

Value Analysis & Standardization:

Systematic steps to support system-wide change

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INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Greetings from Carol Stone

This issue of the newsletter focuses on interpersonal skills, those so-called “soft” skills without which achieving our organizational goals would be so much harder. For some, these skills seem to come naturally; for others, they can be a trial. They are, however, essential and they can be learned.

Inside you’ll find a number of suggestions for improving your interpersonal skills, plus a couple of real-life examples from our “Viewpoint” guest, Erin Germann, Director of Supply Chain Operations for MedStar Health. (See interview on page 3.) We’ve also included in this issue a handy checklist and an “exercise” tip to help get you started.

As always, we hope you enjoy this publication and find it helpful in the day-to-day world of Value Analysis. If you know someone who would like to receive our newsletter, please email me at carol.stone@crbard.com and we’ll add them to our mailing list.



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INTERPERSONAL SKILLS:

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Today we are faced with the preeminent fact that, if civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships.” – Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Vital Friends*.

“People can usually trace their successes and failures to the relationships in their lives.” – John Maxwell, *360-Degree Leader*.

Organizational Goals

It's common knowledge that in today's complex business environment, now more than ever, building successful work relationships and interacting with people in a positive way are essential to achieving organizational goals. And it's no wonder: organizational change, diversity, and electronic communications have changed the face of the workplace.

Success

Upholding positive interpersonal relationships among colleagues, subordinates, and superiors is the key to maintaining a successful work environment. That success depends

upon the combined cooperation, commitment, and action of people, both face-to-face and via the pervasive electronic media. To be an effective manager, colleague, team member, or leader – and a vital, valued member of the organization – having, cultivating and practicing interpersonal skills is critical.

Social Skills

Recent studies support the premise that the most critical job skill a new employee needs to possess is good interpersonal skills, and that among those surveyed, interpersonal (or “social”) skills were the ones they reported most useful on the job. Moreover, employees who have a close relationship with their manager (a direct result of good interpersonal skills) are more than 2.5 times as likely to be satisfied with their job, are more productive, have more engaged customers, and are more likely to stay with the organization, thus avoiding turnover and all that it entails: time and expense for hiring, training and/or assimilating a new member of the team.

In addition, having good interpersonal skills can be helpful in:

1. solving problems by clarifying the real issues and roadblocks
2. minimizing conflict and building group commitment
3. influencing and motivating others to productive action
4. giving effective praise and criticism
5. making trade-offs without being a pushover
6. implementing plans without strong arm tactics
7. developing credibility based on respect and trust
8. working with “difficult” people
9. generating enthusiasm for ideas and proposals

In other words, improving the entire “people side” of your job.

According to one authority, we spend 50 percent more time with customers, co-workers and bosses than we do with our friends, significant others, children and other relatives combined. Cultivating and practicing good interpersonal skills can benefit relationships with them all. ♦

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS:

PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

If there is one thing that most of the people I know in management have to learn, it is how to handle relationships where there is no authority and no orders.” – Peter Drucker, *Vital Friends*.

“Choose your attitude. There is always a choice about the way you do work, even if there is not a choice about the work itself.” – Lunden, Paul & Christensen, *Fish*.

Difficult Circumstances

The need for good interpersonal skills is especially important for the

Value Analysis Professional who must deal with many different constituencies (vendors, colleagues, peers, employees, physicians, clinicians, nurses, staff, administration, bosses, and upper management), guiding them to consensus in what are often difficult circumstances.

Erin Germann, Director of Supply Chain Operations for MedStar Health, gives two examples.

The first she describes as one of the worst days of her life. “We had just converted all IV pumps and tubings

and safety technology in the anesthesia department, and I arrived for a day of procedures training only to find that the head of the department had not let anyone know about either the change or the training. Of course they were angry and upset; I had to extract and utilize every ounce of interpersonal skill in me. The key was keeping calm and pleasant – not defensive – and using gentle persuasion and encouragement to move them forward into a problem-solving mode.

Continued on back

VA People *Viewpoint*



Meet Erin Germann

A self-described “nurse by trade,” Erin Germann grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. There she attended Barnes Hospital School of Nursing, known for being a top supplier of nursing graduates. Barnes, which at that time ranked amongst the nation’s top hospitals, was an 1800-bed academic hospital with an international clientele, which was a sharp contrast to her next position as staff RN at a hospital, which was known as a “palace” in suburbia. The initial part of her career was spent in bedside nursing, first on a general medical/surgical unit, then an oncology unit prior to transitioning to GI Medicine, before accepting a position managing a hospital’s pre- and post-surgical areas and endoscopy suites. For the past eight years she has served in the corporate arena. Today she is Director of Supply Chain Operations for MedStar Health, a non-profit regional healthcare system and the largest healthcare provider in the Baltimore-Washington area with a community-based network of eight hospitals and other healthcare services. She is also a member of the *Value Analysis Newsletter* editorial board.

Q: What drew you to the healthcare field?

A: I wanted to be a nurse all my life, which is interesting since my parents were so squeamish that they couldn’t even pull a loose tooth; they sent me to the neighbor to do the job! I must have missed that gene. As a senior in high school, I followed the direction of a guidance counselor and applied to three nursing schools, one I was sure to be accepted at, one I thought I could get into, and one that was a “dream.” I was lucky enough to be accepted at all three; I chose to attend my “dream school,” Barnes Hospital School of Nursing, where I received my nursing diploma.

Q: How did you transition to Value Analysis or your current job?

A: After 20 plus years of nursing I was looking for a change. I had interviewed and received an offer to “do more of the same,” when a colleague suggested I speak with his boss about a Clinical Liaison position in Materials Management. I was able to offer my years of experience as a pre-requisite to the position.

Q: How did you prepare for your current position?

A: It was really baptism by fire. Eight years ago there were very few RNs in Materials Management when I started as a Clinical Liaison, the only nurse on the Materials Management team. I was tasked with assuring that decisions were made using evidence based medical practices. I was extremely fortunate that my boss was always there to coach me along. I understood the nursing side of Materials Management/Supply Chain, but I needed and received a lot of support from my peers in Materials

Management at our facilities as well as my representative from our primary distributor, our Group Purchasing Account Representative, as well as some major business partners/vendor representatives. It was these folks who helped me understand the contracts/compliance/business side of the relationships.

Q: What role do interpersonal skills play in your job?

A: They are immensely important in helping me do my job every day, dealing as I do with so many different groups of people. In any one day, I can interact with clinical staff, hospital administration, legal counsel, finance, risk managers, vendors, etc. In fact, I don’t know where you can separate the two.

Q: What training did you receive in developing the interpersonal skills you use on the job?

A: Actually, I need to give credit to my oncology patients who taught me more than I could ever have learned from a book. They wanted to thank me for the care I gave to them and their families, yet no words can express what they taught me about life and living! I’ve attended seminars: management 101 stuff, conflict resolution, Myers-Briggs personality profiling. For me, the best advice was that given to me years ago from a psychologist who worked with our oncology staff: “Different is different, different is not wrong.”

Q: Can you give some examples of areas or groups in which interpersonal skills are essential for the Value Analysis Professional?

A: In meetings, especially, where I’m dealing with a wide range of people from staff to administrators. I’m forthright by nature; I have to keep in mind that my goal is to assist, facilitate, develop consensus. I always try to know enough about the subject matter, but I am not shy about saying I am not an expert especially if the experts are in the room.

Q: What interpersonal skill or skills do you consider most valuable for the Value Analysis Professional?

A: Communication, without a doubt. Listening is critical, validating what has been said, then repeating the point and asking for validation. Plus recognizing that just because someone doesn’t say anything doesn’t mean they agree. Taking the time to read people to determine if their response is the result of a bad day or some other extenuating factor. Knowing how to read body language helps. It’s fun to watch someone come into a meeting with a stern face and arms crossed and then be able to have them leave laughing. ❖

Continued from front

I remember saying, 'let me show you this' and 'it will be fine' repeatedly and in fact it was fine in the end."

The second example involved another conversion, this time regarding OR drapes and gowns. "At five of our six facilities, the conversion had been well communicated; the heads had held a touch-feel-see/Q&A session and everyone was aware of the change. At the sixth facility, however, there was no meeting, no opportunity for buy-in, just the conversion, which had been approved by 'key-people.' The backlash was enormous and my directive was to 'clean up this mess,' which meant remedial session of demos and hand-holding."

Partnership & Respect

Says Germann: "The two words to remember are 'partnership' and 'respect.' People just want to be heard." Communication is key: in the words of Gina Thomas, VP Customer Management, MedAssets, "communication, or in this case, the lack of, is always the aggravator of any situation."

In addition to their other duties, VA Professionals must be motivators, champions, collaborators, companions, connectors, energizers, mind-openers, navigators, and teachers. All require interpersonal skills that can be learned and practiced until they are second nature.



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- *Listen more than you talk*
- *Establish a bond by sharing a bit of personal history*
- *Ask questions*
- *Shake hands*
- *Repeat names*
- *Smile*
- *Practice good posture; it generates energy and inspires confidence*
- *Don't speak too fast, pause before replying and avoid interruptions*
- *Be flexible*

Before Reacting

When confronted with a difficult person or situation, take a moment before reacting in order to (calmly) gain a little distance, assess the situation, formulate, communicate, and implement a plan, then modify as needed. The primary leverage you have for coping with difficult behavior is your ability to change the interaction you are both caught in.

Remember: People treat you better when you treat them well. If you can't be positive, be neutral. But don't kid yourself; it's hard to hide your feelings, especially when dealing with difficult people. Meanwhile, remind yourself that people are generally good, not malicious, so give them the benefit of the doubt. Choosing to relate with this in mind can help keep you focused on their positive attributes – and help you achieve positive outcomes. ❖

Stretch Your Skills

This simple exercise can help you develop your interpersonal expertise.

- **Step 1:** Assess yourself (be honest, now). Write down the key traits/behaviors that you think others would use to describe you.
- **Step 2:** Write down the behaviors you admire or those of a person who exemplifies them.
- **Step 3:** Rate your current skill level of these desired behaviors and what hinders you from doing better.
- **Step 4:** Describe your desired outcome; what you can do that you aren't doing now.
- **Step 5:** Design your path; how you're going to get there (practice, timeframe, network of support).

For example:

The reality: "I tend to interrupt people."

The hindrance: "I always feel rushed."

The desired outcome: "I want people to feel I'm listening to them."

The plan: "I will repeat to myself what people are saying as they say it, then pause and repeat my understanding out loud."

Keep a journal of your progress, using a couple of trusted colleagues to tell you how you're doing. Pick a realistic timeframe, say three months, for your behavior to change. ❖

TIP: pick one skill to work on at a time; this is a growth process and growth takes time!

(From *Coaching: Evoking Excellence in Others.*)

10 Easy Ways

To Improve Your Interpersonal Skills

- ◆ Smile
- ◆ Show appreciation
- ◆ Pay attention to others
- ◆ Practice active listening
- ◆ Bring people together
- ◆ Resolve conflicts
- ◆ Communicate clearly
- ◆ Use humor
- ◆ See it from their side
- ◆ Don't complain

(From *Ten Ways To Improve Your Interpersonal Skills*)

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