

BALANCE

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Fixing Broken Relationships at Work

Relationships at work are one of your most valuable resources. So, when problems emerge with one of them and you're losing sleep, feeling angry or building resentments, it's time for a fix. Here's how:

- Make a call to your coworker and ask for time to sit down and discuss your mutual point of conflict.
- Plan a meeting in a place where you both will feel comfortable and relaxed, and where you will not be interrupted. Give yourselves enough time to discuss issues.
- Before starting, take a minute to discuss your goal—what you will gain from resolution of the conflict. Be sure to discuss how not having the conflict on your minds will reduce tension and help you both feel better. This creates a “teaming” effect for your meeting.
- Now, talk it out. Watch for any statement or gesture made by your coworker that demonstrates conciliation or positive contribution to the discussion, and acknowledge it.

By using this process, you will eventually arrive at an agreement or understanding that advances your relationship. Agree not to let any future problems fester between you and your coworker by promising to meet early to resolve differences.

Managing Stress: Action and Attitude

Everybody wants to manage stress more effectively, but many struggle to do it well. The solution lies in taking action. If you have been trying to “will” yourself into feeling or just thinking differently about stress, these mental efforts will only have a short-term effect, which will only lead to more futile attempts. Avoid this cycle by focusing on attacking your stressors with action. For example, if you are always running late for work, take time at lunch to jot down an itemized list of the things you must do in the morning before you leave the house. Does it take 8 minutes to shower, 20 minutes to dress, and 25 minutes to get everyone out the door? Add driving time, errands, and some contingency time. Also, plan buffer time for unforeseen events, and if they don't happen, view the extra time as a bonus when you arrive at work early. Slot every activity into its required time. Determine what time you must go to bed and get up. Reward yourself and the rest of your morning crew for sticking to this schedule, even for one day. Plan a bigger reward for two days in a row, and claim the big prize for a week without a skipped day. Keep going. With a newly acquired good habit, you will soon be teaching others to manage stress.



Writing Skills

If your workplace correspondence generates more head scratching than head nodding, your writing probably needs some improvement. This is not a small problem. In fact, business leaders often cite poor writing skills as one of their critical issues with employees. Poorly crafted correspondence creates confusion, dilutes your message, and harms your professional image. Managers report that they're more likely to hire and promote those who write competently. Here are some tips for effective writing:

- Get right to the point. Clarity is more important than style. Do a first draft, and then go back and simplify.
- Ditch multiple-word phrases like “at this moment in time” in favor of shorter ones like “now.”
- Use positive language such as “We’re making conservation a company goal” rather than “We need to stop being so wasteful.”
- If you’re fumbling for the right words, imagine yourself speaking instead of writing, and then put it to paper.

To catch more grammatical mistakes, let correspondence (including emails) sit awhile, and then do your final proofread. Here’s a secret: Read your work out loud away from distractions to catch the smallest errors. Also, a coworker’s ear can help ensure that you’re using the right tone and that everything makes sense.

Sleepy at Work?

A lack of sleep inhibits concentration and the ability to carry on complex mental tasks. Other side effects include irritability, chronic tardiness, sleeping on the job, and a higher likelihood of on-the-job accidents. Negative health effects include weight gain and increased risk for heart problems and diabetes. Sleeplessness may be caused by sleep disorders or health and lifestyle issues. Develop a plan to get more sleep in consultation with your medical provider.

Sharing Space

Working harmoniously in close quarters requires self-awareness and sensitivity toward others because shared space environments naturally magnify minor irritants and disagreements. Getting along with coworkers is a lot like dealing with family, so take the occasional squabble in stride. Squabble busters:

- Keep a neat work space and wipe down surfaces once per day to prevent spreading germs.
- Pitch in on maintaining community areas – those microwave splatters won’t disappear by themselves.
- Dispose of your lunch remains in an outside garbage can rather than towering the trash in a tiny wastebasket and fouling the air.
- Keep noise levels to a minimum and take personal calls someplace private.
- Tune in to the mood and stress levels of those around you. A slack period for you may be crunch time for others.

Use Cash, Spend Less

Stores offer discounts for using their credit cards because they know you’re likely to spend more. The reason is psychological. When you see cash leave your wallet, the pain of parting with it is instantly felt. Swiping a credit card postpones the pain and the emotional cost. It becomes a future, rather than immediate, concern. To empower your ability to cut costs more easily, try using only cash for everything for two weeks. Research demonstrates that you will spend 12 to 18 percent less on everything from lunch to checkout counter impulse purchases. There is an old saying, “The guy who invented poker was bright, but the guy who invented the chip was a genius.” Now you know why.

Emotional Intelligence and Customer Service

You may be smart, but if you have an outstanding reputation as a customer service professional, it's probably your "emotional IQ" (EIQ) that deserves a lot of credit. Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, describe, understand, and work effectively with emotion. You are what is known as a "people person." If you don't see yourself as a "people person," here's how to boost your EIQ:

- 1) Practice analyzing customer emotions. When you witness undesirable emotions, respond with a voice tone or statements that communicate your assurance that they will experience satisfaction.
- 2) Validate your customer's feelings by using empathetic language like, "I can certainly understand your concern about this matter."
- 3) Practice "upstream thinking" by anticipating and acting on your customers' needs even before they recognize them.
- 4) Be aware of your body language. The way you stand, use your hands, or nod your head can send powerful messages of enthusiasm or indifference to customers, which they'll feel—and remember.

Is ADHD Getting in the Way?

According to the National Mental Health Association, 9 million adults in the United States suffer from ADHD. Left untreated, adult ADHD can make it difficult for sufferers to maintain steady employment. Here are some signs to watch for at work: inability to stay focused during meetings, difficulty finishing projects, poor time management, disorganization, and difficulty maintaining concentration. Treatments for ADHD include medication and psychological and behavioral therapies, among other approaches. Don't stay frustrated. Instead, seek help from your doctor, employee assistance professional, or other qualified professionals.

Forego and Fend Off Gossip

Gossip can range from harmless chitchat about a coworker's embarrassing date to mean-spirited remarks about an individual's personality or character. Left unchecked, some gossip can feed rumors that contribute to a distrustful and a conflict-ridden workplace. A few intervention skills can make you an advocate for civility. Practice stepping in rather than stepping back with these tactics:

- *The Redirect:* Friendly questions or comments such as, "Can we talk about something important—like where we're going for lunch?" Or "That reminds me of something funny..."
- *The Big Shift:* If the rumor involves someone such as the head of the marketing department, intervene with a question like, "Hey, speaking of marketing, what do you think of our company's advertising campaign?"
- *The Call It:* When the gossip is malicious you must confront it by saying, "That sounds like a rumor to me," and walk away. These teachable skills will foster trust and teamwork by not reinforcing the gossip and rumor mill.

E-Cycling: Making Your Computer a Green Machine

Computers are getting cheaper, which means it can be tempting to purchase the latest technology and dump the old. Even if it is obsolete, think twice before tossing your computer or laptop in the trash since it contains toxic substances that are stacking up in landfills. Instead, find out about electronics recycling in your town. Electronics recycling can divert more than 95 percent of these substances from our landfills, including lead and the many other hazardous substances found in old PC equipment.



Freebies for Frozen Budgets

Looking to trim your budget? Here are six great online services with little or no cost:

- 1) Save money and maintain a clean environment by trading your old books with other readers at paperbackswap.com. You only pay shipping.
- 2) Toss that video recorder and instead log on to hulu.com, where you can watch current and classic television shows. There's also a good movie section.
- 3) If music is more your thing, try slacker.com for access to dozens of free internet radio stations. You can even customize playlists based on your preferences.
- 4) Ugh. Sloppy joes again? Check out allrecipes.com and add a new dish to your rotation.
- 5) Better yet, find a restaurant where your kids can eat free by using kidsmealdeals.com.
- 6) No internet connection? No problem. Wififreespot.com will show you where to find all the local free wireless hotspots.

Teaching Kids Saving Skills

If you're determined to teach your child to save money, start early. Consider the following approach if it fits your parenting style: Start with a short-term, easily achieved goal like saving for a special toy. Establish the relationship between work and money by tying an allowance to small household chores. During each payment, separate spending money and savings in front of your child, and place the savings into a clear container. Seeing the coins pile up will provide visual affirmation of progress. Once a savings goal is reached, make a big event of the purchase. Be sure to let your child carry the money and hand it over to the cashier. As your child grows older, you can create longer target dates for purchases and encourage greater responsibility by replacing mandatory savings requirements with matching funds for each saved dollar.

To speak with an EAP professional,
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