

The Impact of Interpersonal Relations for Senior Executives
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I have been coaching senior executives for eight years now, from a range of industries including high-tech, pharmaceuticals, financial institutions, consultancies and many more, and I can't stop thinking about how the majority of them have come to me not because of their inability to do their job but because they want to be able to get more out of themselves, their interactions with others and more out of their own people.

I would say that the majority of my clients have gotten to where they are by being action oriented, hard working, task focused and savvy. In a nutshell, they know how to do their jobs already and don't come to me for the 'nuts and bolts'. They come to me because they have realized (either by self observation or through some sort of formal feedback) that they may not be having as much success as they would like interacting with their people. These people may be their direct reports, peers, bosses, customers or all the above. Most important, they realize that the 'gaps' they have in the interactions with these people in communication (speaking/listening/hearing/understanding) is somehow creating an obstacle for them to achieve their potential in their roles. This is where they really see that as they move up the ladder, move past being an individual contributor, beginning manager and into senior management, the job becomes more and more focused on people and less and less focused on the specifics of 'doing the job'. I find this is when clients sometimes feel a bit confused. They start looking at themselves and all the things they have done to get where they are and are sometimes unclear about what is causing the obstacle. Sometimes they realize that the people side is where they have often had the least training or focus, received the least credit for and yet that is what will make the real difference to them in that senior role.

Over the past several years, there has been a drive toward EQ or EI (emotional intelligence) – how we handle ourselves and our relationships authored by Daniel Goleman. This year Daniel Goleman has come out with a new book called Social Intelligence based on the latest research in biology and brain science which charts the actual cell connections we have with people and how we can 'catch' other people's emotions. I think all the writings on the interpersonal side of business has helped people put more emphasis on this in organizations have started to implement more initiatives to encourage people to think about their interpersonal interactions and the impact they have on their people. But is it enough? I ask myself, why isn't there more focus from organizations on the 'art of working with people' at all stages of the organization. How come it seems to come so late?

The good thing is that people can shift and increase their EQ and their ability to create great relationships with people. Some people are born with a natural inclination towards people relations and emotional intelligence and these people will flourish more easily in those situations, but I have also seen huge shifts of people who don't have this natural inclination. It may take a bit more commitment and focus than the others but it is definitely possible and I have seen the positive results over and over again. So what are some things that people can do?

Below are a few things that can help people build up their interpersonal awareness and skills:

1. Self-Awareness: spend some time really looking at who you are, how you interact with others and the impact you have. One way of doing this is through feedback, informally or even through a 360 degree feedback process. The more that you are aware of about yourself, the more you can do about it.

2. Focus on the Positive: Find out the impact you have on others - how you communicate, the tone of voice you use, the body language, choice of words and approach. Know what you do that has positive impact or influence on others and know the negative as well. Focus on the positive. I believe that what you put your focus on happens. If you put too much focus on the negative, more chance that this will happen...so, focus on the positive! Try to do these things over and over again.

3. Believe in Potential: Be aware of your assumptions and judgments of people. Your assumptions about people will determine how you treat them. If you believe they are incapable then you will do or say things to reinforce this and I am pretty confident that you won't get the best out of them or even get close to their potential. If you look at positive assumptions about people and believe they are capable of much more, the chances are they will prove you right. Just think of a time when you believed that someone did not believe in you. Think of the impact of this. Then think about someone you know believes in you - where are you most likely to flourish? The latter I am sure. Every person wants to feel important and to know that we are useful and have significance. People tend to become what the most important people in their lives think they will become.

4. Give Encouragement: How do you respond to encouragement? I usually work harder and try to do better. People need affirmation to know when they are doing things right and to know that their personal strengths are being valued. Employees need to be affirmed by their leaders - then they will shine.

5. Show you Care: Employees look to their leaders to care about them - not only professionally, but as human beings. They want to feel that they are more than a number on the spreadsheet or a sale that goes through. This comes back to the significance and value. By showing your interest in people, encouraging them, giving them feedback, coaching them, and finding out what is most meaningful to them, you are showing you care. Back to the old saying, 'people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care'. Another way to show you care is to listen. But most people have

forgotten how to TRULY listen. A good definition would be ‘ attention with the desire of understanding the other person.’ Genuine listening seeks to understand without pre-judgment.

People are not motivated by positions or organizational charts. People respond to people. Leaders have followers because of their authenticity and their relationships not because of their title. In Dr. John Maxwell’s writings about the Five Levels of Leadership, the first level is that of position or rights, the second level is permission or relationships, the third level is production or result, the fourth level is the people development or production level and the fifth level is a level that few leaders every reach – this is where people will follow you simply because of who you are and what you represent.