

Career IQ



Self-development is critical to your success

It builds more confidence in your own abilities, helps you thrive in the employment market as well in your personal life. Being up to date on professional skills, and knowledge makes you a more attractive prospect to employers, and will serve you well in any forum. Here are effective ways to develop yourself:

- Read books on skills or topics that interest you and are relevant to your career.
- Enrol in short courses or seminars for further knowledge.
- Review professional journals to keep up on new developments.
- Connect with a career coach to establish development goals and actions.
- Seek a mentor for specific advice and expertise.
- Take time off to pursue longer studies.
- Lead projects and special assignments to gain new skills and knowledge.
- Engage in e-learning venues such as webinars, podcasts and e-conferences.
- Set up a learning group to exchange

knowledge and experience. Job shadow an expert who has mastered a skill you are developing.

Self-development is progressive and it takes time. To attain skill mastery you need to delve into multiple learning methods, and practice, practice, practice.

Mike Lynch and Harvey Lifton (Training Clips, HRD Press) provide a process for learning "Interpersonal Skills". Here are the four steps:

- 1. Plan:** identify situations in which your interpersonal skills need improvement. Choose a situation that is significant for you and occurs frequently on a daily basis. Plan out the behaviour and words for practical purposes.
- 2. Practice:** practice the exact words, the phrasing, the facial expressions, the tone of voice, and the body language called for in the situation. The more important or sensitive the situation, the more critical the practice session is. Think through the reaction you want from others in the situation. Ask the person you are practicing with (a trusted co-worker, a spouse, a

friend) for their reaction and see how close you can get to the desired reaction.

3. Perform: the hardest part of using interpersonal skills is to be aware in the moment. How am I expressing my ideas? How are people reacting? How am I reacting to their comments? Practice will allow you to be comfortable with your message and focus more on delivery and reaction. By planning and practicing you can better adjust your behaviours to the situation.

4. Review: most people want to get through the situations and then forget them. You do not learn anything that way. After each significant interaction, you need to examine what worked well and what you could have done differently. An interaction might be successful even though you used only some of the techniques you had planned. If you had to deal with the unexpected or did not respond well to the unanticipated reaction, determine what you will do differently the next time.

Interpersonal skills are one of the most difficult skills to master since you are always interacting with new people and situations. Well-developed interpersonal skills give you the edge on developing other important career skills such as leadership, project management, teamwork, conflict resolution, communication and more.

Self-development is an investment in your abilities to take you from where you are today to where you want to be in the future.

Effective Project Management

Nothing helps move things along better than a good plan. It helps the people who have to work under the plan. It leads to better use of resources. It gets things done faster. It helps anticipate problems before they occur. It is one of the aspects of managing others that universally receives a positive response. A good plan leaves more time to do other things secure in the knowledge that things are on track and proceeding as planned.

Lay out tasks and work. Most successful projects begin with a good plan. What do I need to accomplish? What are the goals? What's the timeline? What resources will I need? How many of the resources do I control? Who controls the rest of the resources – people, funding, tools, materials, support – I need? Many people are seen as lacking a plan because they don't write down the sequence or parts of the work and leave something out. Ask others to comment on ordering and what's missing.

Set the plan. Buy a flow software program that creates flow charts. Become an expert in its use. Use the output of the software to communicate your plans to others.

Set goals and measures. Nothing keeps projects on time and on budget like a goal, a plan, and a measure. Set goals for the whole project and the sub tasks. Plan for all. Set measures so you and others can track progress against the goals.

Manage multiple plans or aspects of big plans. Many attempts to accomplish complex plans involve managing parallel tracks or multiple tasks at the same time. It helps if you have a master plan. Good planning decreases the chances you will lose control by spreading yourself too thin.

Manage efficiently. Plan the budget and manage against it. Spend carefully. Have a reserve if the unanticipated comes up. Set up a founding timeline so you can track ongoing expenditures against the plan.

You need to match people and tasks. People are different. They have different strengths and have differing levels of knowledge and experience. Instead of thinking of everyone as equal, think of them as different. Really equal treatment is giving people tasks to do that match their capacities.

Vision the plan in process. What could go wrong? Run scenarios in your head. Think along several paths. Rank the potential problems from highest likelihood to lowest likelihood. Think about what you would do if the highest likelihood things were to occur. Create a contingency plan for each. Pay attention to the weakest links which are usually groups or elements you have the least interference with or control over (perhaps someone in a remote location, a consultant or supplier).

Set up a process to monitor progress against the plan. How would you know if the plan is on time? Could you estimate time to completion or percent finished at any time? Get people involved in implementing the plan progress feedback as you go.

Get others to help. Share your ideas about the project with others, possibly the people you need to support you later. Get their input on the plan. Delegate creating the plan to people who are better at it than you are. You provide the goals and what needs to be done, and let others create the detailed plan?

Source: *Michael Lombardo & Robert Eichinger, For Your Improvement*

Tips to Help You Develop Your Leadership Qualities

1. Choose Not to Lose - Whether you choose to focus on your problems, or your possibilities is a key leadership issue. When we are faced with obstacles and failure, those who can overcome adversity, learn from their experiences, and turn them into opportunities are the ones who will be successful.

2. Focus and Context - Shaped by three vital questions: Where am I going (vision)? What do I believe in (principles and values)? Why do I exist (purpose and mission)?

3. Responsibility for Choices - Leadership means accepting responsibility for your choices in life. Leaders realize that life accumulates, and that choice (more than chance) determines their circumstances.

4. Authenticity - Leadership isn't just what you do, it's something that you are, which then drives what you do. Ring true to yourself by exploring your inner space, gathering feedback on your potential behaviour, and ensuring consistency with your stated values and principles.

5. Passion and Commitment - Successful people are energized by a love for what they do because it brings them ever closer to who they are. Overcome apathy and cynicism, develop a burning commitment to your cause, and with discipline achieve your dreams and desires.

6. Growing and Developing - The popular goals of security, stability, and predictability are deadly. The closer we get to these dangerous goals, the more our growth is stunted. True and lasting security comes from constant growth and development.

McMaster Leadership Effectiveness

New Manager Orientation Program

This highly customized program incorporates McMaster's leadership competencies with practical knowledge of business, financial and human resources practices and procedures.

<http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/NMOP>

Newest Resources Available

- *What Color is Your Parachute? 2009* by Richard Bolles
- *On Becoming a Leader* by Warren Bennis
- *People Skills* by Robert Bolton, Ph.D.

Check for Self-Development Resources at McMaster University

- *Centre for Continuing Education: MVP & Computer Skills Workshops, Leadership Development, Diplomas/Certificates*
- *Main Campus: Titles Bookstore, Mills Library*