

# Cooperation

## Developing Leadership Skills

Leaders have a somewhat special point of view. Their basic aim is to get other people to do things. Even though it may sometimes seem that being a supervisor would be easy because anybody can give orders, that is not true. Some managers may try to manage by ordering people about, but these managers are usually not very productive. Bossing people is not leading them. You can get only so far trying to boss people because they resent it. Most people would rather be led than bossed.

*Leaders* get more out of people than *bosses* do. Consider the following two contrasting examples.

Example 1: “Cody, I expect you to get this repair done by 4 p.m. today, or I want to know why.”

Example 2: “Cody, I’m working on the Walker site this afternoon, but this repair needs to be done by 4 p.m. today. Could you try to get it done? If you need any help, let me know, and I’ll see what I can do.”

Of course, everyone would prefer to be asked (Example 2) rather than told (Example 1). The tone of the request in the second example would encourage Cody to join the effort to get the work done.

Overall, successful leaders demonstrate the following traits:

- Leaders do not let their feelings control them. When angry or annoyed, they do not explode. When frustrated, they do not sulk.
- Leaders are more democratic than dictatorial. They encourage people rather than order them around.
- Leaders set realistic goals that are challenging but not impossible for their employees to achieve.
- Leaders build group loyalty by seeing that workers are rewarded for their good work. They do not try to take all the credit for a job well done.
- Leaders continually question themselves. They do not think that everything they do is wonderful or right. They are able to accept constructive criticism and use it to improve their leadership abilities.
- Leaders are competitive. The desire to excel is a motivator for them.

Because leadership skills are developed—you are not born with them—don’t forget to give your leadership skills a workout at every opportunity. This does not mean that you should go around telling people what to do, but be aware of opportunities to be a leader. For instance, when working with a group, try to get a cooperative effort from the group rather than have everyone pulling in a different direction. You can provide leadership by taking actions that would help the group complete its task and by helping the group members maintain good

working relationships. Such practice will help you develop your own leadership style.

## **Understanding Conflict Management**

### Avoidance

Avoidance requires us to refrain from any action that might force a confrontation. People avoid conflict by refusing to take a stance, by physically leaving or by “tuning out.” When it is merely a way to hide from conflict, avoidance is an ineffective technique. Most problems do not disappear when they are ignored. An ostrich that buries its head in the sand when faced with unpleasant situations is practicing “avoidance.”

Despite the arguments against avoidance, it can be an effective strategy when you know the source(s) of the conflict will disappear or get better in a short period of time. Another situation might be one in which the opposing parties are so angry that feelings should not be bared at that time.

### Accommodating

People accommodate when they attempt to make peace by either calming down the combatants or pointing out their common interests. They are then reacting to the emotions, not to the problem. The accommodating approach, like avoidance, does not cause the source of the conflict to go away—only to remain hidden for a while.

The quieting of festering feelings may seem to be a useful technique, and occasions arise in which accommodating should be used. However, someone who takes this action frequently is not resolving the real issues. Probably a more effective use of the accommodating method is to direct the attention of the competing individuals to the accomplishment of a goal that is important to both sides, if such a goal exists.

### Forcing

Forcing takes place when a solution to conflict is imposed by any of the following: (1) the most powerful of the two sides, or (2) the supervisor. Forcers use authority, threats, and intimidation; they might also call for majority rule when they know they will win.

If one side in the conflict has more power than the other, the stronger side can simply intimidate the weaker. Two problems exist with this approach. First, the resolution is not guaranteed to be in the best interest of both parties or the company—only that it will be in the best interest of the stronger party. Second, the losing party will be frustrated by the results and may attempt to retaliate or sabotage the plan. This method is especially bad when the winner is the supervisor and the loser is the subordinate.

Forcing can be a highly effective method of controlling conflict, and times exist when it has to be used. However, it is usually only a short-term resource

because the original conflict will reemerge or similar ones will arise to create more problems.

### Bargaining

Unlike forcing, bargaining seeks a solution through give and take. This compromising means that both sides move from their original position to one that is somewhere in between. Because both sides must be willing to give up something of value and to bargain in good faith, there is rarely a clear winner or loser. Therefore, the outcome is often less than completely satisfactory to both sides.

Bargaining is a more assertive mode than either avoidance or accommodating, but it is not as assertive as forcing. It is a relatively cooperative approach to conflict which causes it to be one of the most practical and often used methods of conflict resolution.

### Problem Solving

Problem solving is the one mode of conflict resolution with the greatest potential for achieving a permanent solution to conflict. Contrasted with avoidance, problem solving deals squarely with the issues. Contrasted with accommodating, problem solving focuses on the roots of the conflict although feelings are not ignored. Contrasted with forcing, no one is coerced into accepting an unwanted solution. Contrasted with bargaining, a solution is sought in which neither side feels it has to give up something important to get what it wants.

Problem solving brings the parties in conflict together to examine the situation, often with third-party help, and mutually to bring about the conditions for improving that situation.

Problem solving is often not used for the following reasons.

1. It is time consuming; the other modes of conflict resolution are much quicker.
2. It requires a great deal of energy and commitment by the people involved.
3. Both parties must be attempting to achieve the same, or similar, goals and have a desire to see the problem solved. The opposing sides must believe that they can achieve a better solution through collaborating than through fighting and be willing to see the problem from the other side's point of view.

### Summary

Probably no one best method of conflict resolution exists which would be applicable to every conflict. We should understand all the modes and know which would be the best to apply in a given conflict situation. The following chart summarizes the conditions that would indicate the best use of each approach.

<b>Conflict Resolution Approach</b>	<b>Context of Conflict</b>
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Avoidance (refraining from confrontation) works best when	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The potential damage of addressing the conflict outweighs the benefits of resolution.</li> <li>◆ People need a chance to cool down emotionally.</li> <li>◆ Others are in a better position to resolve the conflict.</li> <li>◆ The problem will no doubt go away by itself.</li> <li>◆ There's little chance you'll get your way anyway.</li> </ul>
Accommodating (trying to appease combatants) works best when	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Preserving harmony is important.</li> <li>◆ Conflicting personalities are the major source of problems.</li> <li>◆ The issue itself cannot be solved.</li> <li>◆ You care more about the other person than getting your own way.</li> </ul>
Forcing (getting my way) works best when	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ You know you're right.</li> <li>◆ You must protect yourself.</li> <li>◆ A rule has to be enforced.</li> <li>◆ Quick, decisive action is needed.</li> </ul>
Bargaining (compromising) works best when	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The opposing sides do not share goals but are equal in power.</li> <li>◆ Temporary settlements on complex issues are needed.</li> <li>◆ Problem solving won't work.</li> </ul>
Problem solving (reaching a consensus) works best when	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Both sides bring concerns that are much too important to be compromised.</li> <li>◆ Hard feelings must be worked through.</li> <li>◆ A permanent solution is desired.</li> </ul>

### Developing Problem Solving Techniques

Solving problems is a challenge we face everyday. Problems are sometimes big and sometimes small. It is important to realize that no matter what the problem, it is better to solve the problem before it gets bigger and more difficult.

Problems are something with which everyone must deal. They can cause us to lose sleep, to do poorly on the job or in school, to be cranky with friends and family, and to have health problems. Not solving problems we have *now* may create a crisis situation *later*. A crisis is usually hard on our physical and mental health.

Solving problems means making decisions, and making decisions is often hard to do. We make decisions everyday--what clothes to wear, what classes to take, where to live, which friends to be with, and so on. However, some decisions are more complex and require a solution. For example: "What career should I choose?" "What should I do with my rebellious child?" "What am I going to do about moving out on my own?" To some people, these questions are

overwhelming; to others, the solution may be simple. Remember that one person's problem may not be a problem to someone else.

When solving problems and making decisions, it is important to avoid:

- **Acting on feelings rather than logic and valid information.** Sometimes the results of the solution are considered in great length, while the realities of the solution are often overlooked.
- **Narrow vision.** Narrow vision involves zeroing in to the point where the problem solver cannot be open-minded and does not consider other events that may affect the decision.
- **Following poor advice.** Friends or relatives who seem to be experts may in fact give you misleading advice resulting in a poor decision and unobtainable solution.
- **Lack of direction and goals.** When a person has no direction, it is difficult to make decisions and solve problems. A solution that seemed good at one point may in fact tend to be poor when circumstances change.
- **Lack of thoroughness.** Facts and figures needed to solve a problem must be carefully collected and considered. Every alternative should be thoroughly and patiently checked before a decision is made.

There are many reasons that cause people to make an incorrect decision:

- **Fear** is probably one of the biggest obstacles an individual has to overcome. Thinking of all the bad things that could result from a decision causes some people to hesitate and lose confidence in themselves.
- **Not looking ahead will result in the problem reoccurring later.** Always consider the future consequences of the solution.
- **Seeing the problem as worse than it is.** The more a person thinks about the problem, the larger it grows. Often the person talks himself or herself out of even beginning to deal with the problem.
- **Not being able to identify the problem.** Often the problem seems so complex that the problem-solver does not know where to begin.

The **IDEA** method for solving problems is a sure-fire method for reaching a solution to problems.

Step 1:           Identify your problem.  
                      What do I need to accomplish?  
                      What should I be able to do when I finish this task?

Understanding the purpose of your activity is extremely important. As a sharp thinker once said, "If you don't know where you are going, how will you know when you get there?" So, be sure to clarify your goals when setting up to begin a task.

Step 2:           **Design your solution.**  
                      What information is available to solve my work problem?  
                      What materials do I need to solve my work problem?

Designing means planning. A person who applies technology to tasks doesn't jump into the middle of the project but takes a look at the information and materials available to complete the task. After collecting the information sources and materials, it is necessary to select those which will be the most useful tools for the project and arrange them in an efficient way in order to complete the job.

Step 3: **Examine your resources.**

What do I already know about this situation that will help me?

What information sources will be the most helpful?

Within the information sources, what information is important because it will help me solve my problem?

Now that you have your resources together, it is time to use them. As a rule, instructions for installation or repair of equipment are written in a stepwise format—numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. This is called process or chronological order because the first step should occur before the second step, the second step before the third, and so on. Problems are usually solved more efficiently if you read and follow the instructions in a detailed and careful manner. Not only will your future employer appreciate your attention to detail, but also, currently, while you are in school you will find that your instructors are favorably impressed by students who can follow and understand directions.

At the same time that you are looking over owner's manuals, service manuals, or other information sources to complete your task, be sure to take note of the table of contents. The table of contents shows you the parts of the manual and helps you select only the information that will help you. For instance, to install a system you need only the setup information. To repair a problem, you may need only the troubleshooting guide.

Once the essential information for the project has been located, the worker who applies technology surveys not only information resources but also herself/himself. All individuals have a lifetime of problem-solving experience behind them. Look within yourself to see if you have knowledge gained from a previous task that you can use to guide you in the current activity. Use what you know to help you learn about what you don't know.

Step 4: **Assess your solution.**

Did I accomplish my purpose?

Did the information help me solve my work problem? How did it help?

Upon completion of any project, it is essential to revisit your original goals. You need to be sure that you arrived at wherever you intended to go. It is also a good idea to survey your resources again. Did you have what you needed to complete your task on hand, or were you constantly having to stop your task to gather more materials or information? Use this experience to make you better prepared for your next challenge.

Here are a few more suggestions that will help in thinking more creatively and critically:

- Instead of sitting back and waiting for events to determine your actions, get involved up front. Shape the course of events by energetically pursuing the process of solving the problem.
- Think for yourself. Although others can help you, you are ultimately responsible for decisions affecting your life.
- Look at all sides. Consider all arguments, even those you may not want to hear. Remain open to new ideas and viewpoints that differ from your own. (Most great inventors and artists were considered screwballs because they had the courage and imagination to consider notions that wouldn't have occurred to "normal" people.)
- Relax and let your subconscious mind work on the problem. Brilliant, creative people often seem absent-minded and idle, "lost in thought." (Albert Einstein concentrated so deeply that he once actually forgot where he lived!) Purposeful daydreaming is a state in which the mind and body are alert but relaxed--the ideal setting for creative problem solving.

### **Maintaining Good Relationships with Supervisors and Co-Workers**

The more you know about people and their needs, the better you get along with them. If you have no idea what makes another person tick, you will probably have a hard time relating to them. Four general points of which you need to be aware in order to get along with others are:

- Everyone is unique.
- Everyone wants to feel important.
- People have many roles.
- Needs affect actions.

Maintaining an awareness of everyone's uniqueness will keep us from treating everybody in the same manner. For example, one supervisor may want to be called "Jim" and another "Mr. Baxter." One co-worker might like to hear an occasional workplace joke but another might choose to refrain from such. To maintain good relationships, you must recognize, accept, and respect these differences.

While it is natural to feel that what is different from you is somehow not as good (or maybe even bad), you must realize that others have good reasons for their actions and preferences too. Respect their preferences. To do otherwise would make them feel unimportant. Remember how it feels when a sales clerk ignores you but waits on somebody else or when a boss talks down to you? Most of the time, you would want to get even with the offender, so always assume that others feel the same way when we don't respect their opinions and different expectations.

We have to remember that supervisors and co-workers have other roles in life besides that they play for us. They are parents, sisters, sons, husbands, softball coaches, church members, and so on. If someone acts irritable or moody, perhaps it is because his child is sick or his personal life is undergoing some upheaval. Make allowances and understand that by supporting them in their other roles, you'll improve your working relations with them.

All humans have needs. If one is thirsty, he takes a drink of water. If one is lonely, she seeks out a friend. Knowing that people are always trying to satisfy one need or another can help you maintain good human relations. You will not be quick to get angry at a person's behavior if you understand why the person is behaving in some way. For example, someone who brags a lot may get very annoying. But if you remember that this person may simply be acting from a need for approval, you will be much more tolerant and might even encourage that person to resist the bragging behavior.

Good human relations skills take practice and patience, and all of us make mistakes sometimes. However, if we always stop to consider what other people want and need and not just react to an immediate, surface situation, we will have more success at maintaining good working relationships with our supervisors and our peers.

### **Following the Chain of Command**

One of the most important human relations things you can do when you begin your job is to learn the organizational chart. Understand who your immediate supervisor is, who the supervisor of your supervisor is, who other department managers are, and so on. Keep your supervisor informed about what's going on with your job. When you need permission to take time off, do not go over your supervisor's head without his or her permission. Keep your boss informed whenever you want to talk to other management people about the possibility of making changes in the order of business.

*References: Comex—The Communications Experience in Human Relations, Sussman/Deep, South-Western Publishing Co., 1984. Working at Human Relations, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Fruehling/Oldham, Paradigm, 1990.*

