

# **Play Well With Others: Develop Effective Work Relationships**

by Susan M. Heathfield

You can submarine your career and work relationships by the actions you take and the behaviors you exhibit at work. No matter your education, your experience, or your title, if you can't play well with others, you will never accomplish your work mission.

Effective work relationships form the cornerstone for success and satisfaction with your job and your career. How important are effective work relationships? Effective work relationships form the basis for promotion, pay increases, goal accomplishment, and job satisfaction.

These are the top seven ways you can play well with others at work. They form the basis for effective work relationships. These are the actions you want to take to create a positive, empowering, motivational work environment for people.

**Bring suggested solutions with the problems to the meeting table.** Some employees spend an inordinate amount of time identifying problems. Honestly? That's the easy part. Thoughtful solutions are the challenge that will earn respect and admiration from coworkers and bosses

**Don't ever play the blame game.** You alienate coworkers, supervisors, and reporting staff. Yes, you may need to identify who was involved in a problem. You may even ask the Deming question: what about the work system caused the employee to fail? But, not my fault and publicly identifying and blaming others for failures will earn enemies. These enemies will, in turn, help you to fail. You do need allies at work.

**Your verbal and nonverbal communication matters.** If you talk down to another employee, use sarcasm, or sound nasty, the other employee hears you. We are all radar machines that constantly scope out our environment.

In one organization a high level manager said to me, "I know you don't think I should scream at my employees. But, sometimes, they make me so mad. When is it appropriate for me to scream at the employees?" Answer? Never, of course, if respect for people is a hallmark of your organization.

**Never blind side a coworker, boss, or reporting staff person.** If the first time a coworker hears about a problem is in a staff meeting or from an email sent to his supervisor, you have blind sided the coworker. Always discuss problems, first, with the people directly involved who "own" the work system. Also called lynching or ambushing your coworkers, you will never build effective work alliances unless your coworkers trust you. And, without alliances, you never accomplish the most important goals.

**Keep your commitments.** In an organization, work is interconnected. If you fail to meet deadlines and commitments, you affect the work of other employees. Always keep commitments, and if you can't, make sure all affected employees know what happened. Provide a new due date and make every possible effort to honor the new deadline.

**Share credit for accomplishments, ideas, and contributions.** How often do you accomplish a goal or complete a project with no help from others? If you are a manager, how many of the great ideas you promote were contributed by staff members? Take the time, and expend the energy, to thank, reward, recognize and specify contributions of the people who help you succeed. This is a no-fail approach to building effective work relationships.

**Help other employees find their greatness.** Every employee in your organization has talents, skills, and experience. If you can help fellow employees harness their best abilities, you benefit the organization immeasurably. The growth of individual employees benefits the whole. Compliment, recognize, praise, and notice contributions. You don't have to be a manager to help create a positive, motivating environment for employees. In this environment, employees do find and contribute their greatness.

If you regularly carry out these seven actions, you will play well with others and develop effective work relationships. Coworkers will value you as a colleague. Bosses will believe you play on the right team. You'll accomplish your work goals, and you may even experience fun, recognition, and personal motivation. Work can't get any better than that.

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