

# Work Relationships

**R**elating well to people at work is an important part of being successful on the job. Developing good relations with coworkers and the supervisor should be one of your top goals when you begin work. This may take some time, but in the end it will be worthwhile.

*Here are some rules of thumb to keep in mind when building relationships at work:*

⇒ **Do not become too intimate with coworkers or with the supervisor.**

Coworkers may think that you want to be the supervisor's pet and they may become angry and jealous.

Becoming friendly with a coworker is all right as long as others are not excluded, and as long as everyone is treated with equal respect in work-related situations. Never forget that your first consideration is to get the job done. Your second consideration is to enjoy your work.

⇒ **Share personal or family problems with your employer or coworkers if those problems start to affect your work.**

Don't burden your employer or coworkers, but briefly explain the problem to help them understand why the quality of your work may have suffered. Try to solve problems that affect your work as quickly as possible.

⇒ **Learn to keep emotions and feelings under control.**

No matter how rude someone is to you, stay calm and don't lose your temper. In some instances, it is helpful to explain how you feel about what they said or did. Keep your voice calm and speak clearly. Don't curse or start to cry. If someone continues to harass you after you have spoken to them, talk to the supervisor privately about the problem. Let the supervisor handle it from there. It is better to try to solve problems yourself, if possible. If you cannot seem to get along with someone at work, don't tell everyone. Talk to the person involved and be civil when working together. Keep your distance from this person in social situations. Keep conflicts with coworkers at a minimum or transfer to another job.

## ⇒ **Avoid gossiping about coworkers.**

For example, telling the boss that a coworker was talking on the phone or reading a newspaper at his or her desk is not professional or ethical. Workers who do this are rarely trusted because they devote too much time to matters that are none of their business. Use the examples below to check your skill at solving work problems and at building good working relationships:

- Billie is a bus driver. At work one day, her supervisor called out, “You are much too slow in driving your route.” Billie calmly tells him she’s driving the speed limit and that she doesn’t appreciate his tone of voice. Did Billie handle the situation well? Why or why not?
- Shawn works at Motor World. He is responsible for parts inventory and repairs. John, a coworker, is constantly pestering him. He makes fun of the way Shawn looks, and he even makes jokes about Shawn’s family. Shawn has asked John several times to stop teasing him, but John continues. If you were Shawn, what would be the right thing to do? Circle the best response.
  - a. Beat him up.
  - b. Call him a name.
  - c. Go to the supervisor and ask him to make John stop.
  - d. Ask the supervisor to meet with you and John to talk about the problem.

How can response “d” help solve the problem?

What do you think will happen in the end?

- Cynthia is constantly running to her supervisor to tell her who was on the phone or who went to the vending machine to visit with a friend. How do you think Cynthia’s coworkers feel about her? Do you think Cynthia’s supervisor will trust her with more responsibility? Why? Why does Cynthia have time to tend to everybody else’s business? Does Cynthia overstep the authority of her supervisor? How? What will probably happen to Cynthia?

- Jean has been asked out several times by her supervisor. Do you think she should or should not go?  
List three reasons why.

A. \_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_

- Bobby’s pregnant girlfriend just broke up with him. Bobby is finding it hard to concentrate on his work. He is called into the supervisor’s office. What do you think Bobby should tell his supervisor?

Another important way to build good relationships at work is to learn how to handle criticism. The natural reaction to criticism is to become angry, to deny the problem, or to put the blame on someone else. This is expected because feelings are hurt and egos are wounded. One becomes self-protective. Learning how to override the natural reactions takes time and practice and will help improve relationships at work.

## Ways to overcome criticism:

- ⇒ When you first enter your workplace, take a deep breath, smile, and try to relax.
- ⇒ Keep good eye contact with others, especially the boss.
- ⇒ Put negative thoughts and feelings about yourself out of your mind. Shift your thoughts to what you do well or to what you like most about yourself.
- ⇒ Don't take the criticism personally. It is your work you are being asked to change and not you as a person.

E X A M P L E :

**W**hen the supervisor or the boss criticizes, listen carefully without interrupting. Taking notes may be helpful, but be sure to keep good eye contact so that you appear to be paying attention. You may look back to your notes whenever you need to do so. This helps avoid making similar mistakes in the future. At the same time, you will be viewed as an individual who is concerned about getting the job done the right way. The relationships shared with coworkers and supervisors will improve if you handle criticism well. You will also gain additional respect from coworkers. Tension in the workplace will lessen, and you will feel better about the job and about yourself.

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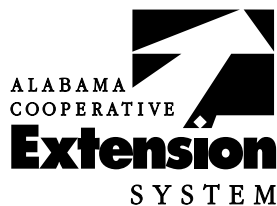
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HE-775

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