

## Managing yourself so others want to work with you

**D**o you enjoy working with your colleagues? Do you ever feel that your job would be so much easier if your coworkers just did their job?

Good working relationships must be built and maintained for pharmacists to be effective in their career, as we need the support of others to get our job done. Despite the time required to build such relationships, they can be quickly and easily destroyed by our actions. At work we want to be respected and someone with whom it is easy to work. Respect is

gained by always being consistent, fair, and equable in all our interactions with people, no matter what their position or title. Always care about each person as the unique and special individual he or she is.

Effectively managing yourself so others want to work with you requires self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy for coworkers.

**Self-awareness.** Self-awareness is an understanding of your strengths, weaknesses, needs, and motivators.

People with strong self-awareness are neither overly critical nor unrealistically hopeful. They are honest with themselves and others. People with self-awareness recognize how their feelings affect them, other people, and their job performance. The self-aware pharmacist understands his or her values and goals. They have a firm grasp of their capabilities and strengths and are less likely to set themselves up to fail because they are self-confident and have good self-esteem.

Self-esteem is a realistic, appreciative

opinion of oneself. Realistic means you deal in the truth, accurately and honestly understanding your strengths and weaknesses. Having an appreciative understanding of oneself suggests that you feel good about and are at peace with the person you are. Low self-esteem can lead to a prejudice against yourself. When you are prejudiced against yourself, you are guilty of distorting or ignoring information that disputes your skewed perception of yourself. To strengthen your self-esteem, bury your internal naysayer who makes negative predictions about your success and biases your expectations. Imagine that the negative internal talk is nothing more than graffiti painted on the walls of your mind, and you need a janitor to clean it up. Every time you hear negative internal talk, picture a friendly janitor coming along, painting over that graffiti, and replacing it with affirmations that are positive and affirming. Other methods for improving your self-esteem include

- Asking others to identify your strengths,
- Laughing at your weaknesses (because no one is perfect),
- Putting your failures in perspective, as they allow you to learn and grow,
- Finding someone who needs your assistance and offering to help them,
- Taking on a challenge to stretch yourself,
- Getting comfortable with compliments and accepting praise, and
- Focusing your mental chatter on the positive aspects of your experiences.

Develop self-confidence. People who lack self-confidence are apprehensive, frustrated, resentful, and often demoralized. To improve your self-confidence,

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*The Success Skills column provides practical advice to help pharmacists become more effective in their professional and personal lives. Installments are contributed by and reflect the views of Sara J. White, M.S., FASHP, Pharmacy Leadership Coach, Mountain View, CA.*

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ask yourself: “How would I behave if I were really confident?” or “How would a confident person I know handle this?” Just adopting the behavior of self-confidence will help you feel more confident. Do not keep admonishing yourself for failures; rather, reward yourself for successes. Learn from your mistakes and move on.

People with high self-esteem and self-confidence are assertive and not aggressive, which builds rather than destroys good working relationships. Being assertive means being fair to yourself and to others. Assertiveness is based on the idea that your needs, wants, and feelings are as important as those of other people. Aggressive people impinge on others’ needs and feelings, such as not giving others credit and not listening to and not respecting them. An assertive person knows how to balance aggression and passivity. If you are too passive in making claims for yourself, you will not get what you want and deserve, and you will be unfair to yourself. On the other hand, if you are too aggressive, you will be unfair to others. Determine exactly what you want and believe you have the same rights as others to achieve that goal. If you are criticized, accept the criticism if it is valid but refuse to be labeled by it. If you are making a complaint, focus on the behavior that is causing the problem, not the character of the person.

When asked to do something, do not yield to the pressure to say “yes” to something that is against your better judgment. Know your priorities, how you want to spend your time, and then decide whether you sincerely want to say “yes.” Assertive people do not seek control but cooperation by examining situations from the other person’s point of view. Assertive people build trust in their relationships by saying sincerely how they feel and by showing that they believe what other people say. An understanding of your true motivation is important to self-awareness. Do you have a true passion for pharmacy, seek out challenges, love to learn, take great pride in a job

well done, possess unflagging energy to do things better, persist with your questions about why things are done one way rather than another, and eagerly explore new approaches to doing your work? Interestingly, people with high motivation remain optimistic when the odds are against them.

**Self-regulation.** Self-regulation means handling your emotions so you do not destroy your working relationships with emotional outbursts. People want to work with people who are reasonably consistent and dependable in their interactions with them. Handling your emotions constructively enhances your integrity and trust. People who have mastered their emotions can cope with change. For example, when a new program is announced, they do not panic; instead, they suspend judgment, seek further information, and listen to the explanations for the change.

The landscape of emotions and feelings is more varied than any on earth, and the roads through it twist and turn like no other highway. Emotions should be acknowledged, not condemned or denied. The key to constructively handling your emotions is to consciously pause when you feel yourself becoming emotional and ask yourself, “What is my best response in these circumstances” rather than issuing an automatic response. For example, instead of sending a scathing response to an e-mail containing an unfair accusation, wait 24 hours before responding or talk directly with the person who made the accusation. You might feel quite differently after some time has passed, and you will avoid destroying your relationship. Instead of blaming your boss for not seeking your input on a change, pause and think about whether you missed a staff meeting where your boss did ask for input, or see if you could provide some input anyway. Instead of feeling paranoid about not being included in a group activity, pause and ask yourself if you handle yourself in such a way that others want to include you or whether it was just an honest oversight.

Self-regulation is the propensity for reflection and thoughtfulness. Faced by

unpalatable alternatives, people often panic and respond emotionally. They see fewer possibilities or feel more trapped than they would if they kept calm, paused, and consciously chose their best response. Learn to manage worry and anxiety, which can make you feel confused, apprehensive, out of control, and overwhelmed. So how can you manage worry and anxiety? Assess the importance of what you are worrying about. Will it matter tomorrow, next week, or in 100 years? Resist inventing new things to worry about. Deal with situations as they develop instead of wasting mental energy on worries ahead of time. Another way to deal with worry and anxiety is to take action, even if it is just making a list or developing an action plan. The act of writing things down helps you stop the mental chatter.

Be aware of your attitudes that are creating internal pressure. Do not tell yourself “I have to get this done” but say “I will do as much as I can in the time allowed.” Do not say “I should not ask for help” but say “Everyone asks for help sometimes. I would happily help someone else and that person would reciprocate.” Do not say “Others cope far better than I do” but say “Everyone is susceptible to stress, so I am not alone in this.”

**Empathy for others.** Having empathy means thoughtfully considering other people’s feelings and their emotional makeup when interacting with them. Empathy also includes the ability to read people’s reactions and see things from their perspective, which fosters a team approach to work. Connecting with others makes work more meaningful. Empathy comes from sincerely caring about and listening to other people. Empathy leaves people feeling understood and cared for. When people feel good, they do their best at work. Feeling good promotes mental efficiency, making people better at understanding information and making complex judgments.

One way a pharmacist might use empathy is in effectively mentoring, teaching, or serving as a preceptor for students, residents, and young practi-

tioners. Assess where each person is and try to take people as far as you can given the time you have with them. Do not expect them to have the knowledge, skills, and abilities you have, even at the end of your time together. You have developed your skills over a number of years, and they will, too, in time. It is important to also assist them in strengthening their self-esteem and self-confidence so they are prepared to tackle the challenges their career will present and to help them develop and maintain good working relationships of their own.

### Suggested readings

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DOI 10.2146/ajhp080003

Originally published in *Am J Health-Syst Pharm*. 65:922–925, © 2008, American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, Inc. All rights reserved. Posted with permission.