

# UNLIMITED POTENTIAL

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Newsletter

## Human Relationships at Work: The Untapped Frontier

*“Today we are faced with the pre-eminent fact that, if civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships.”*

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1945

**L**eaders and managers can study, train and be coached. But if they fail to work on their interpersonal skills, they will not succeed when given more complex responsibilities. The ability to relate to and connect with others helps confer influence and leadership success.

Until recently, there has been little focus on what goes on within the relationship between two people in an organization. Almost all professional development programs focus on the individual: what you can do to improve yourself. Thousands of people explore leadership and management skills each year with an emphasis on improving their personal abilities. Very few have participated in programs to develop interpersonal skills.

Obviously, pursuing personal growth is worthwhile. Now, however, experts suggest that executives who develop their interpersonal skills will finely hone their ability to lead and influence.

The best managers in the world are not only experts in systems, processes and technical competencies. They are also proficient at managing their employees, personal strengths and preferences. Thus, they increase employee engagement and productivity. Unfortunately, most people’s experience with bosses falls short of these goals.

### The Boss Is Last

**A** recent Princeton University study reveals how individuals feel about spending time with associates: Clients and customers were trailed by coworkers—and the boss came in dead last. Interacting with the boss was rated, on average, as being less enjoyable than cleaning the house.



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**H**erdlinger Associates provides the vehicle to help people expand and develop skills and attitudes necessary to achieve a higher degree of success both personally and professionally.

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The Gallup Organization conducted a famous study of workplace attitudes, asking 8 million people to respond to the following statement: “My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.” The results show that people who agree with this statement:

1. Are more likely to stay with an organization
2. Have more engaged customers
3. Are more productive

Perhaps you’ve had a similar experience. When a boss treats you like a friend and cares about your life, you feel more enthusiastic about, and committed to, your work.

We spend 50 percent more time with our customers, coworkers and bosses than we do with our friends, significant others, children and other relatives combined. To be sure, finding a few strong friendships at the office will help anyone be more engaged and productive.

## What Great Managers Do Differently

Top managers get to know each employee as an individual, tailoring their management style to people’s personal needs and preferences. Marcus Buckingham emphasized this point in *The One Thing You Need to Know* (Free Press, 2005):

“To excel as a manager you must never forget that each of your direct reports is unique and that your chief responsibility is not to eradicate this uniqueness, but rather to arrange roles, responsibilities, and expectations so that you can capitalize upon it.”

Studies by The Gallup Organization and other groups delineate four necessary management skills:

1. Pick good people.
2. Set clear expectations.
3. Recognize excellence, and praise it often.
4. Show that you care about your people.

This fourth skill is uncomfortable for many—far too “warm and fuzzy” for results-driven managers on the fast track.

## Show You Care: Soft Skills with Hard Results

There’s no getting around it: As soft as this skill may appear, data support it is tangible and critical to managerial success. Employees who feel cared about are:

1. More productive
2. Less likely to miss workdays
3. Less likely to have accidents on the job
4. Less likely to file workers’ compensation claims
5. Less likely to steal
6. Less likely to quit
7. More likely to recommend the company to friends and family

Human beings are herd animals, with a strong drive to bond. It’s in our blood. If you want people to accomplish more and handle tasks with consistent improvement, you need to connect with them, show you care and observe the results.

When we are connected to others, especially in a work environment, we experience greater security, are more willing to share confidences, feel encouraged to take risks and can support one another freely. Creativity and collaboration skills are enhanced.

## Set the Example

If you want your company to undergo a positive transformation, you must set the example. Forge bonds with your people. Don’t be afraid to ask about—and listen to—what they want, what they like and what has meaning for them. Be deliberate and explicit. Tell them they are important to you and that you care. Explain that you want them to succeed and help them achieve their goals.

Keep their confidences. Learn about their private lives, within appropriate boundaries. Be willing to accommodate challenges in their personal lives within the work schedule.

Above all, be genuine in your show of respect and caring. Don’t hesitate to intervene when facing poor or mediocre performance. When you really care, you help people confront their difficulties and outline the path to success.

To inspire top performance, you must know people as individuals so you can motivate by focusing on their strengths and managing around their weaknesses. As you help them grow, you’ll learn how to steer them toward roles that best fit them, rather than simply promoting them up the ladder.

## Up Close and Personal at Work

Sadly, many managers and their organizations frown upon getting to know employees on a personal level.

Nearly one-third of some 80,000 managers and leaders Gallup interviewed agreed with the following statement: “Familiarity breeds contempt.” Some companies even prohibit close relationships between employees, fearing they’ll come together to berate their bosses or company policies.

Only 18 percent of those surveyed work for organizations that provide opportunities to develop friendships on the job. Companies that discourage such friendships do so at their own peril, as employee satisfaction increases by almost 50 percent when friendships thrive.

Only 30 percent of employees report having a best friend at work, based on Gallup research. These individuals are seven times more likely to be engaged in their jobs. They get more done in less time, have fewer accidents and absences, have more engaged customers and are more likely to innovate. They share new ideas.

Close friendships at work also double the chance that workers will have a favorable perception of their pay. As Tom Rath writes in *Vital Friends: The People You Can’t Afford to Live Without*: “When we asked people if they would rather have a best friend at work or a 10 percent pay raise, having a friend clearly won.”

Rath asserts that more work friendships—even with bosses—improves engagement and productivity. Those with at least three close friends at work were 96 percent more likely to be extremely satisfied with their lives.

## Emotional Intelligence May Not Be Enough

Daniel Goleman’s landmark books of the 1990s stressed the importance of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social skills and empathy. Now, newer studies reveal empathy and social skills are even more important leadership skills.

“In short,” writes Goleman in *Social Intelligence* (2006), “self-absorption in all its forms kills empathy, let alone compassion.” The more attentive we are to others, the more keenly we will sense their inner state and pick up on subtle cues.

Social intelligence is composed of two broad categories: social awareness (what we sense about others) and social facility (what we do with this awareness).

Social Awareness
<b>Primal empathy:</b> Feeling with others; sensing nonverbal emotional signals
<b>Attunement:</b> Listening with full receptivity; attuning to a person
<b>Empathic accuracy:</b> Understanding another person’s thoughts, feelings and intentions
<b>Social cognition:</b> Knowing how the social world works

Social Facility
<b>Synchrony:</b> Interacting smoothly at the nonverbal level
<b>Self-Presentation:</b> Presenting ourselves effectively
<b>Influence:</b> Shaping the outcome of social interactions
<b>Concern:</b> Caring about others’ needs and acting accordingly

You can use this table to examine your strengths in interpersonal and social relationships. Working with a coach, you can develop a plan to fortify your social abilities.

## What You Can Do to Strengthen Work Relationships

Progressive companies encourage socialization through team sports and outside activities. Astute managers recognize that friendships should be encouraged and that work life needn’t be separate and distinct from one’s personal life.

In truth, people bring their personal lives to work each day and often talk about them with colleagues. Even those who don’t share what’s going on outside the workplace bring their moods to the office. Intelligent leaders and managers recognize that each employee is a whole person with a private life that accompanies him or her to work. Ignoring this reality prevents leaders from learning what makes people tick.

Rath encourages employers to promote workplace friendships by creating a fund to pay for employee outings, some of which include family members. They also create a work environment in which people can socialize.

## **Eight Kinds of Friends**

In *Vital Friends*, Rath identifies eight roles our friends play:

1. Builders
2. Champions
3. Collaborators
4. Companions
5. Connectors
6. Energizers
7. Mind openers
8. Navigators

Some friends will fulfill more than one role. He suggests using these roles to identify the types of relationships that exist in the workplace.

This is certainly a more positive approach than that suggested in a recent business book, which simplistically categorizes our work relationships into jerks and non-jerks. Even those we don't consider friends outside the workplace can fulfill one of the eight roles for us. Rath's book and online relationship assessment tool ([www.vitalfriends.com](http://www.vitalfriends.com)) can help you determine the roles your coworkers play in your life, as well as the role you play in theirs.

Everything begins with dialogues in your one-on-one relationships, according to Rath. As with other areas of self-development, strengthening relationships takes practice, and a coach may prove helpful.

To be sure, there are degrees of appropriateness and complexities to navigate. It is essential to use common sense when choosing questions to ask an employee or coworker.

The importance of education cannot be overestimated. Have you ever taken a course in friendship? What about studying your one-on-one workplace relationships? Certainly, we could all benefit from taking a look at the roles we play with our customers and clients, coworkers and, of course, our bosses.

As Rath says, "It is possible that most of the magic, and our room for rapid personal and professional growth, lies in developing our friendships...The real energy occurs in each connection between two people, which can bring about exponential returns."

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