

Transcription - Developing Interpersonal Skills

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, and this is Inside Exec. Today, Fulyana is going to drag me through a discussion on interpersonal skills, developing your interpersonal skills. She sent me an email suggesting that this would be a very good topic for us to discuss, and I just wrote back and said, "No, I wasn't interested. I haven't got time. Could be bothered. I'm too old to develop any more, not interested at all in developing my interpersonal skills." So, I am her challenge today, as you would expect of me.

I ignored that.

And how many of you are with me on this?

I think it's really important, because you can talk and call it even something more modern, but at the end of the day, when you go looking for a job or you're applying, the technical department is a given, you have to have that and you have to be the best in your field, but then, how you are as a person is very, very important. Okay, that's only part of it. I'm also interested to talk about how you continually develop your interpersonal skills to be more successful as a leader at work.

My chin hasn't left my hand yet. I'm still waiting for inspiration.

Being a resilient, which is one of my interpersonal skills, I'll keep going. So, we're talking about communication skills and I think that will make Kim take notice, because that's one of her favourite topics, because it can make and break people. I'll come back to that, so stay with me, Kim. Of course, things like, I'm just going to mention a few, just so we're on the same page, good work ethics, you know, they're vital. Ability to receive and give constructive feedback, it's part of everyday life, not just at work, but very, very important at work. Being a team player. Yeah, that's always said. Of course, I'm a team player, but we need to develop that more, and what it means to an individual. Being flexible and adaptable. Not, my way is the only way, because I've done it before it worked, I know what I'm talking about. We'll touch on examples of how to deal with that. Being able to work under pressure or better still under pressure, we all behave in a different way. Pressure can make people either hard, it can make people explode, it can make people stop thinking, etc. How do you recognize when you're under pressure? what do you do when you're under pressure? How are you going to develop that so that you work best, even under pressure?

The other thing is just having a "can do" attitude, a positive attitude, and the difference between that and being what sometimes people refer to optimists, as silly optimists, or mad optimists, or whatever.

Anyway, this is roughly the background, and then I want to start discussing things for all those behaviors or interpersonal skills. You have so many people you're working with, and they all have different traits. How do you work with those?

It's interesting if we think back, and perhaps you've had an opportunity to listen to the discussion that we have with Trish Nicklin, where she talked about the changes to management and how we manage people, how we manage teams. I think that, in that

discussion, I was very much in favor of us individually taking responsibility for me, the interpersonal skill that I want to develop, the most important is responsibility in terms of myself, and in terms of those with whom I am working. All of the other traits and qualities are to a lesser extent important, because I think that my responsibility as a leader, as a manager, and as the manager of my skills, is to look at what the skill mix is with the rest of the people that I work with and work for, in this instance, and determine how I can get the best out of them, without detracting from the ones who need to be in the right place. I think the ones who don't need as much involvement, and the ones that I get on best with, are the ones that I might get the least time to work on, because I know that that relationship will develop regardless. Whereas the ones that are a bit harder to manage, that are a bit more challenging to need, in terms of my skills, I'll avoid them altogether, or I won't admit these things, or I will take a particular stance that might not be the best way to manage them, but is comfortable for me, in terms of managing the situation, managing the task. When it boils down to it, the bottom line is that I will always manage the task ahead of managing the people and I'm happy with that.

It's extremely valuable. What I just did is extremely valuable. When you think about it, the best thing to understand, yourself and the people you're working with, is to say to yourself, "Whom do I find was difficult to work with and why?" And she's pointing at me.

You all know, she never lets you get away with anything. (That's right. And that's not going to change.) So if you look at people that you find difficult to work with, the first thing you need to figure out is why. Sometimes we don't like everyone, and that's fine. You don't have to like them to work with them. We know that. Stop to think, why is it I found this person difficult and then what strategies have I used to make things better and make things happen and what worked and what didn't work.

That would be exactly similar to what Kim just did. The other thing is, is, "Who do I like to work with most? Who do I enjoy working with most?" And why? And what strategies have I used? I loved when Kim said, "We've got a good relationship and I love working with this person" and she was pointing at me. What she's talking about there is, she sort of knew the relationship is good, so she left it. Now, is that right? Is that wrong? Is that something you can do forever? You've got to reflect on that. Maybe it does for the person that Kim had in mind. Maybe it doesn't. You've got to think. If you've done any leadership courses or did some reading, etc. about the sort of people we work with, you tend to get people, you know, you can group them, you can have the egomaniac, for example, who is everything, likes to be told how fantastic they are, etc. I'm going to list some of those headings, but I want, before I do, I want to say I am not in favor of labeling as such. Because what happens is, if you start thinking, "This person is an egomaniac or a control freak or whatever," you start focusing on that. Now, the fact is, not all eg maniacs are the same, and not all control freaks are the same. They're individuals, you work with them so you've got to find out the best way to work with them. This, to me, is really important.

You can generalize too. Learn about personality types, but never ever forget, it will not apply for two people with the same label on them. Any of you who have been exposed to the DISC model would understand that if you try to categorize people as in the D or the I quadrant, you will find that, for the most part, they'll sit somewhere between the two, that they're not absolutely the Dominator in every instance. Sometimes they might drop down to the lower

levels to the C or the S, they might be the Care or they might be the Supportive person. They might, in some instances where you know that in the past, they have always been the ones who made absolute decisions quickly. They had to be in control of making that decision, then suddenly you bring them a project, and they want to know all the ins and outs of every little bit, and they seem like they're never going to get to a point where they make a decision. You are thrown completely because you relied on this label that you've given them, about this is the quadrant that they fit into. Now, suddenly, when they're not in that quadrant, you don't know what to do, you don't know how to manage that situation. So I'm very much in favour of not labeling, certainly of being aware of the characteristics of those quadrants, because it can help you in dealing with situations, but be aware in theory about what you do when you come across what you think is a person exhibiting those traits of that quadrant, rather than this person is this so I have to manage them this way or interact with them this way all the time. Just develop the skills of being able to work with all of those quadrants, whenever they're presented to you, rather than the person being in the quadrant.

I will use a couple of examples to just see the dangers of making assumptions. Say in your group or in the teams or the project teams that you're working with, you have a person who is quiet. Now that quiet person could be quiet because they're just shy, they might be internal and analytical more than average. They might be quiet because they're really not interested, they don't want to be there, somebody put them there and they're very negative. Maybe they're just quiet because they said to themselves, if I open my mouth, then they can see how much I don't know. Managing two quiet people depends on what you understand of that individual and the strategies you use, you could make things much worse. To a great extent, it could be cultural, it might be that they have not been encouraged in an authoritarian situation to feel that they have the right to say something. It might be that they are the second child or that in their home environment or their family environment or their cultural environment, that they don't speak unless they're spoken to. So unless you specifically asked them for an opinion or comment or some input, they won't give it. I know that that is so much a part of working teams. I've seen it so, so often that unless you go around the table, or even in meetings now, at the end of a meeting, I will go around the table and say to people, have you got anything else to offer individually? So that if they haven't had the opportunity during the meeting or if someone else has said things that they wanted to say, and so they feel like, well, I've got nothing else to add because that was the thing that I was going to say, they've still got the opportunity at the end of the meeting to bring up anything else, or to reiterate again something that's already been said, if they feel that strongly about it. I think that makes it much more inclusive. It means that you are getting their input. They have the opportunity. If it is the case that they're not confident enough during a meeting, as such, to say things, that they know that they will have the opportunity at the end of the meeting to tell me what they want to say.

That's good. We all love a team player. No matter whether you're working with four or whatever, you're always looking for team players. So you're going to be careful. You've got a team member who would always put their hand up. They always want to. They're very enthusiastic. They want to be into everything to the point where they're overcommitted and over promise and under deliver. How do you interact with a person like that? The first thing that should come to mind is not go, "Oh, not him again." He's going to say that. Don't go there. The first thing you do is do not destroy that passion about wanting to be involved. How you handle that is crucial, either as a colleague or as a manager, doesn't matter. You

need to sort of say, "Yeah, good." And then talk to them about with the deadlines and how they're placed. Talk about, there's going to be other projects. If not now for you, we can get someone else. Don't shy away. Just say, "That's fantastic, you want to be in this group. At the moment, we're looking for someone with this sort of experience. We've already got three people that can cover this bit but seeing you're so keen, I really appreciate it. Can I keep your name down for the next project?" That sort of response.

With all of that, particularly in the case of selecting members for a team, for a project, can I caution you about using the word "but"? Whenever you say to someone, "It's great to have your enthusiasm. It's great to have you part of the team, but we're doing this" All they hear is what you say after "but." You can still say that. My approach is generally, "I really love how enthusiastic you are and for every project that we bring in here, can I see what you are working on now?" You don't need to use "but." It's superfluous to the conversation you have, so don't use it. And if you hear yourself saying it, stop and say, "I'm not going to say that. I want to start again" and start again. Look at the commitments that they've already made and lead them towards making the decision that perhaps on this occasion, they've got too much on with conflicting deadlines, that they need to be first in line for consideration for next time round and let them come to the conclusion that they will bring their enthusiasm to the next thing that gets supported. What you're focusing on the whole time is their enthusiasm and their inclusion in projects when it's appropriate, but you let them make the decision.

It's very much like the trend at the moment for sales and sales is that you give the people all this information, you let them come to the conclusion that they're going to buy from you. There's plenty of documentation that you can read out there about how to do that and how to get the words right and all those sorts of things. I have a concern over a few words, "but", "however", so just listen to what you're saying when you think about your reaction to these situations and try to avoid those words if you can. My soapbox is done.

No, no, no, it's all good, really good information. Back to "Do not label." If someone, always at meetings, tends to come up with what I call the "black hat" view, which is somebody who's doom and gloom, negative, "That's not going to work and you know this is going to be dangerous," do not stop listening to them. Please don't stop listening to them, as tempting as it is, as annoying as it is, don't. Because it's that time when they might say something that you need. What do you have to do? What do you have in your interpersonal skills toolbox to deal with that? What you've got to think about is, why are they annoying?

Is it because you don't want a negative influence in the positivity that you're bringing to this project, you don't want to stop the momentum that you feel you're gathering by talking in a positive way about the project and suddenly you've got this break that's happening around the table? Is it that you don't want a dissenting voice in the team? Whatever it is, you have to think about why you're having this reaction to this person. If it's happening more than once, if you feel like this is the person that always does it and we talk, one of these podcasts we talked about accurate speaking, because that's another remarkable soapboxes at the moment, but if this is the person who you feel is always negative in these situations, why do you think that? Is it because they have this voice that isn't as enthusiastic? Why don't you start thinking about them as being not negative? Don't take it past the zero point into the minuses. Why don't you think about it in terms of, they're just the guardrails for this path. They're stopping you falling off either side and yes, you could stay on the path without the guardrails but it's a bit of a safety net. Think of them as a safety net and actually listen to what

they're saying. If it's not relevant, then you can make some decisions after that. But if it, if it in any way, is relevant to the progress of the task that you're doing, then you need the guardrails there. And so you need a person like that. I would much rather have someone in the group that I think of as the guardrails, than not that have anybody who's looking out over the edge of the cliff to see if the water's rising.

Now at the beginning of this session, Kim was not at all interested in this topic. I have used my interpersonal skills to get her interested. How I did that precisely is finding a piece that's of value and importance to Kim, which was communication. You can see when she talked about communication and interaction with others, she is hooked in there. So I think my job is done. I have actually demonstrated that you can work with someone who doesn't like a certain topic and get them engaged and add value, as Kim just did.

I hope that some of you have got some benefit out of it, that I have to admit that I probably have to. I'll definitely finish here. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.

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