

A consolidation of thought pieces on the subject

Points of Interest

- *The first article reflects on the challenge of practicing interpersonal skills in the legal industry*
- *The second article looks at the interpersonal competencies that managers need to develop and how they can do so*
- *“Test drive your skills” gives you an opportunity to assess your interpersonal skills*
- *The last two articles look at how having good interpersonal skills can assist in motivating employees and in restoring relationships back to health*

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THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS FOR LAWYERS (EXTRACT)

BY ELLIOT SIM

The skills required to practice the technical aspects of the law are almost the polar opposite of the skills required to run effective relationships, says corporate psychologist Dr Lynley McMillan. She draws on 20 years’ business experience – specializing in corporate psychology – with law, finance, accounting, and consulting firms, and has a range of clients including partners, chief executives, and boards of directors.

For example, **lawyers have to balance a multi-dimensional role**, as they need to advance organisational strategy and align with their internal clients while they retain their independence and ensure compliance with the law which is the core obligation of a lawyer.

“It’s probably fair to say that in law school they’re trained for the second goal brilliantly, but perhaps not quite so much for the first one.” The

stressful and time-scarce nature of the profession compounds the issue. When time is squeezed by huge workloads and client demands, it mutes our social skills. **The higher our workload is, the harder it is to slow ourselves down and know what the other person is going through.** When someone is pushed for time and building relationships, empathy is placed on a schedule of extinction. This means that the relationship building becomes less satisfying and our interpersonal skills actually begin to diminish. It’s a logical outcome that we become drawn to the technical, as opposed to the interpersonal facets of our roles,” Dr McMillan says.

Research indicates that people gravitate toward law based on having personality traits such as being ambitious, sceptical, perfectionist and a need to be in control. These qualities that persuade

judges and others work like acid on relationships.

“It’s a really interesting dilemma that the profession is faced with. If we look at lawyers as a profession they tend to be thinkers and tend to analyse rather than emote, and tend to be task oriented and speak their minds.” **Rather than striving to win, seeking a compromise can be an important tool when building stakeholder relationships.**

“People are imperfect and they do things wrong; they’re hard to understand sometimes. So the ability to compromise is important.

“In a lawyer role, people are required to interact with a huge diversity of stakeholders from employers, partners and paying clients. “I think the most critical thing that isn’t trained into lawyers is interpersonal flexibility. That’s a core emotional intelligence skill.

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"I have colleagues in the psychology profession who have advocated for years that our professions are really similar in terms of needing to understand human behaviour and that there is a really important cross-over."

"Switching from cut-throat courtroom etiquette to professional relationship building with a client requires a deliberate choice."

A Lawyer's Skills vs. Relationships

- A lawyer skill is to be critical and doubt, but trust is important for relationship building
- A lawyer skill is to cross-examine and they will quite often do that when a relationship is under stress
- A lawyer skill is to argue, although admitting when you have got things wrong builds a relationship
- An attacking stance can be a good skill to have as a lawyer, but when building relationships, we need to accept people have weaknesses and that they sometimes are emotional and unpredictable
- Lawyers avoid professional vulnerability. Conceding a point is a better relationship building skill
- A lawyer skill is to think for others. Listening or respecting another's opinions is a relationship building skill

Having the ability to 'change gears'

Switching from cut-throat courtroom etiquette to professional relationship building with a client requires a deliberate choice.

"In my professional experience it's the gear-change which is the most difficult, especially when we come back to time-squeeze. We all do what we know best when we are under pressure and that takes us back to our fundamental training," Dr McMillan says.

She says **a sense of inquisitiveness or curiosity about people in terms of relationship building is paramount.** "What I have seen in the law traditionally is people will form a hypothesis about why someone acted and why they might act in the future and stick with it, because it helps their line of argument." Being open to diversity is a great starting point. Simply

letting go of assumptions and accepting people as imperfect humans can substantially enhance relationships. Lawyers attempt to make a point by collecting appropriate evidence to confirm that point, whereas in building relationships it's more about inductively taking it as the moment goes.

"There's a growing need to boost relationship building skills in the law. While the area can get incredibly technical and people have written numerous books about how to do it, they can be an arduous read. **The bottom line is having a sense of empathy for where the other person is coming from.** It's pretty much as simple as that."

"To dislocate that sense of wanting to make a point, actively consider the other person's emotional experi-

ence; think about what they want and what they fear gaining or losing.

Adopt a stance or sense of empathy, compassion and emotional intelligence and sustainable results will follow," Dr McMillan says

"Adopt a stance or sense of empathy, compassion and emotional intelligence"



THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

BY PATRICIA A. WHEELER,
PH.D

“According to research, 90 percent of executive failures are attributable to interpersonal competencies”

We’ve heard it before, but it bears repeating. Studies say 90 percent of executive failures are attributable to interpersonal competencies. Factors such as leading teams, developing a positive work environment, retaining staff, inspiring trust, and coping with change. The message is clear — **if you’re going to excel as a leader in any industry, you must master the “soft” skills.**

In healthcare management, where the basic unit of business is the person, these skills are even more important. If physicians on your staff are spending time re-playing a conflict in their minds, their energy is directed away from patient care.

If you lack the skills to motivate your frontline employees to accept and optimally use new information technologies, your organization could be missing revenue opportunities or negatively affecting patient outcomes. Emotional intelligence—however “soft” it seems—has a direct effect on aspects of the organization as concrete as patient safety, clinical outcomes, and profitability.

Following is a closer look at the **five critical interpersonal competencies.**

1 Knowing Yourself

It sounds easy, but in fact self-knowledge is challenging for many executives. To truly know ourselves, we must become aware of our blind spots, those situations we don’t handle as well as we should for optimal business performance.

For some leaders this involves failure to listen to others’ viewpoints, for some it involves making tough decisions with appropriate urgency, for others it concerns difficulty motivating their staff.

Most people have a tendency to sweep their weaknesses under the rug. But this inevitably backfires because our weaknesses affect other people, whether we’re aware of them or not. Self-knowledge enables you to recognize your weaker areas and take corrective action.

2 Maintain Control

Most executives believe that they maintain control. But their staff may think differently! The key here is to be aware of when you are losing control.

Do you pause and reflect when you are in territory that is difficult

for you? Is your tendency to overreact or underreact? While the occasional outburst can be attributed to

simply being human, if your pattern is more extreme—if you are perceived as becoming overly upset or shutting down—you are undermining your leadership effectiveness.

3 Maintain Motivation

Motivation is a combination of optimism and perseverance. Studies have shown that we have a biologically based “set point” for optimism—some of us look at the glass as half empty, some half full. While reality encompasses both extremes, taking the positive viewpoint has much more leverage for leaders. Optimism cascades down to those whom you are leading, enabling them to stay motivated and keep reaching for better outcomes. But when leaders are habitually pessimistic and primarily critical, followers become less innovative and more risk-averse. Perseverance is the second part of the motivation equation.

You must demonstrate the ability to stay on course through thick and thin and set a clear vision of where the organization is headed in the long run.

4 Recognize Others’ Interests

Good leaders have the ability

to take a win-lose situation and craft at best a win-win solution or at the very least, a tolerable outcome.

To do this, you must know the needs and perspectives of the other parties. Only then can you create buy-in and get people behind your agenda, rather than attempting to control them, which will only alienate your followers. Remember the famous saying “I must know where my people are going so I can lead them.”

5 Communicate Flexibly

Flexible communication is the hall mark of great leaders. Leaders must be able to adjust their communication style according to the needs of the situation.

This involves being aware of the effect your words have on different audiences. For example, leaders often underestimate the power of their emotions on subordinates, communicating with them in the same way they do with peers. But direct reports are less likely to push back, challenge, or even seek clarification from their leaders. This all too often leads to miscommunication and feelings of alienation, which inevitably increase relational “static” and slow business results.

Building Interpersonal Skills

Good interpersonal skills are built over a lifetime. But there are several steps you can take to start building these skills faster and more effectively.

Read. There are myriad articles and books on communication skills and emotional intelligence. Many of these provide strategies for real world situations such as resolving conflict or motivating others. And the simple act of reading about emotional competencies will increase your awareness of behavioural “best practices.”

Talk with your team. Teach those around you to give you open, honest feedback about your leadership style. Tell them what areas you are working on and enlist their help. You might not always get the whole truth, but just demonstrating that you are trying to improve your emotional intelligence can help your staff improve their performance as well.

Complete a formal evaluation. Many executives benefit from a 360-degree evaluation of their interpersonal skills. These evaluations can be done using

an online tool or through a live interview process with you and your primary stakeholders. Other tools such as personality type assessments can further round out your awareness of blind spots and opportunities for development.

Work with a coach. External feedback can help you develop perspectives that you might not have previously considered. A coach will work with you to identify the one area in which improving your skills would have the biggest effect on you, your team, and your organization. The coach will then help you identify strategies for improvement, implement the plan, and evaluate your progress.

Ultimately, your success in interpersonal competencies is determined by the experience of your stakeholders. No matter how effective a communicator you believe yourself to be, if your physicians, your board, and your management team do not feel the same, you are not maximizing your leadership potential.

5 Critical Interpersonal Competencies



Know Yourself



Maintain Control



Maintain Motivation



Recognize Others' Interest



Communicate Flexibly

Questions for personal reflection...

Consider these questions with your coach or a mentor in your workplace. Take the time to really unpack your responses to the questions and importantly, what you are going to do differently...

- Which blind spot have you become aware of and what are you doing differently?
- How easy do you find it to pause and reflect when you are in territory that is difficult?
- How would you rate your optimism and perseverance on a scale of 1-5 and why?
- How much time do you invest to understand the needs and perspectives of others?
- How well do you adjust your communication style to fit the needs of the situation?

TEST DRIVING YOUR INTERPERSONAL SKILLS (EXTRACT)

SELF-EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

For each statement, circle the number in the column that best describes you. Please answer questions as you actually are (rather than how you think you should be), and don't worry if some questions seem to score in the 'wrong direction'. There are 16 statements to answer

Rating scale: 1 - Not at All 2 - Rarely 3 - Some times 4 - Often 5 - Very Often

	RATING				
	1	2	3	4	5
I make sure that I display the same standards of behaviour that I expect from other people.	1	2	3	4	5
When providing feedback, I wait until I've observed enough incidents of a behaviour to make a generalized statement that is accurate	1	2	3	4	5
I go along with others' decisions rather than inject my ideas into the mix	1	2	3	4	5
I say "thank you" to the people I work with	1	2	3	4	5
During times of conflict I think about how to preserve the relationship and still get my needs met.	1	2	3	4	5
While actively talking with someone, I have composed my answer before they have finished speaking.	1	2	3	4	5
I look out for myself at work and do what is necessary to get ahead	1	2	3	4	5
I think about how others perceive a problem or issue.	1	2	3	4	5
I speak first, and think later	1	2	3	4	5
I collaborate with others to solve problems using a variety of problem solving tools and techniques	1	2	3	4	5
I cause more harm than good when trying to resolve a conflict	1	2	3	4	5
When someone gives me feedback, I ask him or her to provide examples so that I can better understand the issue.	1	2	3	4	5
I pay attention to other people's body language.	1	2	3	4	5
Where team agreement is necessary, I figure out the best solution to a problem and then explain why it's the right decision.	1	2	3	4	5
I study my audiences' needs, decide what I want to say and then figure out the best way to say it.	1	2	3	4	5
I make sure everyone knows about my contribution to a positive outcome.	1	2	3	4	5
TOTAL					

To score yourself, add your ratings for each of the questions to get a total score out of 80. An interpretation of the results are on the next page. For more information on the test visit http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_36.htm

SCORE INTERPRETATION

Score	Comment
16– 36	Your technical skills may have taken precedence over your people skills in your career to date. You aren't making the most of the relationships you have at work, and this may be limiting your career growth. It's time to assess how you can work better with others in the workplace and develop a more collaborative, understanding, and open approach to getting your needs met – while still achieving team and organizational objectives.
37– 58	You recognize that working well with others in the workplace is important; and you are trying to work collaboratively while still making sure your needs are met. There is room for improvement, however, as old habits may creep in during times of stress and pressure. Make a plan to work actively on your people skills so that they form the natural basis for how you approach workplace relationships.
59– 80	Your people skills are good. You understand the give and take involved in complex issues involving people. You might not always approach situations perfectly, however you have a sufficiently good understanding to know when and where you need to take steps to rectify things. Keep working on your people skills, and set an example for the rest of your team.

HOW TO MOTIVATE OTHERS (EXTRACT)

BY PETER F HADDON

In any organisation, its people are its most important assets and to obtain significant improvements in productivity entails getting the best out of those people. Unfortunately, if we look around at the number of industrial disturbances and the instances of constant bickering between management and employees, it is obvious that a large part of the productivity problem can be attributed to management and supervisors not fully understanding how to handle their people.

They seem to have a habit of constantly rubbing their employees up the wrong way, often for apparently no good reason.

In my experience with training companies over the years, I am amazed that so little attention is paid to the skill of handling subordinates. Even in business schools, where you would

expect a lot of emphasis to be placed on this subject, it is largely ignored.

The abilities to interact with people and clearly communicate your ideas are essential prerequisites to motivating others. If you have ambitions to run a large organisation sometime in the future, you will definitely need these two skills as part of your managerial make-up.

Continuous improvement and creativity is at the heart of learning organisations. Personal mastery forms the cornerstone for a genuine desire to do well and to serve a purpose.

It is not so much what you know but what you do that counts in the eyes of your subordinates.

Setting a good personal example goes a long way to creating the right climate for employees to become self-motivated.

PERSONAL EXAMPLE

It is not enough to tell your employees what to do. You need to be able to show them and that what you are asking them to do is certainly no more than you are prepared to do yourself.

The authority you have by virtue of your managerial position may well force your subordinates to work for you. However, if, in addition to this authority, you are able to display leadership characteristics by setting the right example, by being able to persuade them and guide them rather than coerce them, you will get far more out of them and willingly so. Most people will actually perform better when asked for their co-operation rather than by direct orders to perform a certain way.

“The abilities to interact with people and clearly communicate your ideas are essential prerequisites to motivating others. If you have ambitions to run a large organisation sometime in the future, you will definitely need these two skills as part of your managerial make-up.”

“The greatest gift you can give another is the purity of your attention.”

- Richard Moss

ATTENTION

“If you are a manager with a realistic span of control, having say between seven and ten subordinates beneath you, you should be in a position to pay personal attention to each one of them.

Even though some of them may not be doing as interesting a job as others or be making the same contributions to the company’s goals, they still require attention if they are to perform at their best. You know yourself how important it is to receive praise and appreciation for a job well done – or encouragement and support for a job about to be done. That is what personal attention is all about and everybody needs it. In the same way that machinery needs regular servicing and lubrication, so your employees require personal attention in the form of appreciation and praise on a regular basis.

Employees require personal attention in the form of appreciation and praise on a regular basis for them to be constantly motivated

People will want to work for you and give of their best if you pay attention to them as individuals and appreciate their im-

portance to you and the company as a whole.

When you are supporting them and helping them to grow within the organisation, constantly looking for ways of improving their abilities and increasing their responsibilities, you will have a highly motivated team.

PRAISE & REPRIMAND

A fundamental rule to observe when trying to maximise the output of your staff is to ‘praise publicly and criticise privately’. We all need and enjoy pats on the back regularly and unfortunately it is a common tendency to overlook the excellent work that people do whilst at the same time, be quick to criticise any substandard work performed.

The emphasis should always be on praising your subordinates rather than reprimanding them. However, it is part of a leader’s make-up to also know exactly when and how to reprimand subordinates.

Praise publicly and criticise privately.

For you to be an effective manager and get the best from your staff you need to establish a feedback system whereby their performance can be accurately measured. This follows the basic behavioural modification process where successful performances are encouraged and reinforced, and errors and mistakes pointed out as they arise.

It’s important, from a motivational point of view, to

know that it is wrong to reprimand people who do not meet their goals until they have proven competent at attaining them. Up to that point it is a training problem

However, once they have demonstrated competence in attaining the goals commensurate with the performance specifications, and subsequently slip up, that is when the reprimand should be given.

The reprimand should criticise the deed and not the doer. In the same way that you motivate your child by pointing out that his or her behaviour at some stage was not acceptable, and therefore would not criticise the child himself or herself as this would have negative consequences, so you would focus on the subordinate’s behaviour at that time, without degrading him/her as a person.

Any reprimand should always finish with a re-affirmation of your confidence in his/her ability to perform the task, as previously demonstrated.

Any reprimand should criticise the deed not the doer

As part of a motivational programme, regular performance appraisals should be held. (The periodicity would depend on the size of the company but usually performance appraisals should be held twice a year.) On these occasions there should be no surprises as, provided the individual has a signed copy of the job description, he/she should know exactly how they have been performing and

the performance appraisal period should be an opportunity to reinforce encouragement already given and to discuss and reset goals which need to be added to or amended on the job description.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

When dealing with your subordinates, it pays handsome dividends to be in a positive frame of mind. By greeting your subordinates with a pleasant smile and adopting a respectful attitude, you will gain respect and loyalty in return.

Try treating your subordinates the same way that you would treat your customers and just see the difference in their responses and in their performance levels.

Treat your subordinates the way you want them to treat your customers

APPRECIATION

Everybody likes to feel important and you should remind your employees occasionally of how important they are to the company. I believe one of the best ways of showing your appreciation to an individual is to follow up the verbal praise with a simple hand written note. This indicates the sincerity of your feelings as you have taken the time and trouble to compile the note. ■

HEALING WOUNDED RELATIONSHIPS (EXTRACT)

BY MARTIN PODOVANI

COMMUNICATION

Healing wounded relationships must start with communication. Misunderstanding can be overwhelming and misinterpretations frustrating but no matter what may be the difficulties and experiences, the bottom line problem is usually the breakdown in communication.

We are not connecting and are usually out of sync with one another. As a result we can't know one another. The basic goal of communication is revelation and not resolution. If resolution is the primary goal of communication, then you are bound to get nowhere. If revelation is the goal, then there is hope and the possibility of resolution.

Most often, the resolution of the problem lies in the revelation one makes to another because revelation leads to greater understanding of each other. It is with such communication that we develop trust and build the foundation of relationships.

LISTENING

If Communication is the skill by which we reveal ourselves to one another, then listening is an art by which we open ourselves to the revelations of others.

Listening means getting in touch with another and entering their world. As difficult as speaking openly and honestly can be for us, listening can be even more demanding.

Listening emits a healing effect, especially when one really hears and relate to the pain and the needs of another. Listening demands intense emotional focus and eye contact with another person. It requires that we understand what others are saying and what they are feeling. That we understand what others are saying and what they are feeling. Whether they describe their feeling or not, we need to identify what they are feeling.

Listening helps us to know who the other person really is. But if knowing oneself takes time and effort, then knowing one another takes twice the time and effort.

Most often, the resolution of the problem lies in the revelation one makes to another because revelation leads to greater understanding of each other.

Questions for personal reflection...

You may have a relationship (professional or personal) that is not as healthy as you would like it to be. Reflect on it and identify how you can do things differently to start the process of healing. Consider the following questions:

- How will I make sure that I focus on revelation as a goal and not resolution?
- How will I remain open to the revelations of the other person?
- How will I work towards a constructive outcome?

It is important to remember that we do not have to be friends but can have a constructive relationship. That is the goal.

WHICH INTERPERSONAL SKILL DO I WANT TO DEVELOP?

WHAT ARE THE NEXT THREE STEPS I NEED TO TAKE ALONG THE PATH TO GOOD INTERPERSONAL SKILLS?

THE FIRST STEP I WILL TAKE TODAY TOWARD BETTER RELATIONSHIPS