CHAPTER 1
A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERPERSONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The first chapter sets the stage for improving interpersonal relations in organizations by presenting a framework for interpersonal skills development and training. Students who follow the presented framework will increase the probability of enhancing their interpersonal relations in the workplace.

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND LECTURE NOTES

Many people are held back from promotions and pay raises, and even lose their jobs, because of poor interpersonal relations (relationships with people.)

I. PLAN OF THE TEXT

In each chapter, a three-part strategy is presented for achieving interpersonal effectiveness required in today's workplace.

1. Key concepts required for understanding a particular aspect of interpersonal relationships are presented.

2. Specific suggestions or behaviour guidelines for improvement are provided

3. Self-quizzes and other activities are presented to give the student the opportunity to improve.

Much of the book is about interpersonal skills training, which is the teaching of skills in dealing with others so they can be put into practice. Interpersonal skills are sometimes referred to as *soft skills*, whereas technical skills are referred to as *hard skills*.

II. A MODEL FOR IMPROVING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

A five-part learning model is presented for acquiring and improving interpersonal skills.

FIGURE 1-2   A Model for Improving Interpersonal Skills
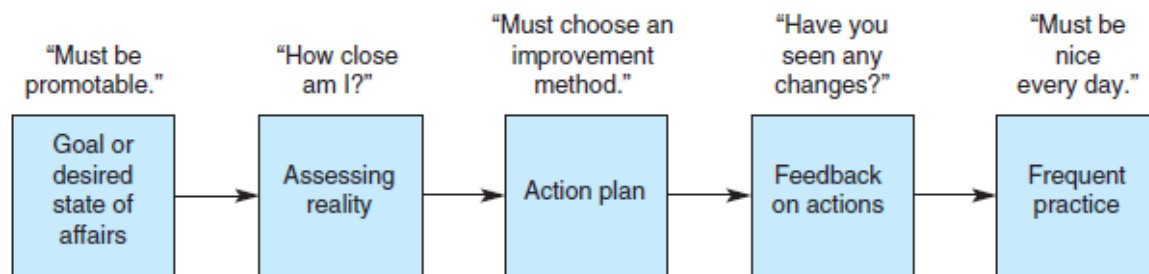
A. Goal or Desired State of Affairs

A goal helps provide motivation and makes it possible to exercise the self-discipline necessary to follow through on your plans. Key points for effective goal setting include the following:

1. State each goal as a positive statement
2. Formulate specific goals
3. Formulate concise goals
4. Set realistic goals as well as stretch goals
5. Set goals for different time periods

B. Assessment of Current Reality

The person needs to assess how far away he or she is from reaching the goal. Soliciting feedback from others about one's distance from the goal is helpful.

C. An Action Plan

Actions must be taken to improve interpersonal relations. Implementing the plan requires self-discipline and a series of steps.

D. Feedback on Actions

The person obtains feedback on the consequences of his or her actions. Short- and long-term measures of effectiveness are important.

E. Frequent Practice

For the new skill to be long lasting it must be integrated into the person's usual way of conducting himself or herself. After a skill is integrated into a person's repertoire, it becomes a habit.

III. IDENTIFICATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

An individual is most likely to develop new skills when she or he feels the need for change. A specific area in which a person needs to change is referred to as a *developmental need*. Self-analysis, thinking through past feedback, and soliciting new feedback are helpful in identifying developmental needs. Feedback from performance appraisals also is useful.

A. Universal Needs for Improving Interpersonal Relations

Some areas for skill improvement in interpersonal relations are found among managerial, professional, technical, and sales personnel. A universal training need is an area for improvement common to most people. The text is organized around universal needs, as follows:

1. Understanding individual differences
2. Self-esteem and self-confidence
3. Interpersonal communication
4. Behaving appropriately when using digital devices
5. Developing teamwork skills
6. Group problem solving and decision making
7. Cross-cultural relations
8. Resolving conflicts with others
9. Becoming an effective leader
10. Motivating others
11. Helping others develop and grow
12. Positive political skills
13. Customer service skills
14. Enhancing ethical behaviour
15. Personal productivity and stress management
16. Job search and career-management skills

IV. DEVELOPING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS ON THE JOB

Opportunities exist in the workplace for developing interpersonal skills that can be a valuable supplement to more formal training.

A. Informal Learning

Informal learning is the acquisition of knowledge and skills that takes place naturally outside of a structured learning environment. One study showed that up to 70 percent of learning takes place informally. Learning interpersonal skills informally can take place through such means as observing a co-worker, manager, or team leader deal with a situation. Formal and informal learning of interpersonal skills supplement each other naturally.

B. Specific Developmental Experiences

Certain workplace experiences are particularly suited to interpersonal skills development. These experiences are

1. Unfamiliar responsibilities

2. Proving yourself

3. Problems with employees

4. Influencing without authority

5. Having a difficult manager.

ANSWERS TO CASE QUESTIONS

Interpersonal Relations Case 1-1: Nobody Likes Me

This modest case, points to a major human relations problem: some workers are so unpopular that it is a source of concern to them.

1. What developmental needs does Phil Baxter appear to have?

    Using Self-Assessment Quiz 1-1 as a guide, here are some of Baxter's development needs: (5) I make negative comments about myself too readily, (8) Very few people listen to me, (13) People find me boring, and (18) It is difficult for me to find things to talk about with others.

2. If you were Marge Caitlin, what would you recommend that Baxter do?

    Baxter' situation seems serious enough to speak with a mental health professional.
    At the same time he could probably benefit from reading, study, and a human relations workshop about getting along well with others.

3. From the little evidence that you have, what is your opinion of Catlin's interpersonal skills?

    The little evidence suggests positive interpersonal skills for Caitlin. Despite being under pressure with her own analytical work, she was observant enough to notice that Baxter was experiencing difficulty. Also, she asked Phil a question that suggests she has good listening skills.

Interpersonal Relations Case 1-2: Sumera Sets Some Goals

This short case illustrates a scenario that takes place regularly in thousands of workplaces—goal setting that could stand refinement.

1. If you were Garth, what would you tell Betty Lou about her goals without hurting her feelings?

    Garth might tell Betty Lou that all her goals have good intent but that she needs to work on refining them so they will more likely be translated into action. Garth might also tell Betty Lou that her goals would all help the company if they were achieved.

2. What suggestions can you offer Betty Lou to improve her goal statement?

    Betty Lou will do well to follow the guidelines for goal setting outlined in Figure 1-3. A good starting point would be to direct Betty Lou to be more specific in terms of what she hopes to achieve. Such questions could include the following: What is the end state of being a great brand? What do you mean by "getting in good" with more buyers? What do you mean by getting Pasta Mucho "all over Facebook and Twitter"?

3. How might interpersonal skills contribute to Betty Lou attaining her goals?

    Attaining Betty Lou's will require considerable interpersonal skill. Becoming an outstanding marketing executive requires a high-level of interpersonal skill. "Getting in good with buyers" also implies that Betty Lou is adept at working well with people.

ANSWERS TO DISCUSSION AND REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Interpersonal skills can also be referred to as (c) soft skills.

2. An effective goal should be (a) specific.

3. According to the text, a developmental need is (b) a specific area a person needs to change.

4. Sitting beside a co-worker to learn a function in a spreadsheet that you are unfamiliar with would be an example of (b) informal learning.

5. Universal training needs can be defined as (d) common areas for improvement that almost everyone could benefit from in training

6. Why do people need soft skills in an era of high technology?

   Soft skills are important in an era of high technology for several reasons. Despite the presence of technology, human problems exist. People still need to be motivated to work at full capacity; communication problems still arise; conflicts must be resolved; and so forth. Another factor favouring soft skills is that the era of information technology has created much depersonalization. Soft skills are therefore helpful in humanizing the workplace.

7. How could doing a thorough job with Self-Assessment Quiz 1-1 have a major impact on a person's career?

   In looking at oneself objectively one can understand why he or she reacts one way or another in a given situation or conflict. It also could point to tangible ways that one can grow, skills-wise.

8. Based on what you have learned so far in this text, and your own intuition, how would you respond to the statement, "You can't learn how to get along with people from reading a book"?

   Often people already have a good idea of what interpersonal skills they possess and where they may be lacking. Sometimes what a person reads in a book such as this one is merely an affirmation of what they already suspected they knew. This text can help to pinpoint problem areas and suggest strategies for improvement that may have previously eluded a reader, particularly once he or she recognizes a problem.

9. Give an example of a skill you might have learned informally at any point in your life.

   Answers will vary but should include an informal, rather than formal, learning situation Previous students have cited excellent examples of informal learning, including both hard skills and soft skills. One student explained how he learned to become a butcher by observing experienced butchers. Dealing with customer complaints is another skill set many people have learned through informal learning.

COMMENTS ABOUT QUIZZES AND EXERCISES

Applying the Model for Improving Interpersonal Skills (Skill-Building Exercise 1-1)

The model for improving interpersonal skills is aimed at developing skills; additionally, becoming effective in applying the model is a valuable skill in itself. Instructors may direct students to use this model for their own improvement, starting with a basic, yet still important, interpersonal skill. (The text illustrates how a student could use this model to improve his/her ability to give recognition.)

What Are Your Developmental Needs? (Self-Assessment Quiz 1-1)

This exercise is placed first in the text because it sets the stage for serious thinking about personal development in the interpersonal sphere. One approach to this exercise is to request each student to present one developmental need and action plan to the class. After the presentations are complete, students are asked to interpret what they heard. Experience has shown that students often ask the instructor to identify his or her most pressing developmental need, so be prepared!