

Learning to Co-Exist With Co-Workers

Eight hours a day. Five days a week. Fifty weeks a year. You spend almost as much time with your co-workers as you do with your family. The moral of the story? Good relationships with co-workers are the single most important factor for job satisfaction. Without them, the hope of a great working environment becomes just a fairy tale.

Want some great lessons on getting along with co-workers? Consider these four work fables:

The Man With a Secret

Bill just could not get along with Tom. Whenever Bill asked his co-worker a question, Tom was always short with him. They had the same job responsibilities, so Bill didn't understand why Tom seemed so much more stressed than the rest of the team. One day, when Bill and Tom were the only people in the lunch room, Bill decided to make one last attempt at conversation. Tom responded, and they started talking about their personal lives. Bill discovered that Tom's wife was battling a serious illness, and Tom was stretched to the breaking point. By the end of the conversation, Bill offered to take over some of Tom's responsibilities. The two became good friends.

Moral: When you get to know fellow employees, you're more likely to understand them and find ways to work well with them.

The Scent of a Colleague

Susan couldn't understand why Jenna did not like her. Susan always made an effort to be friendly, but Jenna barely acknowledged her. In fact, Jenna never associated with Susan at all—on a work or a personal level. After several months, Susan finally asked Jenna why there was tension between them. It turned out that Susan wore too much perfume, and Jenna really disliked the smell. Susan appreciated Jenna's candor and stopped wearing that fragrance. Their working relationship improved immediately, and they even asked to work together on a recent project.

Moral: Even when inconsiderate actions are unintended, they can really strain relations in the workplace.

The Woman With Deaf Ears

Julie was recently promoted to team leader. She respected and liked her entire staff. That's why she couldn't understand it when they started complaining to her boss Marc. After a number of people came to him, Marc called Julie into his office and told her that the grumbling centered on her inability to listen. She constantly cut people off with her responses, assuming she knew what they were asking her. Julie agreed to take some training classes to improve her listening skills. The results were great—her team noticed the change and came to enjoy working with her.

Moral: Really listen. That means taking in all the information and analyzing it *before* you respond. You show your co-workers that you value their concerns and respect their input.

The Man Who Didn't Do Much

None of the field technicians wanted James as their support associate. He failed to respond promptly to service requests, so when technicians arrived at client sites, they had to calm irate customers. When the technicians called James and asked for information or parts, he was slow to get back to them. Their efficiency—and their good humor—suffered as a result of James' poor performance. Unfortunately for James, he was finally let go after repeated warnings. And while the technicians wished James their best, they were glad to begin working with a new support associate with much better work habits.

Moral: Treat your co-workers as you would your customers. By pulling your weight, you're providing good "customer service".

The Lesson Learned

You don't have to be Aesop or a Grimm brother to learn the key to getting along with your fellow employees. It's this: appreciate the work they do and respect them as people. If you follow that golden rule, the story almost always ends happily!

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