

# Taking the lead

## **Jon Watkins talks to Robert Myatt, leader of a forthcoming ifs Masterclass, about how managing relationships can help leaders gain a competitive advantage**

Relationships: we all have them. At home, with friends, at work, they're a part of every individual's daily life. However, have you thought about how you manage those relationships?

While most people would not normally think about "managing" how they communicate and spend time with their friends, according to Robert Myatt, a director of consultancy Kaisen, in the workplace there is a growing acceptance that there is a need for leaders to effectively manage their relationships.

"There is an increasing recognition that business today is conducted through relationships," he says. "It always has been, it's just that managing relationships wasn't very widely acknowledged before as a skill.

"Some leaders are better at managing relationships than others, but the fact is that organisations are far more complex than they used to be, so there is more emphasis on this now. The straightforward hierarchy of the past, where you had a boss and he had a boss and so on, has now gone. They are more matrix-structured, with managers in your country of work, and main managers in other countries, and different managers for different aspects of your work. This has brought with it a recognition that getting buy-in on ideas and swift resolutions means working with people you have little power over – and that means managing your relationships with those people in a better way."

Myatt says the need for leaders to manage relationships effectively is not about politics, but about ensuring swift resolutions.

"If you can manage the relationship to a point where the people you are dealing with respect, understand and trust you, resolutions will be faster," he adds. "Often, the things that slow decision-making and resolutions down are conflicts. As humans, we are territorial people, and we don't like to feel that we are giving up too much. The number and size of departments today means we get 'group-sync', where people who work together become likeminded and stick together. Managing those people can help change their views and get resolutions more quickly."

In addition to speeding up decision-making and helping sway colleagues' minds, leaders who effectively manage relationships with their colleagues can enhance not only their own credentials, but also their organisation's bottom line, Myatt explains.

"Of course there are two sides to this," he says. "Leaders will obviously enhance their own reputation and credentials because by managing relationships they will be getting better results, more efficient outcomes, and what they want from situations. However, this will also help the organisation as a whole, because those more efficient outcomes will help the business be more efficient and therefore more productive. Everybody wins."

In addition, he says there is a benefit to leaders managing their relationships with staff at all levels. “Just as we are seeing the increased development of three-dimensional leaders nowadays, we are also seeing them manage their relationships with the people above them as well as below them,” he adds. “Those are the people with whom they can really gain an advantage.”

Myatt has worked with many leading organisations both inside and outside of the financial services sector, including Thames Water, HSBC and Marks and Spencer Money. His work has included teaching leaders how they can manage those relationships through simple means, such as not underestimating people’s reactions. He is leading an ifs School of Finance Masterclass entitled “Managing effective relationships: for leaders” in the New Year.

“Sometimes people just need to develop a better understanding of what motivates other people and how they react,” he says. “It can be something simple like that. Not all people react the way we expect and we certainly go into situations with a preconceived idea of what reaction they might have. Not all people are socially oriented, for example, or power oriented, so leaders need to be aware that they their colleagues may or may not be threatened by them and to adapt accordingly. That can make a real difference.

Finally, Myatt adds that one of the key hurdles to leaders developing their relationships with their colleagues is the realisation that they need to do so in the first place.

“Not all leaders are good at relationship management, but I think the growing realisation that organisations are becoming increasingly complex and are increasingly in need of a cutting edge, is bringing home the realisation that leaders need to explore every opportunity.”

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