

What Makes Working Relationships Work?

[Collaboration](#) is the key to success for any small business. Any organization needs cooperation and teamwork to succeed, and that means creating an environment where all the employees pull together and their skills and efforts complement one another. Of course, even the most cordial of working environments can't be harmonious all the time. There will be times when even the most productive and diligent of employees will become annoyed, frustrated, and even angry with coworkers.

As a manager, it's your job to motivate your employees to make them feel part of the team and invest their best efforts for the company's success. Making working relationships work is largely a matter of getting the parties involved to feel empowered and respected, and working toward a common goal. Nurturing a winning working relationship requires some basic ingredients:

1. Open and respectful communications
2. Accountability
3. Trust

Like the legs of a stool, these three characteristics are necessary to support any successful relationship; you have to have all three. Consider whether you can trust someone who isn't accountable for their actions? Or whether you can expect someone to be accountable if they don't have all the information required to fulfill the task at hand?

Many business owners and managers don't understand that they actually can improve the quality or communications, accountability, and trust within their organization. In fact, many believe those qualities are inherent and you can't dictate whether people are good communicators, accountable, or trustworthy. However, if you set out strong principles to guide working relationships, you can create an environment where honest, open communications are respected and accountability is rewarded.

By establishing written principles that define the working relationships between management and employees, you define the code of conduct for employee interaction and promote a working environment built on trust and accountability through direct communications. Here are some of the elements required to promote an environment that makes working relationships successful:

1. Use written agreements between managers and employees about what work is to be done, how it is to be done, and when it is to be completed. Include these agreements as part of your documented [business systems](#).
2. Any changes in work requirements need to be made by mutual agreement of management and

staff, and documented in writing.

3. The employee must agree to assume responsibility and be accountable for performing his or her work and achieving the results that are mutually agreed to. The manager is accountable for providing the necessary resources and guidance to achieve the specified results.

4. Any impediments or exceptions need to be reported immediately. The employee is responsible for notifying his or her manager and any other parties involved, in writing, if there is a reason the work cannot be completed. Similarly, the manager needs to keep the employee informed if his or her commitments cannot be fulfilled and the necessary resources provided.

5. Scheduled check-ins or “reporting loops” should be used to measure progress and keep all parties informed. Note that management will assume that the work will be completed unless otherwise informed.

6. As part of a culture of accountability and open communications, there should be no excuse for missed deadlines or surprises.

With these principles of open communications and accountability in place, managers and employees become partners in achieving established goals. They make a commitment to help one another achieve success, and keeping their commitments and maintaining open communications builds trust. And by applying well-documented, impersonal principles that promote open communications and accountability, the X factor of personality traits and reliance on individual characteristics is eliminated from the equation. The parameters are established and documented, expectations for performance are mutually agreed to, and the end result is either achieved or not. When implemented properly, there is very little room for uncertainty or guesswork, and the end result will be a thriving working relationship where everyone can share in the successful results.