

## THE NECESSITY OF GOOD RELATIONSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE

**NASIRU YARO**

National Orthopaedic Hospital  
Dala – Kano

### *Abstract*

The forces that affect the way in which we interact at work are many and varied and include: demographic and technological change, globalization, and the impact of the global recession that may increase or limit the role of different players in the workplace relationship. At an individual level, there are the forces of socio-cultural change and the expectations and behaviour of members of society and the way in which they respond to challenges and opportunities around them. Notwithstanding the uncertainty thrown up by the interaction of these often competing dynamic forces, the workplace provides purpose, status, and friendship, allowing people to develop new skills, both technical and social. The ability of Secretarial professionals to manage workplace relations on a day-to-day basis and to get the best from their colleagues has implications for innovation, productivity, quality and reliability, and ultimately the growth of their organizations at national level and the ability to compete on the global stage. **This Paper is aimed at developing in Secretarial Professionals, the ability and skill to overcome difficult personalities; obstructions to success; lack of respect or recognition for their role; overcoming challenges set on them by others, including peers; handling toxic bosses, suppliers or clients and coping with uncooperative colleagues among others.**

### *Introduction*

In a perfect workplace, everyone works harmoniously, smiling, exchanging pleasantries with little to no stress and exemplifying high levels of productivity. Of course, if this were the case,



everyone would be the same person, with the same attitude. (Carole 2014). *Courtesy HRM magazine*

However, in reality, the workplace is a melting pot of differences, commonly referred to as diverse by many observers. In a diverse environment, there are no two people alike. Though there may be some similarities in work experience and education but backgrounds, behavior, and attitudes vary for each individual. As a result of these differences, Kinsley (2010) observed, negative relationship will occur. Negative relationships between customers or clients and co-workers (especially those you work closely with, like supervisors and employees), as he stated, result in loss of productivity. When the emotional factors set in: resentment for the job and the co-workers, low productivity, and increased errors; then we are in danger of jeopardizing our professionalism.

According to a survey conducted by Office Dynamic (2013), Secretarial Professionals spend at least 40 hours a week with an average of over 2,000 hours a year at work and that doesn't include overtime. In those hours, the professionals interact with hundreds of people with different personalities, behaviors and attitudes. In those hours, skirmishes are inevitable and in some cases unavoidable. So it is very important that secretarial professionals learn to work with these different individuals and maintain a peaceful, cordial, productive, and stress free as possible work environment.

With so much invested in work by organizations and employees individually, as Corel (2011) observed, the value of relationships in the workplace has never been so important. That is **Why Secretarial Practitioners need to be skilled and empowered to build working relationships for both the benefit of career-growth and job-knowledge enhancement.**

### **Why Relationship in the Workplace**

***Relationship, according to Benninga (2007), is “The way in which people behave towards and deal with each other”.*** Relationships as Kinsley (2010) observed, are also characterized by a feeling of connection beyond that experienced in an acquaintanceship. Unlike acquaintanceships, relationships are enduring, although some endure longer than others. As Sias, Krone, & Jablin, (2002) also observed, in contrast to “acquaintances” or people who have limited contact with one another, an relationship is characterized by repeated, patterned interaction over time. Relationships vary in the extent of this connection, but generally speaking, the closer the relationship, the stronger and more emotional the connection.

The typical daily activities in an organization, according to Wheatley, (1994, 2001), including directing, collaborating, information gathering, information sharing, rewarding, punishing, conflict, resolution of conflict, controlling, feedback, persuasion, presenting, interviewing, reporting, gossiping, debating, supporting, selling, buying, ordering, managing, leading, and following are all activities that occur in the context of interpersonal relationships. In fact, virtually all organizational activities occur in the context of relationships, even in “virtual” organizations among “virtual” coworkers who operate in different physical locales. Relationships are the essence of living systems and the basis of organization. It is through relationships that systems maintain balance chaos becomes order, and fragmentation is made whole. (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

To Wheatley, (2001), relationships in the work place are particularly important because an individual with a full-time job for example, is likely to spend as much, if not more, of his or her time interacting with coworkers than with friends and family. Even when an employee is not at work, he/she spends much of his/her time talking and thinking about work. People are largely defined by what they do for a living and with whom the work. Not surprisingly then, in many ways, the work place relationships define who a person is. (Sluss & Ashforth 2007).

In the workplace, a valuable relationship is a two way street and to achieve the desired goals it requires commitment on all sides. This is not just about processes, procedures, systems and contracts. It is also a question of the people drivers, such as leadership, skills and motivation, which will govern the

behaviours and approaches at the working level. It is therefore important for secretarial professionals to understand the enablers that build trust between them and other parties based on mutual benefit and equitable reward in the organization.(ACAS 2011).

Perhaps most important of all to Dr. Richard (2010), is the question of customer confidence. Customers do not generally deal with organizations but with its people and these relationships are the mainstays of viability. It therefore follows that, if we value the resources of a business then the relationships that drive it are a crucial factor too. Certainly the customer relationship factor is important since any business hopes that the majority of customers will stay loyal to them. It is said that “gaining a customer is said to take years while losing one takes minutes”.

It is these observations that prompt the question if relationships are important then should organizations not be making greater strides to develop their profile, structure their policies and processes together with developing the skills of their people to drive more sustainable business models. It is perhaps surprising that a critical factor such as relationships is left to the personal capabilities of individuals and not something that organizations need to foster and develop as a corporate tenet and role that embeds the appropriate characteristics. (Kimberley 2012). Effective relationships will not simply happen because we want them to, they need to be managed appropriately to ensure they are a factor of success and not a cause for failure.

Despite the advances of technology it is still people that make an organization function and that create business. (ACAS 2011). Secretarial Professionals are at the fore front in that direction. In this case it is reasonable to assume that the relationships Secretarial Professionals form are a critical success factor as much as it is important to all stakeholders. There are many ways available for Secretarial Professionals to follow for them to build positive relationships at work but improving and practicing the following behaviors can help most.

### **1. Comfortable Communication**

As a Secretarial Professional, communication is one of the most important aspects of your job. More than anything else, you need to make sure that you both understand and are being understood. But this isn't always easy. Since, as (Shirley Taylor, 2013) observed, sometimes Secretarial Professionals feel hesitant or afraid at work – afraid to ask a question, guidance or afraid to make a suggestion or new idea at work while all these may not be so to their family or friends. Probably the main reason for this as observed by Taylor (2013), is that the professionals, almost certainly have better communication skills and patterns with family and friends than they do with co-workers and others at the office. What brought about this, as Taylor (2013) opine, is that, a Secretarial Professional as a person, have been around his/her friends and family longer, and know their speech patterns, tones, style of joking and so on. As a result, he/she is more comfortable with them and enjoys better relationships with them. Comfortable communication in this regard equals better relationships.

Now think about what it would be like if Secretarial Professionals could have that same kind of comfortable communication with their office mates and customers. If better communication equals better relationships at home, wouldn't the same hold true for work? (Bonnie 2004). Of course it would! Ensuring that we convey our messages clearly and coherently will help make sure we are not misunderstood. This should naturally result in better communication all around which, in turn, will improve relationships significantly. Remember, though, that the opposite holds true as well.(Shirley, 2013).

As Keith (2010) observed, communication is a two-way street, and good listening skills are half – if not more – of good communication. You don't want to end up misunderstanding someone else because you weren't really listening to what they were saying. Better communication results in better relationships

because it puts everyone on the same track. Fewer misunderstandings happen when you are clear, when you provide specific details, and when you are both practicing effective listening skills. Better relationships equal improved morale and increased productivity (Tailor, 2013). Once Secretarial Professionals start developing better relationships through comfortable communication, they'll feel more comfortable at work, more accepted and valued. The Professionals won't have that fear of stepping forward as much, because as their comfort level increases their professional relationships will strengthen and they know that their co-workers understand them better. As Tailor (2013) opined, there is no need to become friends with everyone; what is just needed is to improve the working relationship so that working together becomes much more enjoyable for everyone involved.

Improved morale and increased productivity benefits everyone. Good communication is a win/win situation for everyone in the office. Once Secretarial Professionals improve their working relationships with co-workers, the professionals will automatically feel better and work harder. Their co-workers are happy because there are fewer chances for misunderstandings, and now they know the professionals just a bit better. (James 2007)

## **2. Manners**

As Edmund Burke (2004), stated, manners are more important than laws. Manners to him, “are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe”. Also, as Bonnie (2004) said, “manners and being kind matter a lot”. **Encarta 2009 defines “manners” as the** “characteristic way in which somebody behaves”.

The best Secretarial Professional, know that to have good manners is not old-fashioned at all. Quite the contrary, it is the cornerstone of great working relationships which are all based on honesty and trust. We live in an extremely fast-paced, high-tech world. We communicate via e-mail, text messages, and voice mail much of the time. As Anthony (2012), also stated, our world has become increasingly impersonal and Secretarial Professionals need to fight the impulse to get sucked in. One of the bi-products of functioning in this environment, he observed, is that it is very easy to skip over feelings and it takes work and close attention to interact personally with people.

In our work as Secretarial Professionals, it is vitally important to exhibit good manners, and a big part of that is to be aware of the personal side of people's lives. As Joan (2014) observed, common courtesy can be such a powerful way of influencing people's mood and attitude for the better. Plentiful 'pleases' and 'thank you' rarely elicit anything other than a positive response. 'Good mornings', the offer of a handshake (where applicable) and smiles from a Secretarial Professional will help emphasize and establish a courteous and pleasant atmosphere, conducive to the desired outcomes. Politeness and honesty also, go a long way in creating a mutually-profitable relationship.

Know this – as a Secretarial Professional, your behavior is noted. Your employer, as Bonnie (2004) observed, will hear when people feel great about you and conversely, they will hear if somehow you have not responded in a preferred way. Always err on the side of being polite or helpful. It's not only about good manners – it's about decency, kindness, and showing that you care about other people. Manners are good for business and actively demonstrating and encouraging good manners in the workplace is a simple way to generate good relationships and more productive experiences which are remembered favourably by all involved. (Anthony 2012).

## **3. Collaboration**

A survey conducted by office team (2014), shows that organizations are now operating with less staff, fewer resources and faster turnaround times which is affecting the role of the Secretarial Professional. The Professionals continue to be given and take on more responsibilities beyond the scope of their

original job positions and work experience, becoming the hub for collaborative endeavors. As the survey indicated, today's Secretarial Professionals operates in a more casual environment with a less clear reporting structure. Priorities are always changing, requiring flexibility and the ability to quickly maneuver and recover. It is therefore important to ensure that whilst one particular initiative may come to its useful end due to a variety of factors others may and should be emerge from successful collaboration.

Collaboration is a hot topic in businesses at the moment - and for good reason. As increasingly greater demands are made on both our time and the delivery of deadlines, having an established, supportive network of fellow collaborators is a smart move in any business environment. (Helen 2012)

As Jacobi (2012) opined, respectful relationships at work stem from the cooperation and collaboration required to identify and implement solutions. When all co-workers are included in office activities, the opportunity for people to participate in continuous quality improvement is provided. Although, not every person can participate in every activity, it is important not to marginalize, exclude or leave any one person out. Secretarial Professionals should endeavour to develop the use of people's ideas to change or improve work, and praise much more frequently than they criticize. This builds exciting and satisfying relationships.

Carole (2011) also observed that, collaboration does not only allow Secretarial Professionals to effectively use of their time, but also strengthens their skills and enables them to share their own with others. The person right next to you could know more about application software than you do and equally, you may be a master in something else. All too often Secretarial Professional find it difficult to wave the flag of surrender and ask for help, concerned that they will be perceived as being unfit to do the job, or fearful that others will see it as a weakness. On the other side of the coin, knowing a colleague was struggling with a particular challenge, when you knew all along how to get around it, can be frustrating and we wish they had only asked our advice.

Good collaboration often occurs organically within larger organizations, where Secretarial Professionals naturally network to share problems and issues. In other companies the Secretarial Profession finds herself isolated, with little or no appropriate network to connect with. In any case there is an enormous amount of resources available to all within the Secretarial Profession community, both off and on-line by way of forums, networking groups and help tools. (Tailor, 2013).

In either way, as Shirley (2013) stated, collaboration shouldn't be bound by geography either. According to her, there are huge advantages to be gained by Secretarial Professionals which include among others:

Being part of a community that is supportive of its members and facilitates the concept of sharing.

1. Giving something back by contributing your skills base and knowledge.
2. Adding more strings to your bow and your continued professional learning.
3. Helping get the job done quickly, more efficiently and with the most desirable end result.

#### **4. Rapport**

Rapport is a lovely word according to Bonnie (2014).it has a wonderful natural way of rolling off your tongue and that is what building and maintaining a relationship with another person should be like - natural! Rapport, is what Encarta (2009), **defined as an** emotional bond or friendly relationship between people based on mutual liking, trust, and a sense that they understand and share each other's concerns and the ability to generate responses from other people.

Successful people, as Joan (2014) said, create rapport and rapport creates trust! Secretarial Professionals should be able to learn how to gain and maintain rapport with anyone? And as Bonnie



(2014) also observed, rapport, just like any other skill is something that can be learned with a little practice. Secretarial Professionals can easily create rapport with anyone they wish to, even with a person whom they dislike or the other way round by getting to know them on an informal basis. This can be achieved by discussing about their concerns and strategies for improving the work environment with colleagues and encourage team decision-making and be willing to compromise to resolve issues.

As Dr. Kimberly (2011), asserted, rapport with a close friend or a colleague whom you trust is incredibly easy to recognize, and you don't have to be a body language expert to recognize the signs. She stated that, people with rapport usually sit very close to each other, and, if you look at their body language you would notice that they are more than likely mirroring each other's body positions, albeit unconsciously as they engage in a 'dance of mutual responsiveness'. She added that, they usually breathe at the same rate as each other and at the same tempo, and they're usually comfortable with touching each other. As she observed, "It's a fantastic position to be in to be able to relate more effectively with an individual or group and a superb way of gaining and projecting personal confidence".

Matching eye contact, as suggested by Bonnie (2014), is the first obvious step to take, without staring pointedly at the other person and making them feel uncomfortable. By mirroring and matching body language and voice tonality and speed, a Secretarial Professional can very quickly gain rapport with anyone. You can even match body posture and the distribution of bodyweight. Joan (2014) said "Matching your breathing rates a very powerful way of gaining rapport, and you may already have noticed that when two people are deeply in rapport they automatically breathe in unison".

## **5. Respect**

"Respect "is what Carole (2013) refers to as the ability of accepting someone else's choice. It is about valuing someone else's opinion so that they will feel respected, even when you do not agree with them. *To Carole (2013), the words dignity and respect go hand in hand.* Respect is also what Sue 2011 sees as one of the foundation stones of a healthy relationship. But sadly it is very often not recognized as being essential

According to Dickerson(2014), each of us deserves to work in an environment that is respectful, one in which we feel valued and treated as we would like to be treated. Unfortunately, as he observed, lack of respect in the workplace can lead to an unhealthy work environment. As he said, "When people at work offend or humiliate us, it hurts our dignity and sense of self. It also affects our ability to work well". Our ability to perform at our best is therefore dependent upon our physical, psychological and social well-being. *People have different customs and ways of working and living and Secretarial Professionals should understand, respect and value those differences.*

"Treat others as you would want them to treat you!" How many times do we hear this being said? We say it to our children and hope that they will remember it for the rest of their lives, Carole (2013). We all know that to earn respect, we must first give respect and, of course, give it to ourselves as well, for if you don't respect yourself, then no one else will respect you.

One of those ways that can be used to motivate and increase performance without money, as Carole (2013) said, is Respect. As she observed, there are many ways that we can do this and giving costs nothing but can be worth much. A study undertaken by the University of California, Berkeley in a paper published in the Psychological Science journal (2012), showed that the admiration and respect of our peers have a greater bearing on our overall happiness in life than our bank balance or the status of being rich. These studies revealed that there was clear evidence that social status (relationships) was linked to wellbeing whereas economic status was not. So, if Secretarial Professionals can help someone feel valued and worthwhile and treat them with respect, then why not? As Professionals, we all know the good feeling that we experience when we feel respected.(Dickerson, 2014). The chances, as Dickerson (2014), observed are that, we feel better inside, we have more energy, we have more to give and,

ultimately, we will be more resilient to manage the everyday challenges that life throws at us.

Since it has been established that the most important factor in any relationship and the essential ingredient that makes any human interaction work is respect, the following are some ways that Secretarial Professionals can show respect to someone else as suggested by (Brian et-el 2012)

- Treating others with courtesy, kindness and consideration, regardless of their race, religion, gender, size, ability, position, age or country of origin.
- Never insult, blame, threaten or call people names, even if you are angry or hurt.
- To put other people's needs before yours and a simple act of kindness can convey your feeling of respect to them.
- Avoiding stereotyping people and accepting them for being different will show respect for their customs and religion.
- Understanding another person's likes and dislikes will demonstrate respect.
- Apologizing for a mistake can convey a sincere regret if you have hurt someone unintentionally.

These actions, when implemented consistently at work, as Brian et-el (2012) stated, will provide the basis for a respectful, considerate, professional workplace. *Above all, remember the adage "If you want respect, give respect." Most people, especially staff, will respond to this.*

## **6. Positive Attitude**

Attitude is what **Encarta® 2009** dictionary defined as an opinion or general feeling about something. The feeling or opinion can either be negative or positive. In fact, as Dr. Kimberly observed, it is our attitude towards life and work that makes our life 100%. Also as John C Maxwell in Bonnie (2014) said, "The greatest day in your life and mine is when we take total responsibility for our attitudes. That's the day we truly grow up".

It is thus necessary for Secretarial Professionals to understand how important their attitude is as it relates to their success. As Chrissy (2008), said, "how high and how far a Secretarial Professional go often has less to do with his/her talent or skills and has more to do with the attitude he/she has in navigating those skills". Attitudes can therefore lift you or ground you. It's a choice we all make.

A positive attitude in the workplace can make an amazing difference since as Carole (2013) observed, positive attitude are infectious just like a smile. And as she said, committing to positive attitude by Secretarial Professionals will help them reduce stress, create a better work environment, improve job security and draw people to themselves resulting in a better working relationship. Attitudes also have a strong influence on an individual's energy supply. People who accomplish a great deal usually have a positive attitude and goals to motivate them.

Though, while Secretarial Professionals may be fine with that scenario, they may still have more of an issue with other people and their negative attitudes. How to handle those perpetually negative or toxic people in the office who always see the glass half empty and usually have something negative to say about most everything is also very important.

It is therefore advisable for Secretarial Professionals to set their own personal standards by choosing whom they keep and who they cut loose unless it is based on professional necessity. This is so important because, as Dewun (2013) said, we tend to become like those we most closely associate with. If Secretarial Professionals want high standards for themselves then they will have to be more selective about those they keep close and that's not to say they can't be cordial to all. This is because, in the opinion of Carole (2014), "Negative people tend to attract negative people in the same way positive

people tend to attract positive people”.

### **Conclusions**

It has been established that the number of hours Secretarial Professionals spend at work is on the rise. Similarly, the amount of time the professionals spend interacting with work colleagues may far outweigh the time they spend with family and friends. Therefore cultivating relationships at work that are positive, supportive, and empowering is critical to Secretarial Professionals sense of well-being. There is also no doubt that relationships are a critical factor for all business whether private or public sector. In fact some suggested that relationships are the real critical success factor without which it becomes difficult to build a sustainable business over time.

Given that relationships are important in business, it is therefore important that such a critical aspect is not left to chance by Secretarial Professionals. It is also important for organizations whether private or public to understand that in their effort to project an identity, they are made up of people and thus partially dependent on their people. So relationships cannot be left to luck, nor can organizations rely on trial and error to develop the appropriate behaviours to support their effort.

### **Recommendations**

1. Secretarial Professionals should understand the importance of workplace relationship and strive to develop it in order to exploit its potential benefits
2. Workplace relationships need to be recognized for the value they bring and potential risk that emerge from failing relationships. It is therefore recommended that organizations should endeavour to embed relationship management in their policies, procedures and systems.

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