefits, senior management, or organizational structure. The process eliminated these types of questions because they do not distinguish the great employees from the average and poor. All of those issues have some importance in the workplace, but they are not the answers to attracting and retaining top performers.

The next step was creating a study to test the 12 questions and to explore the possible value they could provide organizations. The questions were tested in 2,500 business units with responses from over 105,000 employees. Results indicate that employees who responded more positively to the twelve questions

also worked in business units with higher levels of productivity, profit, retention, and customer satisfaction. These findings demonstrate a link between employee opinion and business unit performance, across many different companies. Also, employees rated the questions differently depending on which business unit they worked for rather than which company. This information indicates that employee answers were driven not by the policies or procedures of the company, but by the influence and ability of the employee’s immediate supervisor.

Armed with this information it became crucial to determine if there is a recipe for creating an environment in which a manager can secure “5’s” for the twelve questions. Gallup’s research revealed that some questions were more powerful than others. It seems that the questions work better as a tool if the most important questions are addressed first as a foundation. It can be described somewhat like the task of climbing a mountain.

The goal of any mountain climb is to reach the summit, but any mountain worth climbing requires a planful and careful approach. You cannot run to the top of the mountain; you must conquer it in stages. You cannot start near the summit, skipping the lower elevations; you need to be exposed to the thinning air in gradual intervals so your body is prepared for the changes ahead. It is the same for an organization preparing to move towards the “summit” of an environment that fully engages top performing employees.

Base Camp (Level 1):
“What do I get?”

At this stage your needs are pretty basic. You want to know what is expected of you? How much you will earn? What will your resources be? Without answers to these questions it will be difficult to focus on any other issues. Of the twelve questions, these two measure Level 1?

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?

Camp 1 (Level 2):
“What do I give?”

As you move along, you begin to see things differently and you start to ask different questions. You want to know how you are doing. Do others think you are doing well? Are they willing to help?

You become focused on your individual contribution and other people’s perception of it.

These four questions measure Level 2:

3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?

These questions address the issue of your individual self-esteem and worth. Without a positive answer to these questions, your attempts to move to the next stage will be undermined.

Camp 2 (Level 3):
“Do I belong here?”

You continue to climb and you have asked some tough questions. The answers have helped you build strength and momentum to continue your climb. Your perspective has widened and you may begin to question whether or not you fit the organization. Do the things that drive you also drive those around you? Is your basic value system in line with that of the organization?

These four questions measure Level 3:

7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?

Camp 3 (Level 4):
“How can we all grow?”

This is the most advanced stage of the climb. You become impatient for everyone to improve and grow. The focus is on making things better, learning, growing and innovating. Innovation is possible at this stage largely because of the work done at Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. Expectations are clear, your confidence is high, and you are aware of the people around you and their possible reaction to your new ideas. If you have been through all of the stages you are in good

position to reach the summit. You have the materials you need, you understand your role, have the confidence and attitude to move forward, and you have teammates who are similarly committed and prepared for the final stage.

These two questions measure Level 4:

11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

The Summit

When you can answer positively to all of these twelve questions, then you have reached the summit. The focus is clear and you feel a recurring sense of achievement. The best of you is being called upon and you respond with your best every single day. You are surrounded by others who seem to thrill to the challenge of their work. Strengthened by the group's mutual understanding and a shared sense of purpose you look forward to the challenges ahead. It is difficult to remain on the summit for long due to the changing and shifting ground beneath your feet, but while you are there, it is quite a special feeling.

Mountain Sickness

As a manager, you can see that the metaphorical mountain reveals that the key to building a strong, vibrant workplace lies in meeting employees' needs at Level 1 and Level 2. This is where you should first focus your time and energy. If your employees' needs are not met at this first level, then all other efforts may be a waste of time and

resources. However, if you can meet those needs successfully, then future initiatives aimed at higher levels will be much easier to implement and will yield more significant results.

It may be difficult for some managers to start at the beginning due to the fact that they have been encouraged to focus much higher up the mountain over the past several years. Popular programs focused on mission statements, diversity training and self-directed work teams are all Level 3 directives and past total quality management, reengineering, continuous improvement, and learning organization efforts are aimed at Level 4.

All of these ideas are well meaning and many have been well planned and executed, but that has not kept most from withering. They aimed too high, too fast. Without the foundation of Level 1 it does not make sense to start work at higher levels. If an employee does not know what is expected of him as an individual, then how can he become engaged in becoming a better team member. If he remains uncertain of his fit and role, he cannot be expected to be comfortable sharing his ideas for innovation.

There is a great temptation to implement any number of high-level ideas as soon as possible, but it is like helicoptering onto the mountain at seventeen thousand feet. It feels like a good move at first. It quickly puts you closer to the summit, but ultimately provides your group with a smaller chance of reaching your final goal.

The Focus of Great Managers

Great managers take aim at Level 1 and Level 2. They understand that the foundation of a strong and productive workplace is in the first six questions.

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?

6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?

Obtaining 5's for these first six questions should be among a manager's most important responsibilities. In order to accomplish this you have to be able to set consistent expectations for all your people yet at the same time treat each person differently. You have to be able to make each person feel as though he is in a role that uses his talents, while simultaneously challenging him to grow. You have to care about each person, praise each person, and, if necessary, terminate a person you have cared about and praised. These goals appear to be contradictory, but the great manager finds a way to create a workplace that allows them to be coexisting priorities.