

## Developing Professional Interpersonal Skills



*Kay A. Saunders, MBA*

There is little to no doubt that personal likeability is a huge factor with enormous impacts on work quality, profitability and productivity. In the end, much of the success or failure of organizations large and small comes down to the people running them and the customers' reception or rejection of those people. It has been said that, "People do business with people they like." Though this is not always true, it is a largely accepted axiom for why professional social skills are important.

Literally hundreds of millions are spent each year by corporations trying to train their sales and customer service employees to be likeable while on the other hand they survey their clients to see if they are being successful. Nordstrom's has built a solid reputation as the gold standard in the way employees should treat people.

These are traditional examples of what we think of when we consider professional social skills. We think sales and customer service, but in reality training for these skill sets is finding a new home in schools of medicine, technology, and yes, even engineering.

The American Institute of Chemical Engineers (AIChE) sponsored a 3-day course entitled "interpersonal Skills for Technical Professionals." It was designed for engineers, scientists, project team and group leaders, supervisors, managers, executives and high-tech professionals for whom a "significant level of influencing skill and interpersonal competence is required in accomplishing both personal and organizational goals."

Professionals were to learn to assess the impact and consequences of their unique interpersonal style. They would learn how to use specific behaviors to enhance personal and team effectiveness and how the things they say can and do affect their interactions with supervisors, peers and associates. They were to learn how to give and receive constructive feedback, gain skills for improved listening, conflict management, etc. More than mere manners and etiquette, social skills allow one to move fluidly between cultures, to gather and use information, leave a positive impression, make strategic connections, enhance productivity through the division of labor, and make social, political

*The Human Asset Imaging® Institute exists to research, develop and bring to market products that increase interpersonal effectiveness.*

and economic impacts. Dare I say, that people with good professional social skills are the implementers, if not change agents within organizations, dispensing or garnering favors while eliciting the goodwill and well wishes of others.

According to an article in the American Psychological Society Observer, entitled, “*Beyond the Classroom Developing Students’ Professional Social Skills*”, people who perform exceptionally on assignments, but are habitually late, like to over-argue their points and demand personal exceptions to existing policies might fit the description of those with poorly developed social skills.

Authors Merry J. Sleight and Darren R. Rizer define Professional Social Skills as, “Those skills that facilitate interpersonal interaction between individuals or in a group setting. Ideally, professional interactions require having an awareness of the respective positions of the persons involved, the relationships among persons, and the task at hand.”

Listed below are a sampling of the types of interpersonal proficiencies necessary to experience even a modicum of social acceptance and success.

- Developing rapport
- Accepting accountability and responsibility for your own work
- Listening to understand
- Clarifying communication
- Persuading & influencing people and situations
- Monitoring one’s emotional expressions and responses
- Maintaining composure when challenged
- Being receptive to feedback and accepting constructive criticism
- Respecting others’ professional position, particularly those in authority
- Being on time
- Being prepared for the tasks at hand
- Showing or expressing appreciation
- Being equally courteous to everyone regardless of their position in the organization
- Dressing appropriately and being hygienically pleasing
- Knowing how to make proper introductions
- Learning how human systems in organizations allow for work to be done
- Behaving in a manner that is congenial and collegial

*For more information  
on how to assess the  
professional  
interpersonal skills of  
those in your  
organization, please  
call the HAI-Institute  
TODAY  
1-800-585-0318*