



HUMAN RESOURCES  
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

## Relationship Management: Skill Overview

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### Skill Introduction (Step 1)

Relationship management is a key skill for anyone in a supervisory role. At its core, it's about how we interact with others in ways that build trust, encourage teamwork, and inspire momentum and action. It includes how we communicate, navigate disagreements, motivate others, and support collaboration. While many new managers may feel pressure to be well-liked, relationship management is *not* about trying to please everyone. It's about being aware of how your behavior affects others, managing your emotions in challenging moments, and communicating clearly and thoughtfully. When managers use these skills with **intention**, they create stronger relationships with their teams based on trust and mutual respect, not just job titles.

This skill is especially important in higher education, where collaboration occurs across all levels of the institution, from students and alumni to colleagues and the broader community, and where the complexity of these relationships require careful attention and consideration in order to facilitate an impactful workplace culture and educational environment. Because our work is interconnected, no task exists in isolation; every action influences others' work, just as their work shapes our own. For supervisors, success depends on building meaningful connections that empower others and promote collective progress. These elements - trust, accountability, and shared purpose - are foundational elements of effective relationship management.

For newer supervisors or those still gaining confidence, developing these skills can be challenging. It's common to think that communication alone is the problem, but often the real barriers and root causes are unclear expectations, assumptions that others understand unspoken norms, or discomfort with difficult conversations. Navigating the balance between authority and approachability is also tricky; some managers may struggle with setting boundaries or holding others accountable for fear of damaging relationships. Without growth in these areas, trust can erode, silos can deepen, and team effectiveness can suffer.

The good news is that improving relationship management doesn't require sudden change, but rather thoughtful, ongoing effort. Some of the strategies that I recommend to managers include:

- Start by learning what motivates your employees, where they need support, and how they see themselves growing.

- Approach communication proactively, combining listening with clear, honest dialogue.
- Know when to offer solutions and when to simply provide space for discussion.
- Model the behaviors and values you want to see, especially in how you respond to mistakes and feedback.

By taking responsibility for building **trust**, encouraging **accountability**, and fostering **shared purpose**, managers create teams that are empowered and better equipped to succeed as a unit.

## Skill Development (Step 2)

It can be challenging to assess where we might fall in any given skill, and the types of practice or behaviors we should seek in order to improve our ability to practice each skill. I have provided a rubric that assigns descriptions and common behaviors or outcomes for each skill level below.

Please use this table to assess where you currently fall in relation to the skill, and to chart a course of where you would like to be as you work towards enhancing this capability:

<i><b>Skill Level</b></i>	<i><b>Description</b></i>	<i><b>Behaviors and Indicators</b></i>
<i><b>Inexperienced</b></i>	Aware of the importance of relationships but struggles to manage them effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interactions may feel transactional or strained</li> <li>- Avoids conflict or gives vague feedback</li> <li>- Relies heavily on authority rather than influence</li> </ul>
<i><b>Competent</b></i>	Able to manage relationships in common scenarios with deliberate effort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gives timely feedback</li> <li>- Listens respectfully and adjusts based on cues</li> <li>- Begins resolving conflict directly and constructively</li> </ul>
<i><b>Proficient</b></i>	Navigates a variety of interpersonal situations with confidence and adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Builds trust consistently</li> <li>- Handles difficult conversations with skill</li> <li>- Maintains positive rapport across stakeholders</li> <li>- Coaches others effectively</li> </ul>

### **Expert**

Models relationship management, mentors others, and handles high-stakes situations

- Builds bridges across divisions
- Resolves deep-rooted or sensitive conflict
- Shapes team/organizational culture through relationships
- Develops others' capacity to manage relationships

## **LinkedIn Learning Course & Prompts (Step 3)**

The course we will be discussing for the relationship management skill is called, "*Skills to Build Stronger Work Relationships* by Dr. Emily Anhalt" (36 minutes).

You can access the course via your TWU LinkedIn Learning account through [this link](#) and can view instructions for first-time sign-in using [this TWU Knowledge Base article](#). As you watch this video, I recommend considering the following questions:

1. What is one strategy or concept from the course that stood out to you, and why do you think it resonated?
2. How might you apply what you learned to your current role, team management, or interactions with others?
3. Did anything challenge an existing perspective or approach to managing relationships with others? If so, how?
4. What opportunities do you see for us as an institution to use these concepts to improve our work and meet our goals?

## **Exercises and Supplemental Resources (Step 4)**

These exercises are optional, but recommended, as low-stakes opportunities to synthesize the material and provide an avenue for reflection and practice. The exercises should be done after reviewing the skill introduction section, skill development section, and answering the prompts for the course above.

### **Reflection Exercise:**

Think of a time when you did not effectively manage a work relationship well.

- How did you know there was a problem?

- What actions did you take or avoid in the relationship?
- How did those decisions impact trust and communication between you and the other party?
- What is something from this course that could have saved, or bettered, the working relationship had you put it into action?

### **Practice Exercise:**

The course offers several strategies for improving relationship quality between managers and their employees. Select one strategy or recommendation and implement it in a meeting or discussion with one or more of your employees this coming week.

- Which strategy or recommendation did you try?
- How did your employees respond to the new approach?
- Would you do this again, and if so, would you change anything about your approach?

### **Supplemental Resources:**

If this topic is interesting to you, and you wish to learn more, consider one of these resources for furthering learning:

- This TED Talk on the [power of listening](#)
- This Wharton School of Business article on [building influence and rapport](#).
- This article from the Forbes Coaches Council for [New Managers](#).
- The book [Emotional Intelligence 2.0](#) by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves.
- This succinct [LinkedIn learning course](#) on authenticity and relationship building at work.