

People Skills - Are They Inborn or Made?

By Robert Tanner

Managers usually are promoted for their technical skills. Having technical skills does not mean one has people skills, however. Organizational turnover, poor morale, absenteeism, organizational conflicts, worker sabotage, and worker indifference are all symptoms of managers who lack people skills. This raises an interesting question. Are people skills inborn or made? The truth is that both views are correct. Some individuals are naturally better at working with people. They excel at getting the best out of people. It is also true, however, that we can improve our people skills with time and effort. Lacking people skills does not mean we cannot develop them.

Six Steps for Improving People Skills

1. Acknowledge Areas of Improvement

A manager's ability to improve his people skills begins with his acceptance that he has weaknesses that he needs to improve if he is to be an effective leader. Without this acknowledgement, he cannot become better in his interactions with people. This is the first and hardest step for improving one's people skills.

2. Commit to Improving People Skills

Once a manager admits her deficiencies in a certain area, she next has to want to change her performance. Some managers do not want to make the emotional and time investments that bring about change, however. Change is not easy. Once the manager makes the commitment, the process becomes easier.

3. Attend Quality Management Training Seminars

Quality training can provide managers with critical knowledge they need to develop their people skills. Effective training will offer opportunities within the seminar to practice key skills. (This is important for adult learning as we need chances to apply what we are learning.) Taking the training outside the workplace allows confidentiality as well. The manager seeking to improve his skills can experiment and be more open about his deficiencies without fear of it being held against him in the workplace.

Internal management training is also an option, providing it is well designed. If your organization offers assessment center training, this can be a highly effective method for improving your people skills. With this training, a manager has to demonstrate and role-play managerial duties while interacting with others. The manager's performance is then evaluated by seasoned practitioners who can provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of his or her management and leadership skills.

4. Take a Behavioral Assessment

Behavioral assessments such as Myers-Briggs®, Firo-B®, Interaction Styles®, Temperament Theory®, and the TKI Conflict Mode Instrument® are great tools for improving people skills. These assessments can provide insights into areas such as communications, conflict-resolution, motivation, team building, interpersonal effectiveness, values, supervision, and other critical areas. The key is to use individuals who are professionally certified to administer these instruments. There are many business professionals who have not been assessed properly, and this only adds to their confusion on how best to work with others. With the advances of the Internet, many of these assessments can be taken confidentially online and a follow-up coaching session can be done over the telephone. So, it is no longer important where you live. This information is available to everyone. Visit the [Business Consulting Solutions LLC Store](#) to view a sample of any of these reports.

5. Find and Adopt a Business Mentor

Finding a management mentor who exemplifies "people-skill management" is highly effective for a manager's self-improvement efforts. The additional benefit of this approach is that it lets the manager get feedback from someone with proven abilities in this area. Often, finding a mentor is as simple as asking a leader you respect to be your mentor. Go to work with them and observe them in action if you can. Many years ago, I asked a vice president to be my mentor and he readily accepted. Being able to talk to him as a young manager was invaluable to improving my people skills.

6. Be Receptive to all Feedback—Especially Negative Feedback

Managers need to listen to the organization for feedback on their performance. This feedback is always present if a manager is willing to listen to it. It can come through formal sources such as organizational climate surveys, 360-degree performance appraisal feedback, the use of external or internal consultants, and other methods. Even better, managers can create an environment of continual feedback by making it acceptable for others to disagree with them and present alternate views or to bring them bad news. If they keep hearing the same feedback from very different people, they should seriously evaluate what others are telling them. There is likely some truth to their perceptions.

There is Hope!

We do not have to despair if we were not born with "tons of natural charisma." People skills can be developed. We can always improve if we acknowledge the areas where we are lacking and commit to an action plan to perform better. Gain the information you need to take your people skills to the next level by taking an online behavioral assessment at the [Business Consulting Solutions LLC Store](#).

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Robert Tanner is president of Business Consulting Solutions LLC, the author of *Why Smart People Fail at Management* (available at [GetToThePointBooks.com](#)), and an Adjunct Professor of Management. He provides training and development, managerial and organizational assessments, and management coaching services. With over 20 years of management experience, Robert is a seasoned business practitioner. His clients include Fortune 100 firms, start-up firms, and public agencies. He is a frequent seminar trainer on management and leadership topics and was featured in *Smart Business Magazine*. Robert is professionally certified to administer a variety of behavioral and psychological type assessments including Myers-Briggs®, Firo-B®, Interaction Styles®, Temperament Theory®, and the TKI Conflict Mode Instrument®. If you enjoyed this article, [visit Robert's blog](#) and join the management discussion. To learn more about his professional services, visit [Business Consulting Solutions LLC](#).