July 22, 2023

Dear Job Seekers,

For those individuals not currently assigned to a training site, we will be allowing at-home training packets to be completed while a new training opportunity is found for you. However, after October 1, 2023 any individual without a training site will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence.

Training materials will be posted to our website at www.vantageaging.org/indiana for each pay. Below are the assignments for July 22nd - August 4th. At the end of each pay period, you will need to send the completed Summary Questions sheet and training timesheet with the actual hours you worked on the packet (up to 20), either by fax to 330-535-2253 or by email to payroll@vantageaging.org. This timesheet and summary questions are due by Monday, August 7th at 5:00 pm.

If you have any questions please call Dustin Henthorne 330-253-4597 ext. 352

Training – Week 7/22/23 to 8/4/23

Assignment 1: **PLAY NICE AND STAY EMPLOYED**
(THE WHOLE BOOK)

Sincerely,

VANTAGE AGING SCSEP TEAM

Play Nice & Stay Employed!

Workplace Relationships & Conflict Negotiations

Ann Cross | Martha Lanaghen

JIST

Play Nice & Stay Employed!

Workplace Relationships & Conflict Negotiations

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Preface

Today's job seekers face tough challenges. New technology, high unemployment, and fewer jobs make it essential for job seekers to set themselves apart from other applicants. That is, to grab the attention of an employer, a job seeker must stand out!

Employers today want more than someone with the necessary job-related skills. They want an employee who exhibits what many refer to as soft skills. **Soft skills** are the personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. Simply put, they are the skills an employee needs to get along and work well with others.

A recent survey found that the number one characteristic employers want to see in their workers is professionalism.[1] Professionalism encompasses multiple soft skills, including (but not limited to) communication, time management, self-management, leadership, problem-solving, and teamwork skills.

The *Soft Skills Solutions* program will help you learn about and practice soft skills that will make you stand apart from others in your field. The *Soft Skills Solutions* program includes the following books:

- *Stepping Stones to Success! Goals & Attitude*
- *Make Yourself Heard! Professional Communication Skills*
- *How You Act & Dress Matters! Professional Etiquette & Image*
- *Wake Up & Work! Keys to Self-Management*
- *Demonstrate Your Value through Collaboration! Teamwork & Motivation*
- *Play Nice & Stay Employed! Workplace Relationships & Conflict Negotiations*
- *Lead with Integrity! Leadership & Ethics*

Each title concentrates on specific soft skills to help you attain skill mastery. Whether you are a new job seeker, a person re-entering the business world, a recent college graduate, or a longtime employee, completing these exercises to master these important soft skills will help you now and for the rest of your life. Even the most seasoned professionals will benefit from refreshing their skills from time to time.

Try to complete one book from the *Soft Skills Solutions* program per week. Although it may be helpful to begin with *Stepping Stones to Success! Goals & Attitude* followed by the other titles in the program, these books are stand-alone pieces and can be used in any sequence.

1. Meghan Casserly, "Top Five Personality Traits Employers Hire Most," *Forbes*, October 4, 2012, http://www.forbes.com/sites/meghancasserly/2012/10/04/top-five-personality-traits-employers-hire-most.

Program Features

Each *Soft Skills Solutions* book introduces skills necessary for success in business and explains their role in employment success. The program provides self-assessment activities to identify and address your individual needs and application activities to challenge you and to allow you to practice your skills. In addition, the text includes margin tips and informative sidebars to point out key information.

You will encounter these interactive features:

- Thinking Breaks
- Self-Assessment activities
- Apply the Skills activities

Thinking Breaks Part of learning a new skill is being able to apply it to your own experiences. These thought-provoking questions require reflection and honesty that, when applied, will help you identify your own opinions and beliefs relating to a specific aspect of employment success.

Self-Assessment activities The self-assessment activities help you assess your current soft skill level and provide a brief snapshot of your strengths and weaknesses. The more honest your answers, the more accurately you will be able to identify areas for improvement.

If the assessment section indicates that your skill level is high, you should still practice the daily workout but make it more challenging by trying to mentor or teach another person that skill. Attempting to teach others how to successfully master a skill is the ultimate test of your knowledge.

The self-assessment tool is for your own personal use. After you have identified areas in which you would like to improve, practice these exercises and continue to seek out ways to strengthen your competencies in your daily life.

Apply the Skills activities After skills are introduced and explained, Apply the Skills activities challenge you to use these skills. Complete these exercises daily until you've achieved mastery of the professionalism skill you are studying. Some of the activities require working with a partner or mentor. For others, working with a partner or mentor is simply recommended.

When choosing a partner or study buddy, seek out someone who supports you and wants to see you succeed and who can, above all, be honest with you about your current skill level. Your ability to reciprocate this effort is essential to your partner's success as well; you will equally share in your progress and take an active role in each other's individual success, so choose wisely.

Having a mentor is ideal. Your mentor should be someone with whom you have a positive relationship and someone who is a professional in a position of authority. For example, you might seek out a teacher, boss, friend who is a manager or executive at a company, career services advisor, student advisor, human resources manager, current employer, or parent.

Employment success largely depends on your ability to identify and address areas in which you need to improve. To accomplish this, be willing to receive feedback from others. If you are not able to receive this kind of feedback easily—and if you get upset, angry, or defensive—then seek the help of a trusted expert who can help you learn to give and receive constructive feedback prior to beginning the program.

Additional Resources

You will find additional resources on the *Soft Skills Solutions* Internet Resource Center (IRC) at www.JIST.com/irc/softskills.

Workplace Relationships & Conflict Negotiations

OBJECTIVES

Completing this book will allow you to

- Recognize the importance of workplace relationships
- Build better workplace relationships
- Identify workplace hierarchies
- Interact well with executives, bosses, and colleagues
- Manage office politics more effectively
- Describe and apply conflict negotiation strategies

Workplace Relations: So What?

Can you think of any job that doesn't require some level of interaction with others? Very few jobs allow a person to work completely alone—perhaps a night security guard or lighthouse attendant (but even those jobs require *some* interaction). In any given job, a person is required to interact (either in person or electronically) with coworkers, clients, and/or a boss. If you want to be successful, these interactions require communication skills and the ability to navigate workplace relations and conflicts. Note that a workplace can be both *on-site* (for example, the company's office building) and *off-site* (for example, when you travel or work from home).

As you learn these skills, remember that everyone is different in one shape or form. No two people think exactly the same way, just as no two people have the exact same history and life experiences.

Workplace Relationships

Your ability to work well with your coworkers, clients, and supervisors is directly related to your success on the job (and in future jobs). Building professional relationships is a skill. It requires excellent communication and self-management skills and the ability to navigate

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workplace hierarchies (both official and unofficial) and negotiate conflicts effectively.

Consider Jean: She's the most productive worker at a manufacturing company, but she is often rude to her coworkers, rarely assists new employees, and bad-mouths her peers to upper management. She treats her supervisor and the executives with respect, but they continually pass her over for promotions. Finally, her supervisor, Dion, pulls her aside to clue her in on the reason. Jean's inability to get along and build relationships with her coworkers is preventing her from being viewed as management material. "You can't work in this company without building relationships," Dion tells her. "You don't have to *like* everyone, but you need to find a way to *get along* with everyone."

This story illustrates the importance of learning to get along with many different people, and there are numerous benefits to creating successful professional relationships. Positive work relations are able to do the following:

- Create a pleasant and supportive work environment
- Increase productivity
- Lead to recommendations for future jobs
- Make it easier to find a career mentor

In fact, one study found that employees who had positive work relationships were more satisfied at work and, as a result, were more cooperative, more helpful, and more punctual and time-efficient. They also showed up for more days of work and stayed with the company longer than those workers who did not have positive workplace relationships.[2]

Learn More about Communication and Self-Management Skills

For more information on how to develop your communication, self-management, and teamwork skills, refer to the following *Soft Skills Solutions* books:

- *Make Yourself Heard! Professional Communication Skills*
- *Wake Up & Work! Keys to Self-Management*
- *Demonstrate Your Value through Collaboration! Teamwork & Motivation*

Self-Assessment—Are You a Hero or a Zero When Building Relationships?

For each statement, check the box in the column that best describes you. Respond to statements as you actually are (rather than how

2. James K. Harter, Frank L. Schmidt, and Corey L. M. Keyes, "Well-Being in the Workplace and Its Relationship to Business Outcomes: A Review of the Gallup Studies," in *Flourishing: The Positive Person and the Good Life* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), 205–224, http://media.gallup.com/documents/whitePaper--Well-BeingInTheWorkplace.pdf.

you think you should be). When you are finished, calculate your total using the scoring chart at the bottom. NOTE: You may not be employed at this time; however, many of these statements apply to everyday situations. If you are not currently employed, consider your own experiences and personality and answer the statements based on what you would do in your future workplace.

Statement	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
1. I do my best to be friendly and polite at all times.			
2. I assist others whenever I am able, regardless of whether it benefits me directly.			
3. I seek out and encourage the opinions of my peers and supervisors when working in a team setting.			
4. I respect my coworkers and treat everyone professionally, regardless of their role in the organization.			
5. When a coworker makes a mistake, I do my best to help him or her minimize the effects.			
6. I take responsibility for my mistakes.			
7. I meet my deadlines and am considered reliable.			
8. I introduce myself to new people.			
9. I try to get to know everyone in the organization (not just my immediate peers).			
10. I smile at others in the hallway.			
11. Even when I don't like someone on a personal level, I still do my best to get along with him or her.			
12. I try to stay clear of workplace gossip and never engage in backstabbing.			

Use the following scale to add up the points for each of your answers and record your total in the box that follows:

Tally Your Score

Always = 5 points

Sometimes = 3 points

Rarely = 1 point   Total Score:

50 to 60 points: Excellent! You are well equipped to build strong professional relationships.

31 to 49 points: You need to keep working on your relationship-building skills. Consider where you struggle and strive to focus on those specific skills.

30 or fewer points: You have *very poor* relationship building skills, and you should work quickly and diligently to improve these skills.

Understanding Workplace Hierarchies

Most companies today have formalized organizational charts (otherwise known as hierarchies) in which some standard titles or positions exist. One of the benefits of a company hierarchy to employees is the clear establishment of a career path. Employees can familiarize themselves with the internal company politics and analyze the roles and job duties related to a specific position to understand what needs to be done to move up into that higher position. This is why one's ability to understand, work within, and respect the organizational hierarchy is important to success.

You will likely encounter the following types of employees at your job; however, your company may refer to them by other names:

- Executives and senior officials
- Middle managers and supervisors
- Colleagues and coworkers

Understanding how to interact with the people in these positions will help you navigate your own workplace interactions.

Company Culture

Every job has a specific culture (or philosophy). A company's culture includes values, customs (such as words and expressions used on the job), beliefs, goals, and workplace atmosphere (such as being extremely casual and laid-back or tense). Knowing your company's culture will help you navigate its hierarchies. For more information on company culture, read the supplement posted on the Internet Resource Center (IRC).

Executives and Senior Officials

It is often difficult for new employees to know how to behave in a room full of company executives. An executive is a person with senior management responsibilities in a business organization. This person typically focuses on the overall success of the company and less on the day-to-day operations of its employees. Some of the job titles associated with executives include chief executive officer, president, owner, manager, team leader, and chief operating officer.

When you find yourself in the presence of executives, you may be tempted to use the moment as an opportunity to tell them how wonderful you are or how you would be an excellent candidate to replace your boss, but resist this temptation! This behavior is unprofessional and inappropriate and may draw negative attention. Instead, your goal should be to highlight the success of your department and project a positive professional image.

If you've been asked to attend or participate in a meeting in which executives will be present, it's important that you come prepared. Allow the executive or executives leading the meeting to guide the conversation and make sure to read their body language. If the executive asks you a question during this meeting that you don't know or are unsure of the answer to, do not lie or try to fake your way through. It is best to say, "I don't know (or am unsure of) that information, but I can certainly get it to you right away."

Use encounters with executives as an opportunity to create a favorable impression by behaving professionally and modestly.

Additional Information

You can find an excellent resource for developing the skills needed to be successful in workplace situations in *Make Yourself Heard! Professional Communication Skills* in the *Soft Skills Solutions* program.

TIP If you don't know what a person's position is in the company, you should assume she or he is at the highest level and behave accordingly.

Apply the Skills—Practice an Executive Presence

You've likely heard that you never get a second chance to make a good first impression. How you meet (greet) an executive (or potential employer) for the first time will leave either a great impression in that person's mind or a bad impression. In fact, CareerBuilder conducted a study in which untrained

TIP If you need help improving your introduction and handshake, check out the detailed guide to introductions in *How You Act & Dress Matters! Professional Etiquette & Image*, which is part of this program.

interviewers were shown 20- to 32-second videotaped segments of job applicants greeting their interviewers.[3] When these untrained interviewers rated the applicants on attributes such as self-assurance and likeability, their assessments were very similar to the professional interviewers'—who had spent more than 20 minutes with each applicant.

With this information in mind, practice introducing yourself to your imaginary executive or interviewer. You'll want to greet this person by extending your hand for a handshake and saying, "Hello, Mrs. Gonzales. My name is _____ (Jane Smith). I work in the _____ (manufacturing) department under Mr. Washington. It is a pleasure to meet you." Record your own greeting in the space below and practice your greeting:

_____

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Managers and Supervisors (aka Your Bosses)

For some of us, our bosses are people we either love or hate, and there may be very little middle ground. When reflecting on management styles, however, you might start to notice a pattern of behaviors that may explain why you felt or feel the way you do about them. The reason is that managers are commonly grouped into categories. You can find many different articles on the subject, and depending on which ones you read, they refer to these types in different ways. In one such article, the author groups them by "remarkable," "perilous," and "toxic."[4] In another article, the author lists five different types of bosses based mostly around how they use their power.[5] However, for our purposes, we will simply group these bosses by "The Good," "The Bad," and "The Really Terrible."

3. Kate Lorenz, "How to Conquer the First Impression," CareerBuilder.com, last modified September 24, 2007, http://www.careerbuilder.com/Article/CB-409-Getting-Hired-How-to-Conquer-the-First-Impression.

4. Miranda Marquit, "The 3 Types of Bosses: Which One Do You Have?" allBusiness.com, accessed January 29, 2014, http://www.allbusiness.com/staffing-hr/your-career/16723144-1.html.

5. Rajiv Sighamony, "5 Common Types of Bosses (And How to Deal with Them)," Hongkiat.com, accessed January 29, 2014, http://www.hongkiat.com/blog/five-types-of-bosses.

Before you learn how to handle working for each of these types of managers, you must first accept two facts. First, your boss is human.

That's right! Managers will make mistakes and may still be growing and developing their management skills.

Second, your behavior *does* play a part in how a manager interacts with you. It is important that you take ownership of your role in the interaction and always remain professional regardless of how tempting it may be to behave otherwise when dealing with a difficult boss.

The good manager If you have a *good manager*, consider yourself lucky and be thankful that you are working for someone who can set an example and perhaps even pave the way to your future success. A good manager may even become your professional mentor. Note, however, that although you might be tempted to develop a close friendship with your manager, you need to remain professional at all times. It is okay to share information about your personal life as it relates to either your performance at work or with scheduling. For example, if you plan to take a vacation, it is acceptable to share where you are going and even some of the planned details of the trip, but don't share too much personal information such as how much you drank or how much money you spent. Personal topics may embarrass others, or they may think about you negatively based on their opinions about what are acceptable behaviors and discussions and what are not.

> TIP Having a good manager ultimately provides you with an opportunity to identify what management qualities are needed to become a good boss yourself, and you can begin imitating these qualities in your own behavior.

Think about good bosses, teachers, coaches, or leaders you have worked with in the past. What specifically did you appreciate about them? Which qualities would you like to see in your future managers?

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The bad manager A bad manager is typically bad because he or she is incompetent, ineffectual, or inexperienced. An incompetent manager doesn't know how to do his or her job. An ineffectual manager might have the skills to manage but lacks the ability (or desire) to apply the skills effectively. An inexperienced manager lacks experience (usually having been promoted too soon) and does not ask for help to improve. As previously noted, your role in this relationship is key. You must always remain professional and respectful toward your manager. When dealing with an incompetent manager, you may need to assist her or him to guarantee the success of the team. Doing this demonstrates not only your maturity and professionalism, but also helps you build a relationship with your manager and display your skills for others in your team. You might be tempted to hold back information or to goof off because the incompetent boss may not know the difference; however, incompetence eventually gets noticed at the top of the hierarchy, and lack of productivity or bad behavior could become the scapegoat for your manager's shortcomings.

Coworkers may want to bad-mouth an incompetent manager. Do not engage in this type of conversation. Instead, focus on staying positive and continue to bring value to your boss regardless of your opinion on her or his managing abilities.

Lastly, use this experience of working for an incompetent manager as a learning experience. That way, you can avoid these shortcomings when you reach that level in the company hierarchy.

Think about incompetent bosses, teachers, coaches, or leaders you have worked with in the past. What characteristics made it clear that they struggled as managers? Which qualities were the most difficult to handle, and how did you navigate the relationship?

The really terrible manager Unfortunately, sometime in your career you may find yourself working for a *really terrible manager*. The trait that most commonly identifies this type of manager is that she or he is an *abusive manager* in some way. An abusive boss may be competent as a manager, but intimidates or belittles the people he or she manages. Working for this kind of manager can be very trying.

As noted earlier, you have a role in the relationship and should act professionally at all times. Rather than speaking poorly of your boss to others, be proactive in protecting yourself. You do this by performing to the best of your abilities and documenting any problems that arise with your boss. Working to get an abusive manager fired can take months or even years depending on the situation. It is your responsibility to take ownership of your situation and move on to a better job if necessary.

If changing jobs or companies isn't possible, then you should seek out confidential advice from someone in the human resources department. It is the job of the human resources department to investigate and identify problems within the company, and this includes hostile relationships. The HR professional can start to observe the abusive manager and the situation more closely, and if necessary, start the documentation process of a corrective plan of action for your manager. Ideally, with the help of the experts in the human resources department, this manager will be provided with training to help her or him progress from being an abusive manager to a good manager! At the very least, you have documented your concerns with the proper people.

It is up to you to determine whether the behavior of your manager warrants action on your part, but if you aren't sure, consult with your local workforce center or, if possible, the company HR department. These professionals are legally bound to provide you with guidance on what is considered "abuse" versus what is considered just "annoying" or "unpleasant."

Most important, if the nature of the abuse is sexual harassment or discrimination against you because of your gender, sexual orientation, or race, document and report the behavior immediately to your human resources department. As an employee, you have rights under the law that protect you from this kind of behavior.

When Enough Is Enough

It's important to know that there is another kind of truly terrible manager that requires the employee to take legal action or, at the very least, log a formal complaint with the company HR department. These managers are guilty of sexual harassment, racism, discrimination, or actual physical abuse.

Have you or has anyone you know encountered an abusive boss, teacher, coach, or leader? Which qualities were (or would be) the most difficult to handle, and how did you (or would you) navigate the relationship?

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_____

_____

_____

In closing, regardless of what type of boss you have, remember to always take ownership of your own behavior and always give your best by acting professionally and treating all others with respect. You can learn (and should learn!) a lot from each type of manager.

Colleagues

Having workplace friendships is a normal part of life. When you consider that when working full-time, you spend half of your waking hours at work, *not* having friendships within the company seems pretty terrible. It is advisable, however, to use caution when developing close friendships at work. Workplace relationships (both good and bad) can affect job performance.

When you are developing relationships with your colleagues, it's best to consider the possible pitfalls:

- One or both of you are unable to perform to the best of your ability while distracted on the job.
- One of you gets promoted and is not able to spend time with the other.
- A problem with the friendship spills over into the workplace and causes a distraction or makes it difficult to work with the other person.

So how do you navigate the workplace, remain effective as an employee (and teammate), but also establish meaningful relationships with your coworkers? Here are five tips for developing and navigating friendships:

Set workplace boundaries with friends Sit down and talk with your friend about how you will work together, making it clear that you can't do special favors for him or her nor should your friend do special favors for you. This includes lying or giving special treatment. Also, make sure that you and your friend refer to one another in a professional way (no nicknames, please). Lastly, it's best to leave work at work; let your friend know that when you are away from work, you prefer not to discuss work situations. This will keep you both from gossiping or complaining about your workplace.

Use caution where trust is concerned It is very important to take your time when building workplace relationships. Watch and see which individual seems to be the person that other employees confide in and where everyone falls within the hierarchy. It takes time to build trust, so don't start sharing confidential information with a new person right away.

Be fair to everyone Treating everyone with respect regardless of title or position within the company is the only sure way to be well liked. If you are the boss, don't immediately rule out the promotion of the people you like the most just because of your friendship, but don't give them a promotion solely based on it either. Lastly, if you think you will be biased, ask someone else to make the final decision for you.

Keep workplace friendships professional at all times If you behave in such a way that your friendship with a coworker becomes more important than getting the job done, it can harm your career. For example, if your organization knows that you are close friends with a particular coworker, you may be overlooked for additional promotions because executives and managers might fear that you will divulge confidences to your friend. It's best to behave professionally at work and keep friendships for after work.

Keep friendships outside the company It's normal for friendships to develop at work, but it is a good idea to develop most friendships outside the company. This advice is especially important when you need to vent frustrations, or if you need a sounding board to help you navigate a difficult situation. You'll find it is more helpful to confide in a friend who is not personally invested in the company.

The bottom line is that obeying boundaries with respect to friendships at work will help you progress in your career. For more information about workplace relationships check out the book titled *Demonstrate Your Value through Collaboration! Teamwork & Motivation,* which covers the subject of teamwork in the workplace.

Self-Assessment—What Would You Do?

Read through each scenario and then record how you would respond. If you would do nothing, write down "Do nothing." If you would say or do something, write your response in detail including a script of what you might say. After you've finished, read the tips on the next page to help you assess how your approach compares to the recommended solution:

1. You are in the break room and a coworker from another department walks in and says, "Ugh...I just ran into Peter in the hall. He is so gross." What do you do?

2. You've been working at a company for many months and have grown fond of a coworker to the point that you would like to ask this person out on a date. What do you do?

3. It's Friday night and everyone in your department is going out for drinks after work. What do you do?

Tips for Navigating Workplace Relationships

You may encounter numerous obstacles as you navigate your own workplace relationships. The following information identifies ways to handle some of these obstacles or trip-up areas gracefully and professionally.

Handling a bad-mouth coworker When dealing with a person who is bad-mouthing a boss or coworker, do not lecture her or him about why it is bad to talk about others. The simplest solution is to send a message that you don't participate in bad-mouthing without directly addressing the bad-mouthing itself. When someone is speaking negatively about a coworker or boss, simply say, "I'm sorry to hear you say that; I have always enjoyed working with Peter." This response clearly indicates that you are not interested in bad-mouthing your coworkers.

Dating a coworker Dating a coworker is risky for the same reasons that having close friendships in the office is risky: if it doesn't work out, it can make the workplace uncomfortable. However, a study done in 2006 found that 15 percent of people ages 18–27 met their spouse at work, and 19 percent of people ages 28–39 met their spouse at work.[6] With these facts in mind, if you find yourself dating a coworker, it is best to keep the relationship professional at work and not advertise that you are dating. Note that it is never acceptable to date a supervisor or boss, and if you are considering this, realize that the best course of action is for one of you to resign and work elsewhere. Additionally, you should always check whether the company has a stated policy on workplace dating, and if so, follow the policy.

Rules for Dating?

Before you choose to date a coworker, determine if there are any rules you need to follow while you are with your company. You may want to start with an employee handbook if it's available, but you can also ask a human resources officer. Some companies require both parties to sign legal documents disclosing the relationship and others have a "live and let live" attitude regarding workplace romances. Make sure you know where your business stands on this issue!

After-hours drinking It is not the worst thing in the world to go for a drink after work with coworkers. It can build camaraderie and strengthen the team as a whole to socialize a little. *However*, if you go for a drink after work, the same rules apply as when you are at work. Remain professional and be respectful; don't engage in boss bashing or coworker backstabbing. Just because you are off the clock doesn't mean you shouldn't be behaving at your personal best. One last word of advice: if you are going for a drink, limit yourself to one alcoholic drink.

6. Abby Willow, "Top 5 Ways People Meet Their Spouses or Significant Others," Yahoo Voices, last modified November 2, 2010, http://voices.yahoo.com/top-5-ways-people-meet-their-spouses-significant-7031616.html.

Diversity in the Workplace

When people think of diversity, they primarily think of cultural and racial differences; however, diversity extends beyond culture and race. Diversity exists in gender, age, physical appearance, level of education and intelligence, economic status, and sexual orientation.

Workplace diversity has many advantages. Perhaps the most significant advantage of having a diverse workforce is that workers learn from others' experiences and perspectives. These differences encourage personal and professional growth. Part of learning on the job includes learning and understanding the views and experiences of other people.

For more information on diversity in the workplace, read the supplement that is available on the IRC at www.JIST.com /irc/softskills.

Office Politics

There's one basic truth about office politics: you can find it everywhere.

Office politics are the strategies that people use to gain advantage in the workplace. Because of this motivation, the term often has negative connotations. At its worst, office politics manifest in ways such as backstabbing, cliques, bullying, gossip, favoritism, sucking up, and blame games. At its best, it can be used to get people to work together with minimal problems.

In general, people who use office politics to get ahead often do so at the expense of others or at the expense of the greater good. However, when "good" office politics are in use, they can help you fairly promote yourself and your cause.

We find that a person's political skills are key to building a successful career, and this benefits the person *and* his or her company. When employees combine knowledge of what their company needs with an ability to get things done, everyone benefits. Also, when an employee has poor political skills and is fired or quits, companies have to spend time and money finding a replacement.

So, why do office politics exist? Some people have more power than others, either through hierarchy or some other basis of influence. More often, the reason is that people care passionately about decisions at work, and this passion encourages political behavior as they seek to get their way. This behavior is not dissimilar to sibling rivalry and fighting for the affection and love of parents. The reality is that office politics are a kind of natural order of things born of individuals or groups of individuals who are competing for limited resources. Just like in nature, the most resourceful are most likely to survive.

Six Ways to Make Office Politics Work for You!

To deal effectively with office politics, you must first accept that office politics exist. After you've done this, you then need to develop strategies to deal with the political behavior that is going on all around you. The best way to do this is to be a good observer and then use the information you gather to build yourself a strong network.

Below are six tips to help make office politics work for you in a positive way:

Create your own organizational chart Office politics often bypass a formal organizational chart, so it is important to sit back, observe, and then remap the chart in terms of political power and influence. For example, if Sally is an associate manager with many levels above her on the organizational chart, but you notice that everyone in the department, including the higher-up managers, consult her on every decision, then she may well be the top of the office politics chart.

To help you determine how to remap the organizational chart, take note of things such as: Who are the real influencers? Who is respected? Who champions or mentors others? Who is "the brains behind the organization"? Understand the informal network. When you know who's who in the organization, you have a good idea of where power and influence lie.

Next, identify the social networks at your job. Social networks are about who gets along with whom. Are there groups or cliques that have formed within the organization? Who is involved in interpersonal conflict? Who has the most trouble getting along with others? What is the basis for these relationships: friendship, respect, manipulation? How does the influence flow between the parties?

NOTE: Complete this exercise only on your own time and only in the privacy of your own home, or better yet, make mental notes. Although this information may be helpful to know, in the wrong hands, how you "rank" people's influence within the company could damage your own relationships, career, and reputation.

Build relationships When you have an understanding of how the different networks work, build a network of your own! To do this, don't be afraid to go outside the traditional organizational chart and form relationships with those outside your department. Notice we didn't say form "friendships," because that may not be appropriate given the position these people hold in the company, but you can get to know them. In fact, you'll want to develop relationships that cross the formal hierarchy in all directions (with peers, bosses, and executives).

Start to build relationships with those who have the informal power, too. Build your relationships on trust and respect, making sure to avoid brown-nosing and empty flattery. Make yourself well liked by being friendly with everyone, but don't align yourself with one group or another. Become a valued member of multiple networks! This strategy allows you to keep your finger on the pulse of the entire organization.

Govern your own behavior (use ethics) Over time and by being a thoughtful observer of the people and environment around you, you'll begin to learn what works in your organization and what doesn't. Model the successful behaviors of others. Don't gossip or spread rumors. Always be mindful of the best interest of your organization, stay positive, and avoid complaining. If you see something that needs to be improved, don't whine about it. Take action! Do so by expressing your opinions or objections in a confident and assertive way, without becoming aggressive. Additionally, don't get drawn into drama, interpersonal conflicts, or arguments.

Above all else, maintain your integrity at all times by remaining professional in even the most stressful or difficult situations. Be a model of integrity to your team!

Steer clear of negativity As you build your relationships, pay close attention to those around you who are drawn toward drama and negativity. Avoiding those situations and people seems like the best approach. However, get to know these people better and be courteous to them, but always be very careful what you say to them. Understand what motivates these people and what their goals are, and learn how to avoid or counter the impact of their drama and gossip.

Listen carefully As discussed throughout the *Soft Skills Solutions* program, when you spend time listening to others, several things will happen. You will be well liked because people like those who listen. You'll also be less likely to say something that you will regret if you let others do the talking.

Use your new network to positively promote yourself and your team Communicate your own and your team's abilities and successes to the right people through positive political action. People will be more inclined to share valuable information with you if they feel you bring a value to them or the organization. Seek out ways to make yourself, your team, and your boss look good.

Conflict Negotiation

Conflict can sometimes seem inevitable when working with others. Conflict can range from small issues to larger ones. It may be that two workers simply don't get along well or that an individual has a grievance against his or her manager.

Conflict may take the form of rivalry between teams or the lack of trust and cooperation between large groups of employees and management.

Although most of us view conflict negatively, conflict can also have some positive benefits if the parties involved follow some simple rules for negotiating when conflict arises. But first, let's understand what may be causing conflicts at work.

Low Participation

Often when the motivation of a team or individual drops, you'll start to notice that fewer people volunteer to take on new tasks, and there is little employee input at team meetings or briefings.

Behavioral Changes

Behavioral changes are another symptom of conflict. People start to make derogatory remarks toward each other, and fewer social events are organized. You may also notice a drop in productivity, an increase in sicknesses or absences, and a general feeling of dissatisfaction that develops among your colleagues and teammates.

So, what should you do when you find yourself involved in a conflict at work? Recognize that many conflicts can be sorted out by simply talking and listening to others. Giving people the time and space to express their feelings and concerns can often help clear the air and stop the conflict with little stress at all.

For more serious conflicts, you need to have some solid tactics and tools, but you must first understand your own conflict style.

Self-Assessment—How Do You Handle Conflict?

Consider the last major (or memorable) conflict in which you participated. Describe how you responded to the conflict in detail below. Try to remember how you responded to those involved, what you said, and what you did. Finally, describe the end result and how you feel about the result.

Conflict Styles: The Thomas and Kilmann Theory

In the 1970s Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann identified five main styles of dealing with conflict that vary in their degrees of cooperativeness and assertiveness. They argued that people typically have a preferred conflict resolution style. However, they also noted that different styles were most useful in different situations. They developed the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), which helps you identify which style you tend toward when conflict arises.

For more information or to identify your own style using the TKI method, search for the Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) online.

Each conflict style has value. The key to conflict negotiations is to have a deep understanding of all the conflict styles and to not always default to one particular approach. When you understand the different styles, you can use them to think about the most appropriate approach (or mixture of approaches) for the situation you're in. You can also think about your own instinctive approach and learn how you need to change this if necessary.

Thomas and Kilmann's conflict resolution styles are described on the next page.

Competitive People who have a competitive style take a firm stand and know what they want. They usually operate from a position of power (based on rank, expertise, or persuasive ability). This style can be useful when there is an emergency and a decision needs to be made quickly, when the decision is unpopular, or when defending against someone who is trying to exploit the situation selfishly. However, when used in less urgent situations, this style can leave others feeling bruised, unsatisfied, and resentful.

Collaborative People with a collaborative style try to meet the needs of all people involved. These people can be highly assertive, but unlike the competitor, they cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important. This style is useful when you need to bring together a variety of viewpoints to get the best solution, when there have been previous conflicts in the group, or when the situation is too important for a simple trade-off.

Compromising People who prefer a compromising style try to find a solution that will at least partially satisfy everyone. Everyone is expected to give up something, and the compromiser herself or himself also expects to relinquish something. Compromise is useful when the cost of conflict is higher than the cost of losing ground, when equal strength opponents are at a standstill, and when there is a deadline looming.

Accommodating This style indicates a willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of the person's own needs. The accommodator often knows when to give in to others but can be persuaded to surrender a position even when it is not warranted. This person is not assertive but is highly cooperative. Accommodation is appropriate when the issues matter more to the other party, when peace is more valuable than winning, or when you want to be in a position to collect on this "favor" you gave. However, people may not return favors, and overall this approach is unlikely to give the best outcomes.

Avoiding People who use an avoiding style seek to evade the conflict entirely. This style is typified by delegating controversial decisions, accepting default decisions, and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. It can be appropriate when victory is impossible, when the controversy is trivial, or when someone else is in a better position to solve the problem. However, in many situations, this is a weak and ineffective approach to take.

Which conflict style best matches your own way of dealing with conflict? Consider your response to the self-assessment activity on pages 17–18 to support your choice.

Seven Keys to Negotiating a Solution

So what should you do when you find yourself in a conflict? Many resources are available to help you, ranging from self-assessments to books on the subject. The seven widely endorsed rules for handling conflict effectively are described below:

TIP These steps can be used for any conflict, not just work-related conflicts.

Remain calm As soon as you realize you're in a conflict with someone, suggest that both of you take some time to cool off, and then agree on a time and a place to discuss and resolve your conflict.

Avoid negative talk Focus on the positive things instead of saying things like "can't," "don't," or "no." The negative words will only make the conflict harder to resolve. Remember to use "I" language instead of "you" language.

Allow the other person to talk Although you want to make all your arguments, make sure to let the other person state her or his concerns also. Let her or him talk, even if you disagree. Interrupting will only add to the conflict.

Ask questions If you don't understand the other person's arguments, then ask her or him follow-up questions. Always wait until there's a pause in the conversation so you know the other person has finished.

Agree on the problem This advice may seem obvious, but finding something you can agree on *does* help keep the discussion productive. Also, you might have a conflict that is just not possible to resolve in

one discussion. Think of something to do with the conflict that you both can agree on and agree to come back to the topic later.

Brainstorm possible solutions Try to think of as many different solutions to the problem as you can. Allow your discussion to flow in as many different directions as you can (as long as emotions don't get too heated). During the brainstorming step, if you feel as though one or both of you are getting too emotional, feel free to take a break.

Negotiate a solution Hopefully, at this point, both sides have a mutual understanding of the conflict and can work to find a solution. However, you may also have uncovered real differences between your positions. This is the point at which a technique like win–win negotiations, described in the box to the right, can be useful to finding a solution that, at least to some extent, satisfies everyone.

There are three guiding principles here: be calm, be patient, and have respect.

Win-Win Negotiations

A *win-win negotiation* is another way of saying that through collaborative conversation, the team arrived at a compromise so everyone feels good about the result. A win-win negotiation is ideal because all parties leave the conversation feeling as though they got something they wanted.

Apply the Skills—Practice Handling Conflict and Negotiating a Solution

Find a group of people or a study buddy to complete this exercise. Your assignment is to role-play scenarios and apply all that you've learned about different styles of handling conflicts to navigate each situation. Take notes at the end of the role-play about what you said that worked and get feedback about things you may have done or said that created more conflict.

- **Scenario 1:** Have a conversation about the best way to take notes in class. Have your partner interrupt you several times and disagree with your approach. Practice handling interruptions.

- **Scenario 2:** You're in a meeting and you've thrown out an idea about how to get more people to participate in the upcoming charity event. Your partner says, "That will never work." Have a discussion to understand and agree on a solution that will work.

- **Scenario 3:** Your boss just reprimanded you for something you did not do and explained that the information came to him from your partner. Role-play how you will address this situation with your partner, first playing the role of the person who supplied the misinformation and then as the boss.

Summary

As you can see by now, any workplace has a lot of important relationships to understand and navigate. Understanding and respecting hierarchies and learning to deal with conflict in a positive way contribute to having successful and rewarding workplace relationships. And given that most of us spend a third of our day at work, developing these skills ultimately leads to a happier life!

Next Steps

Consider all you have learned and answer the following prompts:

1. From my experience, I consider these to be the three most important takeaways:

2. I plan to implement the following changes immediately:

3. I feel I still need to work on this area(s):

4. I plan to keep improving by doing the following:
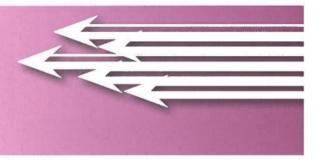
Practice and master necessary skills to achieve on-the-job success with the *Soft Skills Solutions* program!

Employers today want employees who successfully handle on-the-job situations with a strong set of soft skills. Soft skills are the personal attributes that enable you to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. Simply put, they are the skills you need to work well with others.

Use this book to learn how to:

- Assess your work-relationship skills
- Understand workplace hierarchies and build better work relationships
- Manage office politics
- Negotiate conflicts

The *Soft Skills Solutions* program will teach you the skills needed to stand apart from others in your field. The program includes the following books:

- *Stepping Stones to Success! Goals & Attitude*
- *Make Yourself Heard! Professional Communication Skills*
- *How You Act & Dress Matters! Professional Etiquette & Image*
- *Wake Up & Work! Keys to Self-Management*
- *Demonstrate Your Value through Collaboration! Teamwork & Motivation*
- *Play Nice & Stay Employed! Workplace Relationships & Conflict Negotiations*
- *Lead with Integrity! Leadership & Ethics*

Whether you are a new job seeker, a person re-entering the business world, a recent college graduate, or a longtime employee, mastering the skills discussed in these books, and completing the exercises contained within them, will help you now and for the rest of your life.

CAREER SOLUTIONS

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www.JIST.com/irc/softskills

NAME _____   COUNTY _____

Question #1 - From my experience, I consider thes to be the 3 most important takeaways:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Question #2 - I plan to implement the following changes immediately:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question #3 –   I feel I still need to work on this area(s):

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question #4 –   I plan to keep improving by doing the following:

_____

_____

_____

_____

**This sheet and your timesheet are due by Monday, August 7, 2023 at 5:00pm.
Fax to 330-535-2253 or scan and email to payroll@vantageaging.org.**

TRAINING VERIFICATION FORM

VANTAGE Workforce Solutions

DWD INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Project Director to Complete before training starts

Job Seeker Name: _____

Training Provided: <u>At-home training packet 7/22/23 - 8/4/23</u>

Location of Training: N/A

Contact for questions: Dustin Henthorne 330-253-4597 x 352

County: _____

Pay Period End Date: 8/4/23

Check one: ☐ ODA ☐ DOL ☑ IDWD

Check one: ☐ In-person ☑ Remote

Training Waiver Funded ☐ Yes ☑ No

Job Seeker to Complete:

If a lunch is taken, out/in times need to appear on the time sheet. Do not skip cells in between In/Out time if no break is taken. Make sure hours are correctly recorded and totaled in the appropriate column. If you see a Zero then check your In/Out cells to make sure they are filled out next to each other.

M/D/YY Training Date	H:MM In	H:MM Out	H:MM In	H:MM Out	Total Hours
				Total Training Hours:	

"I agree that this training is part of my Individualized Employment Plan (IEP) to obtain unsubsidized employmen. I certify this training was pre-approved by my Project Director or Training Navigator and is is a true record of my attendance in training."

Job Seeker Signature: _____

"~

Trainer Signature: _____

Training sheets must be received by 5 pm the Monday following the end of the pay period. Failure to do so may result in the pay being delayed until the next pay period. Transmit to the Project Director:

FAX: 330-535-2253

SCAN TO EMAIL: payroll@vantageaging.org

Project Director Approval Signature: _____

Payroll Initial: _____   Dept # _____   Employee # _____