

# CREATING POSITIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

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In organizations, real power and energy is generated through relationships. The patterns of relationships and the capacities to form them are more important than tasks, functions, roles, and positions.

~ Margaret Wheatley

**E**ffective leaders understand how to harness the synergy of relationships in order to accomplish the mission. The more autocratic the leadership style, the weaker the relationships and the less buy-in from others in the organization. Since buy-in engenders a sense of participation and a willingness to sacrifice for the organization, the stronger the relationships, the greater the likelihood of resounding success. Hence the question, “How important are working relationships to you?”

In the paramilitary-style organization of most law enforcement agencies, more thought is given to how to organize line-and-chart diagrams than to how to design the organization for effectiveness. Since most of us don't have the authority to expend resources to perform large-scale “time/motion” studies with the goal of a complete reorganization, we are often stuck with whatever exists at the time we are assigned to a position of leadership. Maintaining the leadership status quo is usually easier and it is often more comfortable because that's what we're used to. Breaking out of the established pattern is challenging, requires substantially more energy and involves risk. There are many within the organization, usually at peer levels and above, who will not appreciate attempts to change the system.

However, inside even the most stagnant or rigid organizations, one thing a leader can often do is foster effective working relationships. Within every organization and its subunits, there are individuals with specific skill sets or abilities which set them apart from their peers. Almost every person can recall a situation where a seemingly insurmountable problem was solved by finding the right person, with the right authority, who was willing to apply his or her authority or expertise and solved the problem quickly. Often, the response by such a person is due

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to an existing favorable relationship with one of the parties involved.

So, what are you doing to identify persons in key positions (not necessarily roles or ranks) who can influence your success, and what steps are you taking to establish a favorable working relationship with them? Would these people be potential assets to you who, in a time of need, would be willing to apply their authority or expertise on your behalf? Whether it is the clerk who stamps the requisitions, the person who decides where unencumbered year-end funds get applied, the supply officer who stockpiles unused ammunition or the administrative assistant who knows when the time would be right to approach the boss about an issue, these people can make your leadership life easier. Absent a favorable relationship, or alternatively, in an unfavorable relationship, they can also make your life more difficult. It’s all in the nature of the relationship.

Coach Lou Holtz, famous football coach and leadership consultant, speaks of a three-step concept of leadership: “Do what’s right, do the best you can, and treat people the way you’d like to be treated.” Fruitful relationships are based on all three, but the

most important is treating people the way you’d like to be treated. Recognizing that all persons have value, no matter their position or how little interaction you have with them, is the first step. It’s often as simple as a smile and a little name recognition. It’s easy, relatively painless and can pay great dividends in a crisis. Taking it from there

and building it into a positive working relationship gets easier over time, and potential problems may even be solved before they become an issue.

So, back to the question, how important are working relationships to you? The answer should be “very important.” What are you doing about it? ‹‹

