

Developing Good Personal and Human Relation Skills among Workers of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The importance of developing good personal and Human Relation skills at the workplace cannot be overemphasized. Hence, this paper attempts to examine the elements of human relations, as well as discuss the skills necessary to work with others harmoniously and efficiently in tertiary Institutions. How the employee is perceived by superiors, supervisor and co-workers plays a significant role in the day-to-day relationship at the workplace and has a major role to play in the future of his career. Employers appreciate employees who get along with people at all levels therefore, they seek employees who have good interpersonal relationship in areas such as communication, problem solving, and teamwork. Conclusively, an understanding of one's own capabilities and limitations in terms of knowledge, skills and personal traits is especially important in developing human relations in the work place.

Keywords: *Human Relation, tertiary Institutions, interpersonal relationship*

INTRODUCTION

Working well with others involves understanding and appreciating individual differences. It also means using those differences to one's best advantage. Dealing with human relationships is a complex subject that is often given inadequate attention at the work place. Each individual in a group has a particular and unique personality style that has been shaped by their experiences. There are different types of personality characteristics. Some individuals are quiet; others could be expressive, analytical, reserved, shy, and reactive to mention a few. With training and experience, it is possible for a manager or supervisor to some extent predict how a group of workers would react to different situation.

A number of recent studies (Appleby, 2000; Johnson and Fried, 2002; Yancey, 2001) have found that the most critical job skill a new employee needs to possess is good personal skills. Appleby (2000) asks 39 employers what job skills were most important in making hiring decisions. Social skills ranked first. Yancey (2001) asks 76 recent BA psychology graduates and 44 recent master's psychology graduates what job skills were most useful to them in their current jobs, personal skills ranked first. When Johnson and Fried (2002) ask 144 psychology graduates what job skills were most useful to them in their current jobs, they again submit to personal skills (observable behaviours unique to an individual). Based on these results, it is easy for experts to advise undergraduates and those already employed to seek out opportunities to develop their personal skills. It is important to make, even at a surface level, some determination about oneself and how one is likely to affect the group one belongs to before getting to know each other. The way one accepts and reacts to issue is important in determining one's behaviour.

On the other hand, getting to know one another is a fast process and the more the group changes and the larger it gets the longer it takes. It is hard to trust strangers and workplace demands a great deal of trust. Many organizations neglect this, assuming that the “business” is more important than their relationships. It can be easy to incorporate social activities as part of business meetings, but the group should also hold purely social gathering, where the point is to have fun, share stories of where you grew up, important turning points in your life, your admirers and much more. However recognizing your personality style, the needs and limitations it places you under, is a key step in understanding how to go with the group. This study hence examines the relevance of good personal and human relations skills among educational administrators in Nigeria tertiary institutions. The aim is to expose to educational administrators the importance of inculcating among members of the academic community the necessary skills to work with others harmoniously and effectively.

THE RELEVANCE OF GOOD PERSONAL AND HUMAN RELATIONS SKILLS AMONG EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS IN NIGERIA

The academic system is made up of a syndicate of people with diverse cultures and traditions which invariably influence behaviour and attitude anyway they go. Hence, culture also plays an important role in communication. The same behaviour can send different messages in different cultural contexts. In our global society, we often come into contact with people of different cultural backgrounds, and it is entirely possible that our colleagues have different backgrounds. Understanding the communication styles of an ethnically diverse institution such as a university or college of education cannot be over emphasized. The first thing to realize is that one’s assumptions about how to communicate with others may not be universal. Moreover, one should be aware of the preconceived ideas about other cultures that one may be bringing to the interaction process. Quite often, assumptions that are taken as statements of obvious truth are actually based on incorrect, incomplete, or over-generalized information. Being aware of one’s assumptions can help one to notice whether one is viewing someone as a person with individual characteristics or as a generalized representative of a group.

Similarly, gender can also play a role in shaping the ways in which we interact with each other. This is made more complicated when combined with cross-cultural communication, because various cultures have different ideas about the proper ways in which men and women behave. Once a person has sensitized him/herself to the implications of cultural differences, he can begin to appreciate the rich variety that our multi-cultural world offers us. According to Oche and Okeke (1997), there is need for every educational administrator such as Directors, Deans and Heads of Departments to apply human relations principles. For an educational administrator to do this successfully, Oche and Okeke (1997) posit that he should be conversant with the following elements;

Human worth and Dignity: In the school setting, when faculty members are given their due regard and recognition by the Dean or Director, it is quite obvious that such members will put in their best toward the attainment of the institutional objectives.

Recognition: The approval of desirable behaviours in students is an essential element that school administrators need to give special attention. Their contributions as faculty members should be recognized. Consequently, they need to be motivated through acceptance of desirable behaviours and incentives.

Communication: This is the transmission of information which involves the interchange of facts, thoughts, values, judgments and options which can take many forms such as face to face conversation, telephone calls, letters, or reports. Institutions with good human relations succeed because they have effective channels of communication that are clearly defined. Thus, teaching and learning could be greatly enhanced through good communication channels

Cooperation: There should be mutual trust, understanding and acceptance in any group activity in the institution. For instance, Dean of faculties should cooperate with their lecturers in the area they have interests. Meaningful progress or organizational development can be achieved in workplace only when both the subordinates and the superiors demonstrate spirit of cooperation.

Participation: This is another important element of human relations. Lecturers and students should be allowed to be involved in activities that concern their careers. Lecturers should participate in staff conferences, interviews, staff meetings, and consultation meetings. This element of participation could be achieved through the encouragement of departmental associations where contributions are sought for a common purpose.

DEVELOPING GOOD PERSONAL AND HUMAN RELATIONS SKILLS

Empathy: The first key to working well with people is to develop empathy. This means the ability to put oneself in another person's position, to see things from one's point of view. In particular, a person needs to understand his/her colleagues or superiors very well. Showing respect and empathy helps a person to adjust to his or her new role in the organization. About empathy, Yancey (2001) writes that to achieve human relation competencies one must:

- Effectively translate and convey information.
- Be able to accurately interpret other people's emotions.
- Be sensitive to other people's feelings.
- Calmly arrive at resolutions to conflict.
- Avoid gossip.
- Being polite.

Work Attitude: Attitude is the way we think, feel and act towards an object or person. A negative and unproductive attitude could be corrected through the process of attitude change. It involves abandoning negative attitude for a positive one. The attitude of a university worker indicates the way the worker thinks feels and acts towards his or her job. Success in any facet of endeavour is deeply rooted in attitudes, not in aptitudes. The person who holds the negative, despondent, fearful, timorous, anxious, or sorrowful mental attitude, seems to be creating forces that make people sad, discouraged and anxious. Generally

work attitudes are influenced by our beliefs, job knowledge, environment and personal purpose.

Communication Style: It is natural for people to communicate well with those who have the same communication styles as theirs. A person can also learn to improve his/her communication skill with people who use styles different from theirs. However, this can enhance the person's effectiveness in many different situations. The first step is recognizing the basic effectiveness of communication style. David and Roger (2002) in *personal styles and effective performance*, propose one useful model for understanding how people communicate, thus:

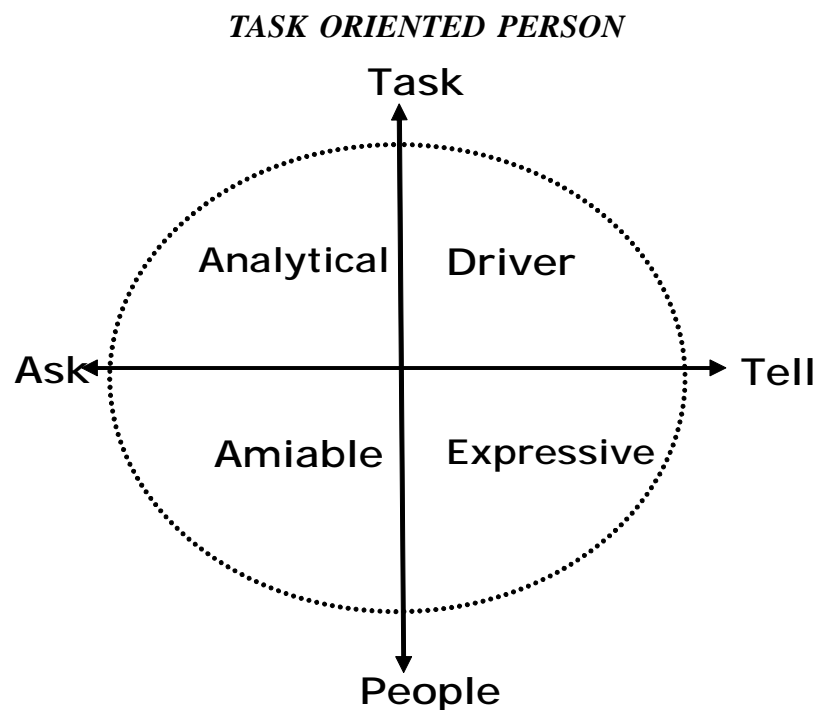


Fig. 1: Process Oriented Person. Adapted from David and Roger (2002)

The model includes four basic types: the driver, the analytical, the amiable, and the expressive. Most people have some elements of several types, with one more prominent than the others. People tend to get along well with others of their own type and one or two compatible types, whereas some combinations clash. Being able to identify the types, allows a person to use appropriate methods to minimize clash. The concept behind the categories is that people differ on two scales: whether they emphasize tasks or people more, and whether they usually ask questions or make statements. Where a person falls along those axes determines his/her communication style, as the diagram above illustrates. People who tend to focus on tasks and on telling thus are Drivers, while task-oriented people who focus on asking are analytical. No type is necessarily better than another, they are just different.

A **task-oriented person** is one who gets great pleasure in getting results and he or she can help the group get organized. The task oriented person can exhibit skills that could help the group to summarize information, add facts or urge the group towards concrete proposals. A **process-oriented person** is one who gets pleasure from working with people. He/she wants to make people feel good about what is happening, and see the world in terms of relationships. He or she tends not to be interested so much in facts and the consequences of the facts and may also be disorganized, and easily lose trend of the current discussion. People in this category tend to care more about getting at people's feelings than worrying about details or results.

Active Listening: Active listening is a skill, which enhances communication, and improves human relations. In active listening a person listen carefully, then paraphrases what he/she has heard, with the goal of supporting and drawing out the feelings of the speaker. When this is done well it validates a person's feelings and encourages him or her to fully communicate. Active listening is a skill that a person can use in his/her work place as well as personal life. Active listening is a particular way of engaging in a conversation in which attention is focused primarily on one person, with the listener fully engaged in absorbing and responding to what the speaker is saying. Journalists, public servants, counselors, business people, teachers and parents all find this skill useful.

There are several components to active listening. In an environment such as the United States, eye contact is crucial to showing that a person is interested in what the speaker is saying. If a person was raised in a culture where direct eye contact is not the norm, he/she may find it a little uncomfortable, but it is one of the best ways to convey a positive message to one's colleagues. If one has a direct, friendly and relaxed expression on his/her face, it conveys a message that one is listening attentively.

Rather than sitting silently while the other person is speaking, an active listener makes a variety of responses. The listener may encourage the speaker to continue or elaborate on what he or she is saying. This can be as simple as nodding one's head, saying "Mm hm", or asking specific questions designed to encourage the speaker to go into more depth on the topic. The important thing to remember is that such responses should not be done in a mechanical or absent-minded way; otherwise it may seem as if one is not listening. Active listening does not only promote good relationship, but also enhances a person's ability to understand and remember what he/she hears. We will find many opportunities in our lives to put active listening into practice.

SKILLS FOR DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE IN THE ACADEMIC SYSTEM

So far we have talked about how to identify types of people from a positive perspective and also active listening in order to enhance communication and improve personal relationship. What about dealing with people whose personal styles create problems? In this part of the presentation, we will look at types of difficult people, and identify some strategies for responding to them effectively. First, let us think about people we have encountered in our lives and ask have you ever met a bulldozer, funny person or very quiet

person or other types? We may recall the kinds of interaction we had with them? We also need to consider our own behaviour. When we are at our worst we need to think about ways that we can respond constructively to difficult people when we encounter them, we need also to think of ways to avoid becoming difficult ourselves.

Sharing Feelings: There can be undercurrents of bad feelings, which don't get talked about. One technique that can bring this out is to do a feeling circle, in which everyone in the group expresses how they are feeling. For this to work, some ground rules are needed:

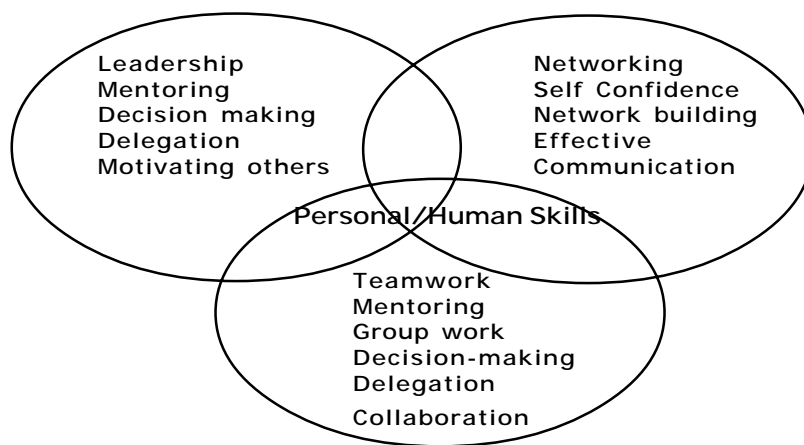
- Only one person speaks at a time around the circle.
- No defensive reactions are allowed in the circle.
- Start your contribution to the circle with "I".

The goals of the feelings circle should be written down and placed where everyone can see them. The way feeling circles work, is for members to simply state whatever is on their minds. For example, a member might say: "*I'm feeling disappointed because no one helped me enter scores yesterday*". This helps focus the group on feelings and also can define some larger issues for discussion. For this kind of sharing to work it is important that the circle not be interrupted by defensive answers, but that each person is allowed to speak without interruption. Participants have to be free to express feelings without immediate reaction. If this becomes part of the meeting routine, even very shy individuals may come to express themselves. A nice addition to this is to add "I really appreciate ..." round at the end. Sometimes feeling circles can be focused on a specific issue. They can be a way of dealing with a particular issue, a conflict between individuals; an individual's behaviour, or even as a healing source for someone who loses a family member or has some other personal crisis. Or they can be general in nature, focusing on getting to know one another's histories by responding to set questions such as: a story from my childhood, people that are important to me, lessons in life I have learned and who taught them, the most important thing I ever did, the most dangerous moment in my life. These kinds of sharing circle allow people to learn about each other in new ways.

Assertiveness: You are an assistant lecturer and your Supervisor is a Director of school, it is possible that a special dynamic with relationship to power may come into play. Directors or supervisors are accustomed to being in a position of power in relation to assistant lecturer. Either they have authorities directing assistant lecturer or they are the bosses directing assistant lecturers in whatever work that needs to be done. Assistant Lecturers are in a clearly subordinate position relative to their directors/supervisors. They should do whatever their directors tell them to do. In this we both can work as a team trying to achieve a common goal: the improvement of teaching.

In a Book entitled: *Your Perfect Right: Communication Styles*, Robert (2002), makes the following points. "*Some people are afraid to be assertive because they feel that refusing a request will result in rejection by others. They may not want to seem confrontational. Moreover, being asked to do things might make them feel important, even when the tasks are excessive*". Again people might feel that if they say "no" to a supervisor, they won't advance their careers.

It is important to add that this is often true of junior lecturers, who may be particularly afraid of speaking up to their Head of Departments. Of course, they should always be respectful and polite. They don't need to be defensive about refusing an unrealistic request. If a junior does so early enough, there is no need to be angry about it, either. Subordinates need to be reasonable and friendly, yet firm when appropriate. These tactics will serve them well in all areas of life. In summary personal/human relation skills involves Leadership, networking and teamwork. Employees are expected to march their talents with employers' expectations. Leadership involves mentoring, decision making, delegation and motivating others. Networking entails self confidence, network building and effective communication. On the other hand, teamwork involves mentoring, group work, decision-making, delegation and collaboration. The diagram below summarizes personal skills.



IMPROVING PERSONAL SKILLS

No matter how hard you work or how many brilliant ideas you may have, if you can't connect with the people who work around you, your professional life will suffer. The good news is that there are several concrete things that you can do to improve your social skills and become closer to your colleagues. All of these tips will ultimately help you succeed in today's working world. Try the following tips for improving interpersonal skills:

1. **Recognition:** The ability of staff both as an individual and as a group should be recognized. The Dean and Heads of Department should allow the members of his staff some leadership roles in their various skills and at different levels and group situations. Lecturers should be given the authority and responsibility for their day-to-day functions. With this type of recognition, each staff member will be motivated to cooperate and put his best for a smooth running of the faculty.
2. **Be Appreciative:** Find one positive thing about everyone you work with and let them hear it. Be generous with praise and kind words of encouragement. Say thanks when someone helps you. Make colleagues feel welcome when they call or stop by your office. If you let others know that they are appreciated, they will want to give you their best.

3. ***Pay Attention to Others:*** Observe what's going on in other people's lives. Acknowledge their happy milestones and express concern and sympathy for difficult situations such as an illness or death. Deal with lecturers individually and collectively with a view to finding out their problems and getting involved in their welfare.
4. ***Practice Active Listening:*** Actively listening is a way of demonstrating that you intend to hear and understand another's point of view. It means restating, in your words, what the other person has said. Your co-workers will appreciate knowing you really do listen to what they have to say.
5. ***Resolve Conflict:*** Take a step beyond simply bringing people together and become someone who resolves conflicts when they arise. Learn how to be an effective mediator. If coworkers are bickering over personal or professional disagreements, arrange to sit down with both parties and help sort out their differences. By taking on such a leadership role, you will garner respect and admiration from those around you.
6. ***Communicate Clearly:*** Pay close attention to both what you say and how you say it. Being a clear and effective communicator helps you avoid misunderstandings with co-workers. Verbal eloquence projects an image of intelligence and maturity, no matter what your age. If you tend to blurt out anything that comes to mind, people won't put much weight on your words or opinions.
7. ***Empathize:*** Empathy means being able to put yourself in some else's shoes and understand how they feel. Try to see things from another person's perspective. You can help yourself with this by staying in touch with your own emotions, since those who are cut off from their feelings are often unable to empathize with others.

CONCLUSION

This study reviews the relevance of good personal and human relations skills among educational administrators in Nigeria tertiary institutions. The aim is to expose to educational administrators the importance of inculcating among members of the academic community the necessary skills to work with others harmoniously and effectively. As an individual member of an institution you will find your strengths and areas that need improvement through relationship within and outside the Organisation. In fact, an understanding of one's own capabilities and limitations in terms of knowledge, skills and personal traits is especially important in developing human relations. The more insight individuals have into their own behavioural traits and the effects on the members of their team, the more effective they are likely to be in their interpersonal relations.

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