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Five tips to improve work relationships

by Cathy DeBerry, adult services librarian at SCLSNJ's Warren Township Library branch

My husband and I will be married 28 years this February. He is the yin to my yang and our marriage is the classic case of the bubbly extrovert marrying the strong silent type. On paper this can be the best kind of marriage, but it can also include conflict.

As I considered what my husband and I "did right" all these years, my mind wandered to the relationships I have at work. I spend nearly as much time - let's be honest, maybe even more time - with my colleagues as I do my husband.

While you can pick your spouse, you can't always pick who you work with. And in order to be successful in the workplace, it is necessary to have good working relationships. Why? Because humans are generally social creatures. We crave friendship and social interaction.

Studies reveal that the better our work relationships are, the happier and more productive we are in the workplace.* Americans spend an average of 47 hours a week at work, according to a Gallup Poll (2014).^ Assuming an average American sleeps eight hours a day, that same American spends about 40 percent of his awake hours at work. Given our pack mentality and how much of our lives are spent at work, you can see why it's so important to have positive work relationships.

If you have great relationships at work, you are one of the lucky ones. If not, here are some tips to improve your relationships:

Trust: Trust that your teammates will pull their own weight and that they will make the right decisions; show them you'll do the same. Be open and honest.

Respect: Create an inclusive environment. Talk to all employees as if they are your equal. Always maintain a positive and solution-driven attitude. Don't be critical or focused on negatives; rather, offer alternative ideas or solutions.

Empathy: Listen to and respect different points of view expressed by colleagues. By practicing empathy, you will understand people more which leads to better working relationships. Employees at any level who practice empathy are often the most successful.

Compromise: As with any relationship, conflict is inevitable. Conflict implies a healthy exchange of ideas. Remember to be professional when expressing your concerns. And if you can't get your way, try to meet somewhere in the middle. A compromise that is agreeable to both parties fosters healthy relationships at work.

Communication: Your attitude while talking is key. There's an old phrase: "You catch more flies with honey." This is valuable in relationships - in the workplace and beyond. Also, it's important to remember, according to Karen Friedman's, book, *Shut Up And Say Something: Business Communication Strategies to Overcome Challenges and Influence Listeners*, "It's not just your words that convey a message. It's all of you. If you slouch, jam your hands into your pockets,



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shuffle your feet and avoid eye contact, people will get the impression you don't want to communicate with them.”

When your colleague, your boss, your employee (or, in my case, my husband) is making you crazy and none of the aforementioned tips are working, consider the possibility that it is not that important. You may discover that you may just want to take a breath, pull an “Elsa” and let it go.

[*https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/wired-success/201007/how-workplace-happiness-can-boost-productivity](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/wired-success/201007/how-workplace-happiness-can-boost-productivity)

[^https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2014/09/02/the-average-work-week-is-now-47-hours/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2014/09/02/the-average-work-week-is-now-47-hours/)

About Somerset County Library System of New Jersey

Somerset County Library System of New Jersey (SCLSNJ) partners with you to connect, to explore, to share and to discover. Together we enrich lives, expand knowledge and strengthen communities. SCLSNJ branches can be found in Bridgewater, Bound Brook, Hillsborough, Manville, North Plainfield, Peapack & Gladstone, Rocky Hill at Mary Jacobs Memorial Library, Somerville, Warren Township and Watchung. Additionally, there are two SCLSNJ reading stations in Branchburg and Washington Valley. Visit SCLSNJ.org for further information about library services offered at SCLSNJ.

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