

Preface

Birth of an Idea

While we were all teaching at James Madison University, a group of executives, who served as the College of Business dean's board of advisors at the university, identified a critical ingredient missing in most business school graduates. The executives found that while students were technically competent—they could read a balance sheet, do a market analysis, and develop cash flow projections—many graduates lacked interpersonal skills or the ability to work effectively with others. The executives created a wish list of “soft skills,” faculty were hired, and the Interpersonal Skills course was born. Since that time, thousands of students have taken part in this required undergraduate course.

In the beginning, the cadre of faculty dedicated to this course selected two books and additional readings to support the course objectives. In response to student and recruiter feedback, we improved continuously both the content and delivery of the course. One such improvement stemmed from students' concerns that the books were inadequate for a variety of reasons. We agreed and continued to search for a book that met our needs. Frustrated with our inability to find the interpersonal skills text for our particular audience, we decided to write it.

“I Want to Buy This Book for My Boss”

As our colleagues and students have heard about this book, a common response is not simply “Where can I buy this book,” but “My boss could use this—can you send him (or her) a copy?” The truth is this book is very relevant to a variety of readers. While it was written primarily with an undergraduate student audience in mind, each of the authors is experienced working with graduate students, adult learners, and working managers. In addition to our current teaching and research responsibilities, one or more of us has been a management consultant, a corporate trainer, an internal organization development consultant, a director of a career services center at a top-tier graduate business school, or a small business owner. Because of the depth of experience we offer, we are convinced that the material, with slight modification, is very appropriate for graduate students, adult learners, and managers as well as for undergraduate students. In short, this book is appropriate for anyone who wants to improve his or her ability to interact with others in the workplace.

A Unique Focus on Developing Managerial and Interpersonal Skills

In researching textbook options for a skills course, we found:

- Many useful resources but not any one resource that met all instructional needs.
- A dearth of coverage of areas we deemed important to students, including diversity, project management, facilitation, and personal goal setting.
- A majority of books written for the graduate student or midlevel manager level rather than the primarily undergraduate audience.

Emphasis on Both Personal and Professional

Some texts focus solely on managerial skills but provide little if any assistance in helping the reader understand how understanding him or herself (intrapersonal effectiveness) relates to interpersonal and managerial effectiveness. The premise and sequencing of our book is that for students to be successful as managers in business, they must first have a solid understanding of self and how the self interacts with others to facilitate organizational success. Accordingly, we incorporate information on personal qualities needed for success in business and provide personal examples throughout the book focusing on family and other relationships alongside professional examples focusing on the workplace.

Balance between Theory and Practice

Our book offers a balance between theory and application. In our experience students and managers benefit by having some conceptual background on the topic of interpersonal skills but relate best to practical information that can be applied immediately to school, job, or team settings. Providing tips and techniques as well as conceptual grounding motivates the reader to learn a particular skill. Some popular interpersonal skills texts provide substantial theoretical and conceptual grounding of each skill area covered and are written primarily for a graduate audience rather than for undergraduates or working managers. In each chapter, we strike a balance by providing both sufficient conceptual material and applied material appropriate for use in real-life personal, academic, and professional situations, using conversational, user-friendly language.

Coverage of New Topics or More Thorough Coverage of Existing Topics

We have included a number of topics that are covered minimally if at all by other textbooks. Reviewers who have read our manuscript report that our treatment of topics such as self-disclosure and trust, stress and time management, conveying verbal messages, listening, diversity, ethical decision making, and negotiation are more thorough than what exists now. Other topics such as project management, facilitation, and problem solving are new and not addressed substantively in other books.

Focus on Experiential Learning

In addition to the latest thinking about each of the topics covered, we provide different types of exercises at the end of each chapter that have been tested in the workplace or classroom and evaluated positively by both undergraduate and graduate students as well as working managers. The variety of exercises accomplishes several objectives. First, the instructor can accommodate multiple learning styles by fashioning a subset of exercises appropriate for a particular audience. “One size does not fit all.” Second, the combination of experiential and reflective exercises helps give students concrete experience, feedback, and an opportunity to reflect on ways to improve their current skill level. Finally, in an age when virtual and distance education are increasingly popular, the numerous observational and reflective exercises can facilitate learning even in settings that lack face-to-face interaction.

Why Focus on Interpersonal Skills?

The need to focus on improving interpersonal skills is recognized by more than business school faculty, deans, and executive advisory groups. In a recent survey by the American Society for Training and Development, more than one-third of people identified communication or interpersonal relationship skills as the most important quality in a good boss, and 42 percent said poor interpersonal skills makes bosses less effective.¹ Another recent article notes that the lack of interpersonal skills may be the major reason highly qualified professionals are not promoted.² The rise of teamwork in contemporary organizations has increased the need for every employee to work effectively with and through others. Individuals on work teams need to be able to communicate and collaborate effectively with others whose personalities, approaches, and work styles may differ greatly. In addition, as power to make decisions and implement solutions is

transferred down the condensed hierarchy to nonsupervisory employees, the ability to marshal needed resources in the absence of power or authority makes interpersonal and managerial skills more critical than ever. Even those in leadership positions need to be skilled on the softer side of management along with the right knowledge and experience. Recent studies report communication skills, interpersonal skills, and initiative are what corporations seek when hiring MBAs.³

Organizations are looking for employees with outstanding interpersonal skills to help them remain flexible and viable in today's competitive workforce. Organizations are profoundly affected by interpersonal interactions within and between employees, customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders. The more effective the relationships and interpersonal communications are, the more productive for the organization and the individuals.⁴

According to Harvard professor Robert Katz, three types of managerial skills are necessary: conceptual, technical, and interpersonal. As one moves through the managerial layers, the need for technological and conceptual skills changes, whereas the need for interpersonal skills remains proportionate for all managerial levels: lower, middle, and top.⁵ Improving interpersonal skills goes beyond the classroom and the boardroom; the lessons learned can have broad applications in helping individuals to better deal with problems and conflicts with family and friends.⁶ Interpersonal skills help individuals initiate, build, and maintain relationships—in both personal and professional life.

“For things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.”

Aristotle

A Pedagogical Approach That Works

In today's service-oriented, knowledge- and information-focused, global marketplace, interpersonal skills are essential. However, these skills seldom occur naturally; for most of us they must and can be learned.⁷ If these skills are neither learned nor practiced, the good news is that it is never too late to start. Recognizing the need for these skills and acquiring and enhancing them can help workers be continuous learners and remain marketable.⁸

We have designed the text and the supplementary materials to aid students and practicing managers in assessing their level of effectiveness and enhancing their capability in each of 19 skill areas. Each chapter begins with a set of questions that relate to the learning objectives of the chapter. Next, we include a case study that helps the reader understand how the skill (or lack thereof) applies in real world situations. Then, we lay out the background about the skill—what it is and why it's important. Then we offer strategies and techniques for learning and using the skill. The chapters are written in an easy-to-read style with numerous practical examples in both professional and personal settings. After the chapter summary and list of key terms and concepts, the reader can test his or her understanding of the written material and ability to apply the skills through the many exercises in each chapter. Some exercises are reflective while others are experiential. Some exercises are designed to be performed in a class environment while others can be performed outside the classroom. Some exercises allow for receiving feedback from others; others encourage self-feedback.

How the Book Is Organized

The book is organized in a practical, experiential learning format that facilitates learning. Each of the 19 chapters can be used as a stand-alone, modular chapter independent of the rest of the book or used in conjunction with other chapters. The chapters are grouped into four units: understanding self (intrapersonal skills), working effectively with others (interpersonal skills), working in teams, and leading individuals and groups.

In the first unit, intrapersonal skills, we begin the process of looking within ourselves to analyze our strengths and weaknesses and gain a better understanding of our personal perceptions, views, beliefs, and work style. Unit I topics include self-awareness, self-disclosure and trust, personal values, goal setting and ethics, as well as self-management. In the second unit we move to interpersonal skills, or interacting with others, through verbal communication, listening, persuading, and working with diverse others. The third unit focuses on more advanced interpersonal skills for working with teams and groups such as building teams, running meeting, facilitation, and decision making and creative problem solving. In the final unit, we focus on leading groups or individuals through the use of power and politicking, networking, mentoring, coaching, empowerment, and managing projects.

In each chapter, we discuss how a skill or concept can be incorporated into one's self-development, how a skill or concept is used in interactions with others, especially in team settings, and how the skill or concept is applied in the context of managerial roles in organizations.

Note to Instructors

Teaching interpersonal skills using an experiential, learner-centered approach differs greatly from those classes in which a more controlled, lecture-oriented approach may be appropriate. In order to help instructors transition from professor to facilitator, lecturer to experiential exercise leader, we took pains to carefully construct an Instructor's Manual and supporting materials that support this goal.

The IM contains sample syllabi and assignments, chapter-by-chapter explanatory notes, teaching plans, ideas for implementing the material in the classroom, ways to motivate the discussion on a topic, detailed instructions for using the activities and exercises, discussion questions, additional resources, and sample test questions. PowerPoint slides and an electronic test bank are also available. A companion video and Web site (www.mhhe.com/iso3e) will enhance students' overall learning experiences.

What's New in the Third Edition?

Thanks to our students, faculty colleagues, and reviewers, we continue to search for new means to present the material necessary for analyzing, learning, and improving interpersonal skills. The emphasis in this edition focuses on making the text more current and enhancing its pedagogic effectiveness for students and instructors.

Organization of Material

While the second edition moved chapters and topics from one section of the book to another to improve utility in the classroom, the third edition focuses on the organization of the content within the chapters. Material was moved and modified to improve the flow, readability, and clarity of each skill area presented in the chapter. However, the overall map of the book that specifies both the journey and the major stops along the way, including intrapersonal effectiveness (understanding yourself), interpersonal effectiveness (understanding others), understanding and working in teams, and leading individuals and groups, remains intact.

It is always a challenge to determine the exact order for delivering each skill area, so this edition has included more examples to illustrate how these skills are interrelated without reordering the chapters. For instance, effectively coaching others or providing feedback, as discussed in Chapter 17, requires not only well-honed verbal skills (Chapter 6), but also listening skills (Chapter 7) and goal-setting skills (Chapter 3) as vital

components for success. Dealing with challenging behavior on teams (Chapter 10) is also referenced in Chapters 11 (conflict), 12 (meetings), and 13 (facilitation). Since Chapter 3 had evolved into goal setting and ethics in the second edition, the title was changed to “Establishing Goals Consistent with Your Values and Ethics,” in this version to clearly reflect the connection. The content of the chapter was also reworked to emphasize the importance of integrating ethical concepts into the goal-setting process

Updating

Updating the material within the chapters was a key focus of this edition. While “landmark” research has been retained, several chapters incorporate new academic and commercial sources to reflect current trends and research on the topics. Many of the opening scenarios now provide more in-depth examples of how each interpersonal skill impacts business situations. The opening scenarios are referenced more often within the chapters to aid instructors in using these examples as reflective teaching tools and to provide additional clarity to students. Greater emphasis is also placed on showing real world application and examples of the skill areas. Text boxes were added in several chapters to show examples of these skills in today’s workplace. Chapter 14 includes an illustration of how Google, one of today’s hottest and most creative companies, is using laughter and “fun” to increase worker creativity. The ever-increasing impact of technology on our lives and interpersonal communication is further illustrated in Chapter 7 by including more material on e-mail. We greatly expanded our coverage of the use of virtual methods for connecting employees working on teams in Chapter 10 and getting work done through meetings in Chapter 12. Chapter 16 discusses how the increased use of blogs and Web sites such as MySpace and Facebook is changing the way individual’s network.

Topic Expansion

Since several new topics were added in the second edition, adding depth to these topics in the current edition has been emphasized. Based on reviewer feedback and our own self-reflection, stronger definitions, expanded explanations, more tips and techniques, and more illustrations or examples enhance several topics. For instance, we added new content on self-awareness and self-monitoring, and theoretical material regarding the “Big-Five” Locator in Chapter 1. Chapter 4 expands on the topics of stress management and emotional intelligence, while Chapter 6 provides more insight into nonverbal communication and Chapter 7 provides a more detailed discussion of effective media selection and information richness. We’ve provided an in-depth look at the persuasion process, including appealing to basic instincts, in Chapter 8. In Chapter 9, we’ve augmented our discussion of the increasingly important roles that ethics and global partners play in negotiations. In Chapter 11, we expanded our coverage of organizational and individual approaches and strategies that help prevent or reduce conflict. We added five principles of collaboration to the discussion of collaborative decision making in Chapter 14, introduced the topics of locus of control and Machiavellianism in Chapter 15’s discussion on politicking, and added a section on skills necessary to “manage the project” in Chapter 19 to point out the range of interpersonal skills needed to direct a project from start to finish.

Overall, chapters have been updated with the latest research, business examples, and a third of the chapters have some new (some improved) exercises.

The application of concepts through experiential activities has been and continues to be a necessary strength of our approach, and we continuously search for and create exercises that facilitate skill acquisition. We believe the additions and changes to the third edition make the text more content-rich, informative, practical, and immediately accessible and applicable. We are excited about these strengths and improvements and hope you find them as valuable as we believe they’ll be.

Endnotes

1. American Society for Training and Development, Inc., “More Than One-third of People Surveyed Identified Communication Skills or Interpersonal Relationship Skills as the Most Important Quality in a Good Boss.” *Training and Development* (February 2000), p. 16.
2. David Satave, Jim Weber, “The ABCs of Supervision: Technical Skills Are Only Half the Story,” *Journal of Accountancy* (February 1998), p. 72.
3. Shari Caudron, “The Hard Case for Soft Skills,” *Workforce* (July 1999), p. 60; also Karen O. Dowd and Jeanne Liedtka, “What Corporations Seek in MBA Hires: A Survey,” *Selections, Graduate Management Admission Council* (Winter 1994), Fairfax, VA; and annual employer survey, National Association of Colleges and Employers, Bethlehem, PA.
4. Michael B. Coyle, “Quality Interpersonal Communication—an Overview,” *Manage* (April 1993), p. 4.
5. Robert L. Katz, “Skills of an Effective Administrator,” *Harvard Business Review* (September–October 1974), p. 91.
6. City Business/USA Inc., “Acuson’s Interpersonal Skill Training Goes to School,” *The Business Journal* (Oct. 2, 1995), p. 56.
7. Coyle, 1993.
8. Patricia Buhler, “Managing in the ’90s,” *Supervision* (November 1997), p. 23.