

What It Is

Managing relationships is about intentionally building bonds with others, learning how to positively influence interactions, and negotiating through difficult situations.

It's more than just having relationships – it's proactively taking steps to ensure they're healthy and beneficial to both parties.

How Improving It Helps You

We as humans are a social species – we survive and thrive when we have healthy relationships with those around us. When meaning and fulfillment are scarce, strong bonds with family, friends, and colleagues can work wonders on our emotional health and behavior.

There are many complexities in negotiating relationships, but continually working to improve your self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness will help you to stay confident and clear-headed in every interaction.

Maintaining healthy relationships includes practices like monitoring your conversation habits, setting and keeping boundaries, and developing a mindset that assumes goodwill in others.

Taking steps to improve the health and depth of your relationships, whether at home or at work, can blot out any feelings of purposelessness or isolation, and steady you in any circumstance.

Take some time to think about why you want to be better at managing your relationships, and write your response here:

Why do I want to improve my relationships?

Practices to Better Manage Relationships

Having Great Conversations

Can you think of people who seem to be natural-born conversationalists? Not those who are just inspiring speakers, but people who you've talked with and left feeling energized or completely understood.

Great conversations are essential to great relationships, but many of us lack confidence in this area. Radio host Celeste Headlee did a TEDx Talk where she translated her interviewing skills into tips for having meaningful conversations. Her ten tips are:

1. Don't Multitask

Be present and in the moment – don't be half in the conversation and half out.

2. Don't Pontificate

Conversations are an opportunity to learn from others. They are not the place to state your opinion while staying closed off to what others have to say.

3. Use Open-Ended Questions

Start questions with who, what, when, where, why, or how – you'll get more interesting and thoughtful responses when you ask questions that encourage others to be descriptive.

4. Go With the Flow

Let go of thoughts that come up while the other person is still speaking. If you're locked onto thinking how you want to respond, you've stopped listening to what they're saying.

5. If You Don't Know, Say That You Don't Know

Be cautious with your words. If you don't know something to be true, don't state it as fact.

6. Don't Equate Your Experience with Someone Else's

Our experiences are individual and unique – don't turn the conversation to your similar experience and make it about you. Keep asking questions.

7. Try Not to Repeat Yourself

Don't keep rephrasing the same point over and over – it becomes condescending and unhelpful to the conversation.

8. Stay Out of the Weeds

Little details that you're struggling to remember (years, dates, names, etc.) are often unimportant and you can let them go to keep the conversation moving.

9. Listen

Listening is perhaps the most important skill you can ever learn. Distraction comes easily, but meaningful connection happens when you quiet yourself to hear others.

10. Be Brief

Respect others' time – don't monopolize it.

Setting and Keeping Boundaries

The care you show for yourself should mirror the care you show for others. Many people struggle with either not setting boundaries for themselves, or not respecting others' boundaries. In her work, researcher and author Brené Brown discusses how **people who lack boundaries often end up feeling mistreated or bitter – which is beneficial to neither party in a relationship.**

Brown suggests keeping this mantra top of mind, so you're able to extend the benefit of the doubt to others (which is the next practice we'll discuss):

"What boundaries do I need to put in place so I can work from a place of integrity and extend the most

Here are the basic steps to ensure you have appropriate boundaries in your personal and professional relationships:

1. Identify What You Need

You should have a clear goal in mind – for example, feeling safer, being treated fairly, or relating to one another in a more positive way.

2. Define Boundaries to Help Meet Your Needs

Make them concrete, easily understood, and define consequences so others know what you expect.

3. Communicate Your Boundaries

Be firm, but kind and respectful. Don't place blame, explain excessively, or apologize for setting a boundary. Reinforce that you value the relationship and that's why this boundary is important.

4. Enforce Those Boundaries

If someone violates your boundary, enforce the consequences you outlined right away, don't let it slide. Your consequences must be realistic and you must follow through with them to let others know your boundaries cannot be disregarded.

Always Assuming Goodwill

Giving others the benefit of the doubt is a highly beneficial and rewarding practice. Assuming goodwill in others' intentions can be tough to keep as a habit with everyone you meet, but it's absolutely worth it to nurture that mindset.

The idea is to **assume others are operating based on positive intentions, rather than negative ones.** That makes it much easier to manage your responses. If someone does or says something that upsets you, pause to acknowledge their positive intentions. Then, if you have the opportunity, offer constructive feedback on why those intentions aren't resulting in positive outcomes.

It's especially important to foster this mindset in your closest relationships, but work on extending this habit to acquaintances and strangers, also.

If you're after more fulfilling everyday living, then make it your goal to always assume goodwill in others.

Whether through these techniques or others you've learned, write down some ways you can work on better managing your relationships:

To improve my relationships, what steps am I going to take right now?

Questions for Reflection

Once you've spent some time using these or other practices to focus on improving your relationships, think through the questions below to reflect on what you've found.

What conversation habits have I noticed that I could replace with more helpful ones?

What negative feelings am I holding that stem from not setting a boundary with someone?

What boundaries do I need to set or enforce more firmly?

How am I making sure I'm staying respectful of others' boundaries?
