

SIGMA

Leadership Series



**Great Leaders
Have Strong Relationships**



GREAT LEADERS HAVE STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

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The good life is built with good relationships.

– Robert J. Waldinger

Leaders depend on the strength of their relationships at work with upper management, peers, and direct reports to succeed professionally. Leaders are not expected to be able to achieve a broad vision on their own, so they rely on others to help them achieve organizational goals. This is a main reason why it is beneficial for leaders to spend time cultivating positive working relationships with their colleagues. Beyond attaining the organizational benefits of enhanced productivity and success, there are also personal reasons to focus on improving your workplace relationships. Quality relationships can greatly improve a leader's own health¹, happiness², and wellbeing at work¹.

Strong leaders know how to relate to others in an outgoing, friendly, warm, and personable manner to establish and maintain effective interpersonal relationships. These sociable qualities can appear to come more naturally to some people than others. As with most things in life, social skills will improve with dedicated practice. Once you apply sustained effort towards bettering your relationships at work, you can then improve your communication with team members and employees in other departments. This can help expand your professional network and introduce new career growth opportunities for the future³.

In assessing the strength of your relationships, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I demonstrate interest in my coworkers' professional and personal lives?
- Can I trust and depend on my coworkers, and vice versa?
- Do I display a friendly, optimistic attitude when interacting with my coworkers?
- Am I comfortable discussing topics deeper than small talk with others at work?

Improve Your Interpersonal Relations Skills

Keep a good attitude: People like to spend time around those who are optimistic, cheerful, and enthusiastic. Additionally, others are likely to mirror your attitude. For example, if you make a point of smiling often at others, they will also tend to smile back at you, creating a warm rapport. It can be especially difficult for leaders to stay positive in challenging times. Although you don't have to pretend to be unrealistically upbeat, try to avoid complaining too much and focus on proactive problem-solving.

Be respectful and interested in others: To strengthen your work relationships, start treating your coworkers, direct reports, and clients in a friendly, respectful manner. To demonstrate respect, remember to be patient with others and empathize with their point of view. It is also a good idea to give people the benefit of the doubt when they bring a new idea or opposing viewpoint to you, even if you do not initially like the idea. Always remain polite, open, and focused on your interactions with others. Respect and interest can quickly build social ties.

Communicate regularly: Many promising new relationships fade into the background when individuals become so busy with other responsibilities that they forget to check in on each other. To develop new relationships, or to foster existing relationships, ensure that you consistently keep up to date with them. It can be useful to set a recurring lunch date or appointment with them in your calendar.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Strengthen Your Relationships:

The following steps can help you strengthen your relationships at work:

- 1. Move beyond small talk.** Small talk can make up the bulk of workplace conversation. To deepen relationships with those you have already established some rapport with, start asking more meaningful questions about their lives (e.g., about hobbies, values, passions). For example, instead of asking “did you have a nice weekend?” which is a yes/no question, follow up on past information they shared: “I remember you said you were attending your daughter’s soccer game over the weekend. How did it go?”. This will allow you to learn more about others’ lives and demonstrate the importance of their interests to you. Just remember to steer clear of potentially controversial topics which may spark conflict.
- 2. Provide help and ask for favours.** A marker of a good relationship is the ability to depend on each other. One way to cultivate mutual trust is by offering and providing support to others, as well as asking others for help in times that you need it. Remember that you can turn to your direct reports for help as well, as aiding ones’ supervisor can feel especially empowering. One important caveat is to try to avoid providing unwanted or unsuitable advice to coworkers. Ensure you ask others if they would like help before giving it and listen to what kinds of solutions they have tried already. When you do provide advice, share tips that you truly believe will help them succeed, rather than benefit you or any other aims.
- 3. Remember your manners.** Manners are important at work, both on- and offline. Email etiquette can often be left at the sidelines in favor of quick, succinct communication. Regularly including “please” and “thank you” in your written requests can go a long way towards making others feel valued and cared for – especially those with less status in the organization. Etiquette is equally important in face-to-face conversations. Whether it is a meeting or an after-work party, if you notice someone has not spoken up in a while, or was interrupted mid-way through a story, ask them whether they’d like to contribute or finish sharing their thoughts. This can create a culture of mutual respect.

Resources



[What Makes a Good Life? Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness](#)



[For Leaders, Relationships Trump Expertise](#)



Develop the strength of your relationships by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for coaching on developing your skills as a leader.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

Email: support@SigmaHR.com

Call: 800-265-1285

References

¹ Mastroianni, K., & Storberg-Walker, J. (2014). Do work relationships matter? Characteristics of workplace interactions that enhance or detract from employee perceptions of well-being and health behaviors. *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine*, 2(1), 798-819.

² Kun, A., & Gadanez, P. (2019). Workplace happiness, well-being and their relationship with psychological capital: A study of Hungarian teachers. *Current Psychology*.

³ Kim, M., & Fernandez, R. M. (2017). Strength matters: Tie strength as a causal driver of networks' information benefits. *Social Science Research*, 65, 268-281.