

Working effectively with people

Do you enjoy the people you work with, or do they frustrate you? Do people seem to want to help you, or is working with them more effort than it is worth? Are you able to influence your superior, nurses, physicians, or pharmacy colleagues, or do you feel as if they ignore you? Have you been told you need to improve your people skills, or do you sense that you need to?

Since a significant amount of your life is spent at work, you must be able to work effectively with people. This effectiveness means being able to read a situation, knowing how to make a good

impression, and sensing others' feelings and interests. Remember that you are creating your professional legacy or reputation every day through all the interactions you have with people. Is your current reputation what you would like it to be?

General principles for every pharmacist. Every job associated with the pharmacy is equally important to deliver optimal pharmacy services. While pharmacists are ultimately accountable, without pharmacy technicians, clerical personnel, housekeepers, and others, pharmacists would not be able to fully utilize their clinical expertise. Every person deserves to be treated fairly. There should not be a double standard, where some people—such as department leaders and managers—are allowed privileges that others are not. People are only fully engaged and productive when they are doing meaningful work, have a sense of purpose, and belong to a comfortable work group that appreciates, recognizes, and acknowledges their efforts.

Key to being effective at work is building a trusting and mutually beneficial relationship with your coworkers. Get to know them on a personal level. Where did they grow up and go to school? Are they married? Do they have children?

What do they enjoy and dislike about their current job, and what would they like to do in the future? Be willing to share your story. Always balance the need to get the work done with caring about people as individuals. Make deposits in others' "emotional bank account." These include acts of kindness, compliments, praise, appreciation, and gratitude. Smiling at and speaking to people by name go a long way to maintaining a good working relationship. Always be friendly, helpful, and encouraging.

Be cognizant of your attitude, because you set the tone in the work environment. If you as the pharmacist complain and whine, expect the same from those you work with. If you look for the positive and are enthusiastic and optimistic, then your work group will follow suit. View problems as the challenges and opportunities they are. Speak and act as if everything you do is a pleasure. Be generous with your praise and careful with your criticism. Be considerate of the feelings of others, and develop a good sense of humor. Do not ask others to do things you would not do. If you are wrong, admit it and apologize; people do not expect you to be perfect, but they do expect you to take responsibility for your actions.

Always employ the "abundance mentality." In other words, understand that there is enough success and good fortune

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The Success Skills column provides practical advice to help pharmacists become more effective in their professional and personal lives. Installments are contributed by and reflect the views of Sara J. White, M.S., FASHP, Pharmacy Leadership Coach, Mountain View, CA.



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for everyone. Someone does not have to lose for you to win.

Appropriately handling your emotions is also key to working effectively with people. If you find yourself beginning to respond emotionally, pause and consider what the best response would be given the outcome you desire. When you are angry or frustrated, take a deep breath and understand that if you act on these emotions, they can destroy the relationships you've built. Remember that arguments rarely solve anything. Address the immediate need and revisit the situation at a later time. To resolve conflicts of any type, be honest with yourself about your role in the conflict, seek common ground, let everyone express their needs, and search for win-win solutions. Conflicts or disputes should be addressed swiftly to avoid larger problems.

It is no secret that we all function differently. Do not have preconceived notions about others or their strengths and weaknesses. We can work effectively together as long as we respect each other's differences.

Working effectively with your superior. In addition to clearly understanding what your job expectations are from your superior's viewpoint, ask him or her to describe the responsibilities, challenges, and current priorities that he or she has. If you want your boss to help you grow and develop, assist him or her in meeting these challenges and priorities. Respect your superior's time by being organized and concise in your interactions. Invest in your superior's emotional bank account through appreciation and compliments.

Think about your superior's work style. For example, does he or she want to know all the details or only your recommendations, or prefer formal scheduled meetings over unscheduled office visits? Adapt your style to that of your superior to be effective. Paraphrase what you think he or she is asking you to do (the desired outcome) to ensure clarity, and ask for specific deadlines.

Do not simply complain to your superior about problems; rather, bring po-

tential solutions to the table. Anticipate problems and offer possible solutions before a crisis develops.

See your superior as a successful person you can learn from by observing how he or she handles situations. Even if you do not think some of the approaches are effective, you are at least learning what not to do.

Do not wait for your annual performance evaluation to ask for feedback on areas in which you can improve and to inquire about growth and development opportunities.

Never put your superior in the position of choosing between supporting you or someone else. Resolve conflicts and disputes yourself.

Working effectively with subordinates. As a pharmacist, you are the leader on your shift or in your practice. As such, have a candid discussion with your subordinates, allowing everyone to provide input about the work vision or the desired outcomes of the pharmacy. Be very specific and practical regarding the desired outcomes. Periodically, as a work group, discuss the specific ways each person has contributed to meeting the established work vision.

Be very clear about the work expectations you have for each person, explain the importance of each person's role, and ask if resources or training is needed to meet these expectations. Give your coworkers the autonomy and latitude to do their job. If an error occurs, immediately address it with your coworker and ask what he or she thinks contributed to the error and what can be done to prevent it from recurring. Always use an error as a learning experience.

Give each person your respect; do not make people earn it. It is their decision to maintain or lose that respect. Always view the work situation as *we* and *ours*, not *I* and *mine*. In other words, give away the credit for a job well done, further investing in their emotional bank account. Remember you get the behavior you recognize, acknowledge, and reward. You are the role model, so set high expectations for yourself and meet them. You cannot expect others to meet goals that you cannot.

Help each person grow and develop by providing frequent feedback. Instead of offering criticism, coach people on how to improve their performance. Always leave them challenged, not threatened. Help them learn to answer their own questions instead of giving directions or commands. Build people's confidence by focusing on their strengths.

Periodically ask for feedback on your performance and ideas for things that you could do that would make people's jobs easier. Ask what they would like you to continue to do and to stop doing.

Working effectively with peers (pharmacists, physicians, nurses, and other colleagues). To be effective, you have to maintain a good working relationship with everyone if you want to influence everyone. Regardless of your position, degree, credentials, or knowledge, if you irritate your peers, they will avoid you and not benefit from your expertise.

Try and understand what your peers need to get their job done, and do what you can to assist them. Remember that patient care is a multifaceted endeavor.

Build alliances and cooperation by sincerely listening to, anticipating, and solving problems before they affect patient care.

Ask your peers for their opinion and input before you provide yours. Avoid placing blame when something goes wrong. Try and figure out what happened, and spend your energy on how to prevent it in the future.

Working effectively with students and residents. Assess where students are in their development as a pharmacist, not just their drug knowledge but their personal and professional maturity. Develop them as much as you can given the time you have with them. Do not try to clone yourself; help them grow to meet *their* potential.

Stretch your students with a variety of opportunities and challenges, but do not push too hard. Set them up for success by coaching them on what to expect in new experiences and opportunities. It is equally important to help them build their self-confidence as it is their clinical knowledge base. Do not always focus on

what they do not yet know; instead, show them how they can use their current knowledge and how to find the information they need, as that is what a successful practitioner does.

Frequently provide your students with constructive feedback, always having their best interest in mind. Be sure to point out their strengths as well as areas for improvement. Share your successes and failures and how you used the lessons learned. Share what you have learned about working efficiently (setting goals; managing your time; keeping up with your e-mail, voice mail, and pager) and working effectively with

people.

Ask for feedback on how you could be a better preceptor and sincerely listen.

Conclusion. Working effectively with people—colleagues, superiors, subordinates, and others—requires respect for their goals and individuality and an emphasis on the positive or changeable aspects of the situation.

Suggested readings

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