



# ORIENTATION GUIDE FOR IMPROVEMENT OF SOFT SKILLS

DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS THROUGH  
APPRENTICESHIPS

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## **ORIENTATION GUIDE FOR IMPROVEMENT OF SOFT SKILLS**

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This guide should be studied in conjunction with the self-assessment tool of soft skills, developed in the framework of the DESSA project. The self-assessment tool is available at (insert link here when ready) and can help VET students or other stakeholders detect which soft skills they need to improve in the future.

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## Introduction

In recent years, it has been made clear that certifications and strictly academic accomplishments, are not enough to find a job, or live your life with prosperity, or even become a better person. We have realised that there are many more things to be valued than hard skills. Things that are entangled with our nature, our emotional growth, our capability to interact with other people.

The purpose of this guide is to highlight the importance of these soft skills, and assist in developing them, providing useful tips and examples, to anyone reading them. It provides valid information, explains exactly what soft skills consist of and offers tips and examples of activities aiming to develop and strengthen them. Keeping in mind contemporary needs and modern life's requirements, the guide serves as a concrete informative tool, in which you can find more or less everything you need, so to be prepared for an interview, or a new work environment, or successfully deal with everyday setbacks and challenges. With great respect and care, this guide aims to assist, especially young people starting their lives and careers.

Furthermore, this guide can open up your mind to new ways of approaching issues, new ways of dealing with problems and modern behavioural skills, that will come handy in your personal and professional life. Its purpose is to assist you become more prepared before entering the competitive professional field, taking under consideration your needs, your way of thinking, and the numerous challenges of our complicated and technologically advanced era. Acknowledging the fact that everyone is different, this guide covers a vast variety of examples and consistently aims to promote outside the box thinking, and enhance creativity, collectivity, well-being and personal growth.

The target group of this guide are students of initial or continuing VET organisations, apprentices and University students. No matter if you are on the younger side of the spectrum, or the more mature one, you will find extremely useful advice and information.

Use this guide for your benefit. As simple as that. Take whatever suits you the most, but pay attention to everything; find new ways and solutions to make your life easier, stop facing dead ends, and gain a vivid and exciting attitude towards life. On a more practical level use it as a general guideline on work ethic, on behavioural development, a manual on how people will appreciate your work and effort more, a significant tool on how to become more and more effective. Use it as an inspiration to find even more personalised paths to follow, to create your own ideas and form new beneficial habits. Use it before an interview, so your chances are higher, use it if facing a difficult situation in work and don't know how to react, use it as a topic of discussion with your friends, a motive to exchange views and ideas.

Soft skills are so important and useful, and if you actively try to work on them, mindfully practicing every day, you will soon discover a whole new world of success, prosperity, excitement, and living life to the fullest, which is exactly what young people should do.



## What are soft skills and why are they important

Soft are “the cross-cutting across jobs and sectors skills that relate to personal and social competence.”

Source: Skills Panorama, Cedefop

They are related to mental and psychological abilities we all own as human beings, and practice every day without realising it sometimes. We all have them in various degrees, and they help us build relationships, create friendships, find jobs, work in harmony, be effective in our work place, and function in our modern society with all its troubles and challenges.

There are people that naturally select a leading role, others not as much, thriving when working more quietly, there are people that are able to create strong bonds in a team, others that tend to think outside the box, people who can state clearly what they think and others that know the exact right time to act. We all have the potential to be these people. As long as we understand our own assets, realise where we might be lacking, and actively work on them and practice every day.

When we say practice, we don't mean running around, we mean mindfully living every moment of our life, observing ourselves and others, accepting our great possibilities, try to change our flaws, constantly keeping notes on how we react, what habits we have, and work hard on our personal growth. Soft skills are the manifestation of our intelligence and our emotional ability combined. Strict logic and knowledge are obviously useful, but there more things that make us better citizens, better friends, employees, boyfriends and girlfriends. We need to sharpen all this wealth that our brains and minds carry and develop our endless abilities.

Since the day we are born we are called to face challenges, become members of a family, go to school and interact with our classmates and teachers, we learn to follow rules and protocols, we grow up and gain experiences, and learn through time. We use our soft skills, without understanding that we do so. These particular skills, cannot be measured, weighed, there is no way to put them in boxes and evaluate them with a mark. But they are the ones that will help us shine, become happier and live a better life.

They are important in every aspect of our life. Having strong and sincere relationships is so significant for all of us, being flexible and accepting others as they are, being a good team player, listening to others with care, help us navigate through everyday life. Communication is the key for any kind of bond, being motivated will lead you to success, being creative can be such a life saver in various occasions, and understanding the need to adjust is what kept humans alive since the world's creation. Every day we have to face conflicts, complicated personal and professional issues, family difficulties, challenges, setbacks and failures, significant or not. Soft skills are our weapons. By using them we offer to ourselves a whole load more chances to succeed, to study, to find the perfect job and fulfil our dreams.

Imagine a life in which people were not polite, were offensive one to another, were not able to talk and communicate, were not able to solve their problems, did not care at all for their personal development and well-being. Sounds like an awful world. An unbearable society. Does it ring a bell? Our own advanced world definitely sometimes resembles to that. It is because people don't actively and mindfully use their soft skills. They don't care about them as much as they should. But you are smarter than that. We can't stay stuck to old habits, to

old and dated ways of thinking. The world is rapidly changing, and young people using their soft skills to the fullest, can make it a greater place.

In this guide we focus on twelve soft skills. Each one of them of great importance. All of them can be extremely helpful when applying for a job, when you have your first interview, when you enter a new group of friends and colleagues, or facing a problem.

To choose the soft skills included in this guide, an online survey targeting entrepreneurs was launched. The purpose of the survey was to obtain information on the importance of soft skills for entrepreneurs and to find out which of them are particularly important for the development of an enterprise. In total, 55 answers were gathered from the Netherlands, Spain, Greece, Poland and Lithuania. The survey clearly showed that entrepreneurs are aware and clearly value the importance of soft skills of employees, while they highlighted the 12 most important soft skills, included in this guide:

The first and one of the most important is communication. We will not be bored to state that communication, indeed, is what makes the world go round. In any form, verbal or not, communication is man's great talent, an ability that lead us where we are today. Without communication humans wouldn't have been able even to form societies, let alone progress, create, invent, travel, develop science and art. Communication is the key to every mystery.

Consequently, communication takes us to the second soft skill, the one of cooperation and team work. Since the prehistoric age until today, people need to work together, in order to be stronger and achieve great things. Collectively trying to accomplish a goal, is valuable in societies, families, and obviously professional settings. In teamwork comes creativity and power. Sometimes it might be challenging, sometimes it can cause friction and issues. That is why we analyse it, giving information on how each one of us can become a better team player, and collaborate with others successfully.

What if we feel we don't want to try, we feel drained and tired of setbacks, we feel depressed and stuck in a vicious cycle? We have all felt like that from time to time. That is why motivation, is an excellent soft skill to work on. Self-motivation is tricky, and cannot be easily deciphered. What works for me does not work for someone else, and we are all so different, how can we find a common practice to enhance our motivation? Truth is, there are certain things that can be useful to everyone. Tips on how to at least try to become more motivated, which will definitely lead you to better choices, more exciting prospects, more fun activities, and more dreams turned reality.

From this guide, creativity could not be missed, no matter what. More than ever, we have realised that being creative is of such importance. And to make it clear, creativity in this case is not referred to art, but more as a tool to help us find new ways to deal with issues, to be more productive, to create new possibilities, to discover modern methods, invent ground breaking solutions and in general change whatever is keeping us back and replacing it with innovative techniques. Youth is combined with creativity and the will to change, and it is clear, that the only way forward is to respect the past, but also trying to create a new better version of it.

Problem solving is the fifth soft skill of this guide, and there is no need to expand on why it is so vital. Problems seem to follow us around each and every day of our lives, from minor setbacks to unfortunately severe issues. We have to face numerous challenges of every kind so we need to develop to solve problems more efficiently and effectively for our own well-



being. We don't live secluded from the rest of world, we have to know how to deal with other people, solve occurring issues in our work place so everyone benefits, we can learn how to resolve situations without provoking tension, we can work on how to find the best possible outcome if an issue occurs.

The sixth soft skill must be a synonym to human nature. The adaptability to change is deeply engraved in our brains, but sometimes we hesitate to change things because we fear the unknown. It is certain, that if we do not adjust, the world we just leave us behind. The technological progress is colossal, man has created unbelievable things, science keeps discovering new techniques minute by minute, and we cannot stay behind. Being adaptable is such a valuable asset, as it is extremely helpful for our personal lives too. Every second passing by, we are different. Every day we learn something new, our lives might suddenly alter; so we need to be flexible and prepared for what may come. We have to quickly adjust in order to live the life we deserve.

Another difficult to pinpoint soft skill is the willingness for personal development. It is easy to get confused, as we don't all share the same definition of development, especially on a personal level. There may be people that would have a different view on the subject, but more or less we all realise how important it is to try hard for yourself. To have and develop this inner feeling that pushes you forward. The inner voice inside us, not letting us stick to old mistakes, our drive to become our best versions. Many, many times, it seems hard and almost undoable even to try, let alone be extremely motivated. And that, is human. But we can all work on enhancing our own willingness, practice on empowering our will for more personal growth.

Time management is the eighth soft skill we focus on. We all either feel that time is flying by, we feel we don't have any time at all, and at the same time we procrastinate, we do not finish our tasks until the very last moment, we get easily distracted, and more often than not we find ourselves rushing to catch a deadline. Being able to effectively manage your time is significant. It will help you so much in everyday life, but also in your work environment too. Not being on time, delaying tasks, causing problems because you couldn't finish something when it was due, are unacceptable professionally. Managing your time can be learned, and it will definitely make you a more reliable person throughout.

As we live and work among others, our negotiation skills should be sharp and ready to help us in so many situations. Negotiation starts the moment we understand our world, since a very young age that is. We negotiate daily, realizing it or not. When entering a more professional field, we have to learn how to negotiate effectively aiming for the best possible result. You might have to negotiate with your co-workers, or another company, or try to close a big deal, or just decide where to go for dinner; each kind of negotiation can be deciphered. Learning all necessary tools to achieve the most profitable outcome in a negotiation process, is extremely useful and comes handy every single day of our lives.

Conflict resolution is the tenth soft skill in this guide. Being honest with each other, we know that conflicts occur very often in every office of every building in this world; outside of offices too, for that matter. We all deal with conflicts in our families, with our friends, our loved ones, and surely in our work setting. Some people cannot handle conflict at all, they are scared to speak their minds in case they cause trouble, whereas others mindlessly throw themselves in conflicts and arguments, enjoying it more than they should. We all need to find the balance in such situations, understand what to do and say in order to smooth things, we can work on

consciously finding the best way to deescalate conflicts, for everyone's benefit. Conflicts can be creative, and sometimes can lead to great and unexpected results, but usually can only cause harm and havoc. Conflict resolution is a soft skill much appreciated by all big companies, especially in recent times, and extremely valuable for our relationships in life.

The eleventh skill of this guide, is considered one of the most significant traits a person could have, and that is confidence. Especially in recent years, confidence is one of the first skills that enterprises look for in future employees, and it is easily understood why this skill is so vital for everybody. Though we grasp the importance of confidence, a lot of people find it very difficult to actually be confident and believe in themselves, either because of their upbringing, or cultural background, or personal insecurities. Finding our inner strength and believing in our own abilities can be a life changing skill.

Ironically last, but definitely not least is the skill of leadership. Through human history, all kinds of leaderships have existed, and what constitutes a good leader has always been a subject of great theoretical analysis. Nowadays a good leader is someone who inspires and leads by example, someone who can create a strong team having a vision for the future. It is definitely not an easy skill to practice, but surely a crucial one. Not everybody is born to become a leader, some people even hate being in the front line, but it is certain that being able to inspire and guide others, to whatever extent, is a soft skill we all should at least try to understand and practice.

In this guide you will find some things that will apply to you more than others, things you will have to think about and come back later again to reread them. Some might click from the beginning, and others you will realise with time, but give them a chance. Read carefully, enjoy all this new information, and give yourself the opportunity to make all your aspirations come true.

## 1) Communication

Communication is one of the most important and transversal soft skills. Communication skills “help to express ideas and views clearly, confidently and concisely in speech, writing and body language”

Source: Skills Panorama, Cedefop

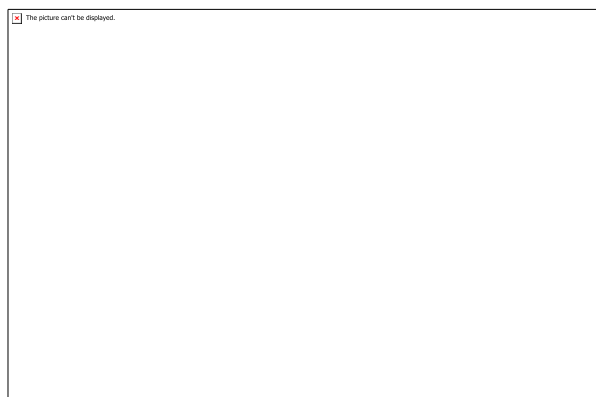
### What are communication skills?

The way we choose to express ourselves, the choice of the words we use, our tone of voice is the most powerful tool we possess to achieve the best result in passing through our ideas and succeeding in given situations throughout our life not only as professionals, but also as individuals. Even before humans developed oral and written speech, we used our bodies and gestures in order to communicate and collaborate with others and go through everyday challenges. Since then, civilisation has progressed so much, to reach today’s –unimaginable for the past- velocity and technological wealth, leading into a world where communication is the key aspect of life.

### Why are communication skills important?

Communication is a global tool used by mankind, but is also extremely personalised based on culture, studies, interests, our own experiences, and even curiosity to enrich our own vocabulary and use it accordingly. Especially in a working environment, communication is the base element, in order for the simplest to the most complicated task to be completed. The more specific the words we use, the clearer our ideas will be passed on to other people, avoiding misunderstandings and mistakes. The fewer misunderstandings the quicker all given tasks will be completed with positive outcomes and optimum results.

Being polite and respectful, avoiding using words that could cause unnecessary conflict, or are considered dismissive, plays a huge part in prospering in a job environment. Politeness in the way we speak not only to our superiors, but all our fellow colleagues and co-workers is extremely essential, creating an amicable and positive working space which is the fundamental aspiration of every professional. There might be times, when pressure and obstacles might occur, causing arguing and quarrelling, but it is very significant to always keep in mind how politeness, and respectfulness is the way of solving problems in team efforts.



Written communication has become so powerful during the last decades, leading to people exchanging numerous emails and text messages for personal and professional use. The same rule about being specific, applies to writing forms of communication as much as verbal ones. Knowing the best terms to describe your ideas is a key element. Correct spelling, the right use

of grammar, clearness in expression, creativity alongside following the rules of work ethic, are imperative and vital.

Prior to speaking or writing, the way we hold and present ourselves is the first key to communicate with others. Having a strong personality, being positive and open, always knowing your limits are what makes you stand out and differ. From our clothes to our gestures, everything is a signal that can be used in our favour. The first impression we make is tremendously significant and could define success in an interview, or even when entering a new workplace. Showing your individual personality, being composed and presenting yourself in its best form, is the way to communicate to others that you are the finest choice they can make.

In a society of constant changes and globalisation, travelling and working all over the world, knowing the keys of communication is the first step to accomplishment and success. Having a deep knowledge of how to utilize your communication skills, is an asset that makes you stronger and resilient in any environment you are called to work, or study, or just co-existing in groups of individuals.



### Tips to develop your communication skills

1) **Focus on listening when others talk.** Give people the space and time to express themselves, and then reply, after having taken in consideration exactly what they tried to say. Attempt to not rush, and jump into conclusions, but on the contrary listen carefully until you form the most suitable response in the given situation.

2) **Try not to have prefixed ideas about other individuals.** Obviously, by working with people or attending classes together, you will form an opinion about everyone, but try to get to know others more in depth. Sometimes you will be pleasantly surprised by what other people think, and how they behave in general, as long as they feel they have the space to manifest their talents. Same with yourself, use time to communicate yourself better, revealing your personality and creating a safe environment for everyone to feel appreciated.

3) **Be informed about the other person's interests, hobbies, studies,** and try to find common ground for exchanging experiences and ideas about work and life in general. Building a relationship on shared practices and activities, will empower your communication skills and therefore, your teamwork will be more thought-provoking and efficient.

4) **Deal with working from distance, as if you actually are in a specific professional setting.** Working from home, or sometimes coffee shops does not mean you are alone, and not communicating with others. From your emails, to texts, to video call meetings, your focus on interacting with others should be the same as if you were in an actual office.

5) **Interact with people even in unexpected places.** Being open to listening and talking to people you meet at gatherings, parties, the gym, sport activities or sometimes even the supermarket, will make you richer in communication skills, and will offer a more spherical knowledge about all kinds of different personalities, and how to reach out to them. That

doesn't mean you have to be a social butterfly, but the more positive and open you are to the world, the more experienced and motivating you will become.

6) **Participate in amateur drama classes.** Theatre has always been the epitome of communication as the bond between the actors themselves and most importantly with the audience is something close to magical. Participating in such groups, will give you the opportunity to meet people, share a common goal of creating a performance, rehearsing plays and reading lines, exchanging opinions, and participating in the fascinating world of Drama. Amateur art classes, or seminars in general will broaden so much your way of thinking, and will strengthen all your hidden talents, if you let them too.

### Examples of activities

**A. Join with colleagues or peers a seminar** so you have a weekly fixed joined activity, that not only will be fun but also educational, and will create numerous opportunities for talking, exchanging views, learning, sharing thoughts and ideas. Try to have some free time after your class to continue your conversations and bring on the table questions or share your knowledge to one another.

**B. Arrange a chat group with your friends focused on specific movies** you choose to watch and share between yourselves responsibilities on finding interesting information about the director or actors, or even the era the movie is about. Watch the movie together or separately and then use the chat to find out what other people feel about the movie, and all the exciting information they came up with.



**C. Plan appointments to share lunch or dinner with friends or family members,** or cook for one another, so you create an extra bond over cooking and conversations about food and its culture. If possible, even experience various styles of cuisines, so you get glimpses of different civilizations and the chance not only to talk about them but also try their usually amazing food. Food has always brought people together and makes conversation flow.

### Reflection

Keep notes about how you used the different information from all your cultural activities, write down even one word describing a seminar, or a meeting, and then go back to check if your everyday life and work has changed after joining art classes, or other hobbies involving groups of people.

Ponder on the following questions:

1. With which groups of people did I find it easier to communicate and why?
2. How did I feel after a long conversation over lunch with my friends?
3. Did my psychological state effect my communication skills, and if so, in what way?

4. Which was the most effective tip I followed and saw actual results in my communication skills?
5. Did you find yourself sharing with others your new knowledge on communication skills, and if yes, how they reacted?

## 2) Cooperation/Teamwork

Cooperation is the “voluntarily arrangement in which two or more entities engage in a mutually beneficial exchange instead of competing. Cooperation can happen where resources adequate for both parties exist or are created by their interaction.”

Source: Business Dictionary

Teamwork is defined as “the summary of skills required to work well as part of the team.”

Source: Skills Panorama, Cedefop

### What are cooperation/teamwork skills?

Cooperation/teamwork is the ability to co-exist and thrive as a part of a larger group that has a certain goal, common objectives and aspirations, from your family and friends to a strictly professional environment. Participating in shared activities, helping other members of the group and aiming for the best result not just yourself but mostly for the whole team, is what cooperation is all about. A team consists of many individuals collaborating with each other, in order to complete a certain task, sometimes putting aside their personal ambitions, if needed. Honouring other peoples’ ideas and respecting their opinions is the fundamental element of cooperation. Even if you disagree, being respectful towards others, and, trying to understand their point of view is an essential component of cooperation.

### Why are cooperation/teamwork skills important?

If not living totally secluded from the rest of the world and working completely on your own, which is extremely rare, it is very easily comprehensible why cooperation is so vital. Being a part of an organised society basically means learning from a very young age how to exist among others, follow certain rules and also, especially as you grow up, having common goals and dreams in life. For human beings to achieve their dreams, progress and prosper, loads of teamwork is required.

From the prehistoric age, the absolute necessity of finding food and being protected from the elements of nature, made human form groups, which were the first cells of society. Even without being able to talk, they had to work together efficiently enough even to stay alive and nourished. The progress of our civilization





is strongly tied to teamwork, to collaboration and even sacrifices of groups of people in order to accomplish what was essential to go forward. The first travels around the world, all the explorations and discoveries were only possible because people shared a common passion and worked hard to make it true.

Science and culture, the great achievements of the human species, are based on collaboration and sharing dreams that seemed impossible, but actually became reality. From politics to sports to art, medicine and technological miracles of the last centuries, all great attainments are a result of teamwork. They are the result of the combination of great minds working together, of team efforts and sometimes disappointments and failures leading at the end to great successes.

### Tips to develop your cooperation/teamwork skills

1) **Be acceptive.** Only by accepting the fundamental fact that each individual is different, with different background, different cultural references, different way of growing up, and different way of thinking than our own, we can actually be a productive member of a team. Accepting and acknowledging our differences is what makes teams thrive and excel. Sometimes differences come between people and are considered an obstacle. If we pass through this easily made misunderstanding, we realise, that with variety comes creativity, strength and more chances to succeed.

2) **Set your ego aside.** Finding the balance between not losing your personality, accepting hierarchy, and other peoples' choices, is definitely challenging. But that is what teamwork is all about. Realising the fact that egoism and narcissism can only be destructive, is the first step towards creating a great team. It is the difference between a mediocre company and an excellent one. Especially in our society in which individualism is glorified and antagonism is an everyday phenomenon, the clever thing to do is break this vicious cycle and make a different choice - the choice of believing that groups are stronger than people on their own, and that collaboration is much more profitable than vanity.

3) **Believe in yourself.** It is important to make clear that putting our egos aside, does not mean not knowing our own value and not realising the importance of our own self. In group formulations, usually the loudest personalities tend to take the leading roles, especially in the beginning, which makes some individuals feel secluded and left out, or not being appreciated enough. Make sure, that you give yourself time to shine and do not be afraid to share your expertise and knowledge. You are a significant part of the team as everybody else, and your particular talents and abilities are what earned you a job in the first place, so don't put them aside.



4) **Try to socialise with your colleagues, be friends with them.** Obviously, friendship comes with time and trust, and it is not mandatory in a workplace. Still, you will find out that getting to know people better, outside of the strict professional environment is extremely beneficial. Knowing them, you get to understand more of the way they think, or how they react on

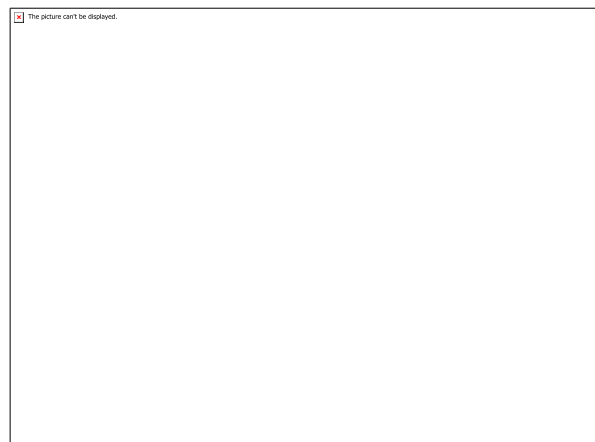
various occasions, which can prove crucial on work related issues too. Exchanging thoughts and experiences and laughing together is exceptional for a great team spirit, and given time creates an atmosphere of safety and protection in which everyone can be themselves and lead to the best outcome. Even if you don't find your absolute best friend, you will have formed strong bonds, and you will enjoy more your everyday life.

**5) Use and cultivate your sense of "right timing".** Knowing when to talk and when to remain silent, is a talent that not everybody has. Sensing the most inviting atmosphere for you to pitch in an idea is as crucial as realizing when is the time to joke and when things are serious and joking will make them only worse. Keep all your senses open to the stimulates you receive and use your critical skills to decide the best timing for your actions. This will make you stand out and people will feel you are someone they can count on, therefore someone who they can trust. If everyone realizes the significance of timing, work will flow much easier, and effectiveness will rise.

**6) Give credit to others.** When someone performs well, or successfully finishes a task, let them know their work is valued. Being generous to people and making them feel appreciated is one of the most significant components of cooperation. Don't let jealousy, or competition come between you and others. Basically, don't allow jealousy to come between you and your best self. Acknowledge hard work, make clear that you realize their efforts, and share their feeling of accomplishment. You have absolutely nothing to lose, but loads to gain, by giving people credit for their performance.

**7) Know your place in hierarchy and follow the rules.** Every form of establishment has some kind of hierarchy and certain rules to be followed. It might sound strict and old fashioned, but the reality especially in a professional environment is that someone is the leader, and there are certain instructions and guidelines that everybody has to respect. Knowing your limits actually creates a safer space for you to do your job, you will not cause any unnecessary conflicts, or be considered rude. To be honest, no one appreciates a disrespectful person, or someone who goes out of limits and act as if their better than anyone else and know it all. Obviously, you can express yourself, disagree, stay true to your ideas and values, always following the rules and respecting everyone. Not only the ones above you, but also your colleagues.

**8) Have a specific goal that your co-workers and you want to achieve.** The clearer the goal is, the clearer the plan of sharing tasks depending on everyone's strongest abilities will become. Having a specific target, will make all people work more effectively and concentrated, than not knowing what you are aiming for. If the goal is crystal clear, people understand better what they need to do, and how to use your assets in order to successfully fulfil their aspiration.



**9) Be understanding and patient with others.**

The people you meet professionally and get to work with, have a whole life outside your office's walls, and sometimes my face difficulties and struggles that will affect their performance at work. Be patient, and never assume you know it all about a person, because



you will be surprised. You can't really know what a person is going through unless they actually share it with you, so be understanding if someone goes through a rough patch. Being kind and considerate is a gift that will come back to you when you will need it.

## Examples of activities

**A. Join with colleagues a pub quiz.** Going out with friends is one of life's great joys. What if you can combine enjoyment with building some team spirit and get to know everyone better. Joining a pub quiz, will make you understand peoples' personalities, find out their strongest



expertise fields, and make you work as a team of course, in order to win that night's prize. Think of how content and excited you will be, if you win, and what positive effect it will have on your whole team's morale. The confidence you will so easily and pleasantly feel is not to be missed. But even if you lose, you can only try harder next time, or in the end you will have spent a nice night out, getting to know your co-workers better, which is only useful.

**B. If pub quizzes are not your thing, you and your colleagues can join a sports club** and play your sport of choice. Form a team to exercise together and compete with other teams. Exercise will make everyone feel much more energized, and it is common knowledge that winning in a sports game is extremely thrilling. There isn't a better way to sharpen your cooperation skills than playing a good game of football or basketball.

**C. Participate as a group in a charity.** Find out a charity everyone is interested in supporting and donate some money as a group. It doesn't have to be much; it only has to be for a cause everyone is willing to support. The feeling of offering and helping others, can only be beneficiary for the team's bonding.

**D. Have lunch with each other, and even share your food,** if people want to try your cooking skills. Eating and relaxing with your colleagues during lunch break creates a more family like environment, and through sharing you show people that you care for them. You can even arrange to alternately bring some snacks from your country of origin, or some childhood favourites, so everyone gets an extra understanding of each other, and also have fun too.

## Reflection

Plan a monthly meeting at the office at specific dates, to go through everything that happened during your shared activities, remember your successful results and give credit to yourself, or talk openly about what went wrong in some cases, and how you worked things out. Make sure that at this meeting, everyone can be honest with each other, and all unresolved issues are acknowledged and solved.

Reflect on the following questions:

1. Do I consider myself a team player?
2. Under what circumstances my cooperation skills are empowered?
3. How did I feel after a successful professional result that was a product of cooperation?

4. Which factors enhance my willingness to cooperate with my colleagues?
5. Do I tend to keep a leading role in a team or am I more comfortable when not in the spotlight?

### 3) Self-Motivation

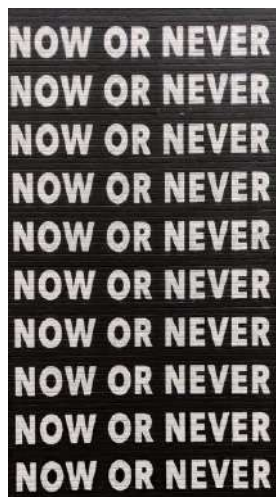
Self-motivation is “the ability to do what needs to be done, without influence from other people or situations.” People with self-motivation can find a reason and strength to complete a task, even when challenging, without giving up or needing another to encourage them.

Source: Business Dictionary

It is the inner strength that pushes us to go forward, complete our everyday responsibilities and accomplish our goals. It can also be described as the courage we find to overcome problems, and complete errands, avoid procrastinating and be productive in our work environment.

#### What are self-motivation skills?

In a society that is often tormented by difficulties on financial, political and psychological levels, individuals sometimes find themselves feeling lost and disappointed, depressed and sad. Depression leads to sentiments of inadequacy, self-pity, self-sabotage, and you can easily get in this vicious cycle, that only leaves you feeling worse. This is where self-motivation skills emerge to help you go through these rough patches.



The ability to face life and its challenges with strength, and not letting occurring obstacles defeat you, is a skill that sometimes seems extremely hard to practice. Self-motivation can be very personal and hard to describe, as everyone is different, has a different mindset, different aspirations, and a different past that has formed his personality. So, self-motivation skills can indeed vary from person to person, but there are definitely some common practices. The quicker you feel yourself after some kind of disappointment, the more you believe in your abilities and the knowledge that you can overcome anything thrown at you, are some components of self-motivation. People tend to push themselves forward either to gain an inner feeling of accomplishment or because they have something practical or materialistic to gain, or a combination of both.

Self-motivation is our inner thirst to succeed, to progress, to reach our goals no matter how small or big they are. No matter what your goal is, from getting a job you want, to finishing a paper for university, from going to the gym to not missing deadlines, all these significant or minor tasks will be easier accomplished if your motivation skills are sharp and you believe in yourself enough to practice them.

#### Why is self-motivation important?

The importance of self-motivation lies in the very essence of human nature. No matter where you are born, what you want to do in life, what your financial status is, or what your parents do for a living, your self-motivation is your most significant ally when everything else might fail you. Imagine a world where doctors and scientists stopped trying after every failure, after every experiment gone wrong, every medicine not right enough to cure, every light bulb exploding.

As Tomas Edison, the great inventor, would say *“Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.”* And also *“I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.”* And furthermore *“Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.”* It seems Tomas Edison was the epitome of self-motivation and proved it by changing our world forever.

You don't have to discover electricity or change the world to realize how vital is to have self-motivation. It is the only backup plan we have when things go wrong. It is the only asset no one can take away from us, and the one thing that will make us shine out and become what we dreamt of becoming.

### Tips to develop your self-motivation skills

1) **Clean your room and make your bed.** It might sound something your parents would say, but it actually works. Very basic, very old habit, that can set the whole right mood for your day. Making your bed takes only three minutes and tidying up your room maybe another seven. In ten minutes, and maybe with your favourite music on, you will set yourself up for a very productive day. Cleaning and tidying up, subconsciously urges you to tidy up your life as well. The feeling of accomplishment after you see your room tidy and nice, it is not one to be ignored. Plus, when you come back tired and exhausted after a long day, you will feel much better, relaxing in a welcoming atmosphere, than a chaotic messiness. This tested habit, does not need spending more than ten minutes of your time, or putting any mental effort into it. And it can be a life changer.

2) **Do things that make you happy.** Self-motivation is tied to being content and happy. The happier you are, the more willing to accomplish your goals you become. It is common knowledge that when we hit a low spot, everything seems hard and pointless. Trying to find out what makes us happy, and then do it, helps our productivity in everyday life, and creates the best foundation to work harder towards succeeding. Obviously, we don't all like the same things, and have a different definition of happiness; still, there are some things the majority enjoys. Go meet your friends and talk, see your family more often, if that makes you happy, go to the theatre or the cinema, exercise, sing, draw, solve puzzles, or cook your favourite dinner. You know what makes you happy. Go out there and do it.



3) **Set realistic, everyday goals.** Another cliché sounding tip that works. Setting a minor goal every day, like reading a book, or doing your laundry, or go shopping, no matter how insignificant it may sound, sets you up for achieving long term goals too. Take baby steps, as they are called. You cannot expect from yourself to change overnight. That's something happening only in movies. Real people struggle, fail, and then they come back stronger, but that whole process takes time. And it does not just magically happen. Taking small steps, accepting setbacks, making steps forward again, and setting a small goal for each of your days, can help a lot. Start by writing down one, just one thing you want to achieve in the day. And stick to your decision to do so. By setting just one small thing to do, at least in the beginning, you protect yourself from the disappointment of setting too many goals and then failing.

Disappointment is our worst advisor, so we have to do everything to protect ourselves from it.

4) **Take care of your dietary habits.** The more balanced our diet is, the more balanced our life. The way we eat usually shows a lot about our personalities, or at least, about our psychological and mental current situation. Obviously, everyone has different dietary needs, and taste in food, but we all more or less know what is good for us and our brain function. Fresh, home cooked food makes our bodies feel better, fruit and vegetables are so full of needed nutrients, and offer a huge variety of vitamins. Both our body and brain need all that to be in their best form, and being in your best form, makes you more capable and energised every day. No one is talking about extreme diets or cutting out food groups from lunches; you only have to feed your body with quality food, as often as possible. The effect of having a healthy and strong body, will make your self-esteem rise, and your self-motivation grow.



5) **Try to not procrastinate.** Set as your goal to not miss any appointments from now on, because you were too bored to get out of bed or get dressed. Try to show up at your appointments with friends, and not be late. Avoiding meeting friends or acquaintances maybe because you feel a bit down but at the end of the day will only make you feel worse. Pressuring yourself to stick to your dates, might sound a bit harsh sometimes, but the results are amazing. Going out and talking to people, walking around or watching a movie, will leave you more satisfied and happier, than staying alone and being sad on your own. You might find yourself having a great time, your mood will improve, and the next day you are going to be stronger and mentally healthier, than letting loneliness and sorrow drag you down. Don't miss out, be present, and changes will come.

6) **Exercise in moderation.** In recent times, exercise has become extremely popular, especially on various social platforms, that tend to bombard us with the benefits of running, weightlifting, doing yoga or Pilates, or combinations of all the above. The volume of videos and tips, and personal stories of success in this field are innumerable, and sometimes make us feel bad about ourselves, our shape, our bodies, and their lack of so-called perfection. Do not fall in this trap. Only keep in mind, that exercise is beneficial for your overall health, and if done in moderation can make you feel happier. Find what kind of exercise is suitable for you and try to find some time during the day to work out. Even if your schedule is busy, try to walk more, and at least stretch, in order to feel better. Realise what is the best type of exercise for your own needs, don't compare yourself to anyone else, and stick to your personalized program of choice.

7) **Stop comparing yourself to others.** It is extremely hard to do so, but you should actively try to do it. Accepting that everyone is different, and that you are not less than anyone in this world, no matter how successful they seem, will make you love yourself more, and appreciate all your assets and abilities. Do not compare your achievements to anyone else's, as everyone has another path in life, and it is useless making comparisons whatsoever. Stay focused on the things you want to do in your life, that might differ a lot to other peoples' choices, and work on your own happiness and fulfilment. Each one of us has a certain pace in life, and no



one is the same as someone else. That doesn't mean that you should stop admiring people, but don't let that ruin your prosperity and progress by making you feel inadequate. Very much the opposite so.

**8) Work on solving unresolved issues.**

Our past defines us, and if we let it take too much space in our lives, we feel trapped and we don't let ourselves progress in life. If you have fallen out with friends, or family members, and still thinking what went wrong there, or if you keep your feelings for yourself and that makes you feel pressured, try to open up. Talk things through, with your loved ones, apologise if you have to, or try to find out what you or the other person did



wrong and change it. Resolving all these issues, will make you stronger and more resilient, you will get the feeling of growing up sentimentally, and becoming a more mature version of yourself, that can face all challenges, and succeed.

**9) Find something out of ordinary you aspire to do**, like planning a trip far away, or buying a car, or a piece of clothing you really love, or getting a pet and keep focused on that goal. From saving money to finding a better job, from working on earning more money to sorting out your house to become more suitable for a pet, will give a new purpose to your life, and it will make your self-motivation an everyday practice. Reaching to that certain goal will make you happy and ready to set another one, and then another one and so on.

**10) Do not blame yourself for every single bad thing happening.** Self-blame and accusation are something most of us do, even if we don't realise it, when doing it. Feeling all the time that you have done something wrong for which you have to get punished, is a common feeling for many of us. Beating ourselves up is somewhat encrypted in our minds, and with time it becomes such a huge obstacle for our progress. Accepting of course your responsibilities, in given situations, give yourself the benefit of the doubt, and stop blaming yourself for everything. Choose even the words you use to describe yourself carefully, so you don't accidentally fall in the old habit of unnecessarily accusing yourself.

### Examples of activities

**A. Get yourself a pet, if possible.** Having someone to take care of, someone that you will love and give you back so much love and tenderness, can change your life. You will soon find out, that being responsible for this creature, will make you more responsible for yourself too. Even if animals don't talk, we all know that the bond between us and our pets, is so strong and beneficial. You will gain company, and maturing, all in one.

**B. Visit a museum exhibition you find interesting.** Museums are so unique, and if you live in a big city, most probably you will have a number of them around. Sometimes we tend to forget how many museums we can visit for free, just because we take them for granted. Try to plan a visit, alone or with friends, or if you live in a smaller town, plan a trip to your city

and museum of choice. Familiarizing yourself with Art, will broaden your thinking, and make you want to actively become the person you dream of becoming.

## Reflection

Keep a diary with your day to day goals, your monthly goals, and even your life goals. Go back each month to check all the things you were capable of doing, all tasks finished, and reflect on the ones you didn't do. Without blaming yourself, figure out why you were not able to succeed in some of them, how you were feeling about that fact, and make notes on what needs changing for next time.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Why is it sometimes very hard to find your self- motive?
2. After what specific activities you feel more self-motivated and empowered?
3. How does your overall psychological state effect your self-motivation, and how often do you fight it back?
4. Do you find it helpful sharing with your friends your self-motivation journey and exchange thoughts on how to enhance your skills?
5. During the pandemic and the mandatory lockdown, how did you keep yourself motivated and which activities helped you go through this difficult for everybody period?

## 4) Creativity/Innovation

Creativity is “the ability to produce or use original and unusual ideas”

Source: Cambridge Dictionary

It is the mental strength to see solutions and possibilities where few people can, and then act in ways that are innovative and ground-breaking. Creativity is the ability to find more possible valid answers to the same question, discover new techniques to deal with issues and determining your own path that leads to effectiveness. Divergent thinking and breaking old habits and established methods is what creativity is all about. Using a different and diverse approach, a non-linear and not traditional methodology are key aspects of creativity and innovation.

### What are creativity/innovation skills?

Living in modern society with all our technological gadgets and commodities in everyday life, we can barely imagine a world where all this did not exist. We live in large buildings, own cars, use the internet, our mobile phones are almost our hands' extension, we travel by planes and we have reached the universe and other planets. What today for us is common practice, once was only someone's dream, and seemed impossible and crazy.

Our whole civilization was created and formed due to creativity and out of the box thinking. Everything that surrounds us is a gift of ground breaking attempts, that resulted in what we know today, and even more that the future generations will bring. The ability to materialize and turn into reality, ideas that have never existed before, is not easily explained and definitely it is not something that just suddenly happens from one day to the next.

Key component of creativity is patience, and the strength to not let setbacks stop you from trying again. Creative people tend to view the world in a different way, meaning that their brains absorb information and analyse them with an out of the ordinary approach. They see success and opportunities, where everyone else sees problems and failure. Breaking the rules, and not following the same path as everyone else, forgetting about stereotypes, proposing new methods and ideas of dealing with problems, constantly exploring new territories, are all aspects of creativity. The know how to turn all these ideas into something tangible, is what innovation is all about.



### Why are creativity/innovation skills important

In a world that rapidly changes, being ahead of time is the best asset a person can have, and the best investment a company can make. If you take a look at YouTube for instance, you will easily realize how people turned themselves into their own profitable businesses, creating content, and using their personalities to gain fame and money. Obviously, not all YouTubers are innovators, or their content extremely special, but it is an easily comprehensible example,



of using your creativity to your benefit; of creating an opportunity for yourself. Until recently people didn't even know what a YouTuber is, but reality proves it is an actual job, and a very popular one.

Figuring out new techniques to be more productive, finding solutions to problems that seemed very hard to solve, using the knowledge we have in new ways, is what will make us stand out and shine. When unemployment, financial difficulties and personal struggles are such a common aspect of life, your own creativity will help you go through, and might offer you an unexpected and exciting future of prosperity. Your own mind is the solution, as long as you accept its fascinating abilities and use it in the most efficient and innovative way. Creativity is our first and last refuge, and if you embrace this fact, your life will never be the same again.

### Tips to develop your creativity/innovation skills

1) **Mindfulness.** In the last decades, more and more often we hear the term “mindfulness”, or “being mindful”, and the great benefits of its practice. The simplest way to describe it is as being consciously present every single moment. “It suggests that the mind is fully attending to what’s happening, to what you’re doing, to the space you’re moving through”

Source: Mindful Organization

Being mindful means recognizing all your thoughts, your ideas, the way your body feels, your feelings and what caused them. Getting all this information, you soon find the way to lead your brain into more productive paths, avoid doing the same mistakes, or let negative feelings take you down.

2) **Live life to the fullest.** It is not as simple as it sounds, but it definitely is rule number one to highlight your creativity skills. Our life so easily falls into routine and repetition, we sometimes find ourselves just mechanically doing our everyday tasks, and we struggle to find



pleasure. Though it is understandable, and not easily changed, we need to realise that there are so many different things out there to explore, and actively try to be happy and adventurous. Do not let days pass without reading something new, organizing small trips, going to the cinema, going for walks, watch movies, listen to music, meet friends, and have fun. Open up yourself to falling in love, dream, make new friendships, and find time for yourself to enjoy life's gifts.

3) **Brainstorm with your colleagues.** Find the time to freely discuss ideas, not holding back, no matter how crazy may seem. Listen carefully to other peoples' concepts, try to build on them, and develop them even more. Be positive and open to suggestions and don't get stuck to preconceived notions and old habits. No idea is a bad idea, and you have nothing to lose by sharing your thoughts, you never know how close to a new discovery you might be.

4) **Be consistent.** Being creative, does not mean that you don't follow any rules, deadlines, or the company's guidelines. Creativity and intelligence on their own, are not enough if you are not trustworthy, and reliable in your work setting. The more consistent you are, the more people will appreciate you, and leave you the space to promote your ideas. Let people

understand that you can be trusted with even greater tasks, more difficult challenges, through which your innovative abilities will stand out.

5) **Try to do something new every day.** Set as a goal to learn about something you didn't know, no matter how insignificant it might sound, talk to a co-worker you haven't talked to, read another chapter of a book you haven't finished, or just listen to a new song. The possibilities opening up are endless. A new song might lead you to another one, and then another, a book to the next one, so you get richer in knowledge, new sentiments and feelings are recognized, and your creativity rises high. Variety is fundamental in creative process, and by empowering it every day, you will become a whole new person. Keep notes about the smallest new things you tried and did; you will end up with your personal book of daily achievements.

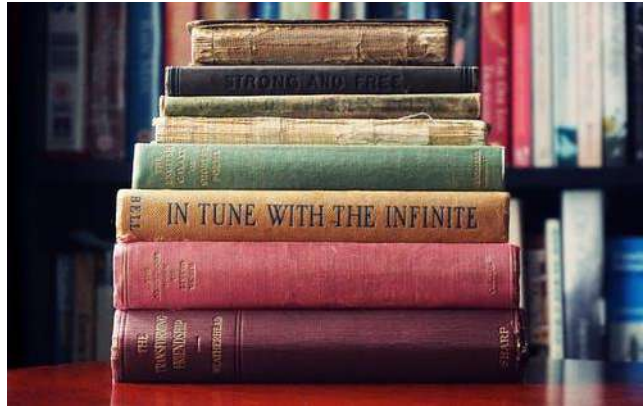
6) **Commit to a creative activity.** Creativity and inspiration are extremely personal and each one of us has his own methods to feel more energized and evoke his own Muses. The more you feed your creativity the more it grows, and becomes a part of you. Choose an activity you enjoy and commit to it. Join a drawing workshop, a theatre group, or learn how to make your furniture look brand new. There are so many possibilities nowadays, you will most definitely find the suitable one for you. Commit to learning how to design clothes, bags or even shoes, have some singing lessons, dancing lessons, whatever aspires you the most, and try to not miss a single class. It will make you feel alive, creative, and it will bring such joy in your life.

7) **Go out or travel alone.** The freedom you will experience by having a good time on your own, is the first step to empower your creative process, and will also make you find solutions to problems, and face life as it is. Go out and just observe people, nature, personalities of individuals around you, the way they talk or move. Every single thing can provoke huge ways of inspiration if you are open to it. Travel alone if you can, in a place you have never been before, and feel the energy of a new city, of different surroundings, different accents, and food. All these experiences progressively will form your personality and attitude, and make your creativity sharpen. Have a notebook with you and write down ideas, thoughts and observations.



8) **Meditate and exercise.** Meditation has always been a way to awaken our most inner spiritual parts of our brain, and nowadays it is an extremely popular practice even in working environments. Combined with moderate exercise, is the epitome of wellness, which leads to more creative thinking, and sentiments of happiness. When your body and mind are mindfully working together, the changes happening are inevitable. Give yourself the time, even if only some minutes, to practice meditation, and also don't forget to walk, stretch, and even dance to keep your energy high. Both your mind and body will thank you for that.

9) **Read books.** As simple as that. Literature can make your life much more interesting and rewarding. Not only you become cleverer, not only you learn new things and information that can prove extremely useful even when you least expect them to be, but you get this warming feeling that books make you feel. They give you a difficult to describe sense that you can do anything, that there is a whole world out there and you are a part



of it. Literature can be eye opening, it offers so much joy, if you get into it, and makes you want to try new things. It develops your brain, and it pushes you to become the better version of yourself. You might realise you want to learn a new language, or travel more to places that you read about, you will enter a new world and obviously become much more self-motivated and happier.

10) **Write.** Even if you are not the most artistic person in the world, try to write down your thoughts, your feelings, create little poems, or rhymes, or even draw doodles, if you are not a painting expert. It is an extremely useful way not only to spend time, but also maybe discover hidden talents, and also helps to get to know yourself better. Creative writing, just following the flow of your thoughts that is, can be therapeutic, and valuable. Express yourself through art, and creation.

## Examples of activities

### A. Organise with your friends a mythology studying group.

Step 1. Every participant should choose one country; in which they want to focus on. Each participant should choose a different country.

Step 2. The participants try to gather information on the country's mythology and report it on a diary.

Step 3. Organise a meeting, where each one presents his/her findings. Other participants should express their opinions and pinpoint what they found fascinating.

Step 4. Combine information and create your own mythical creatures, or a whole new mythological universe. Try to put in as much detail about the universe as you can.

Step 5. Each participant presents his mythical universe, which is enriched through time.

### B. Create your own board game.

Step 1. Gather your friends, and decide what the majority of the people would like the game to be about; a mystery game, an historical based game, a strategy one, whatever more people find fascinating.

Step 2. Make all the rules, and try to be precise about them, taking under consideration many probable outcomes, and issues occurring. Since the game does not already exist, you can be as creative as you want, and decide even the craziest rules.

Step 3. Write down all the rules, and give them to all the players to study them, so they are ready for the first game.

Step 4. Play the game, talk about it, propose improvements, realize possible defaults, and change them.

Step 5. Enjoy a unique game nobody else in the world has.

**C. Cook a meal strictly with what you already have in your fridge and cupboard.**

Don't go out to purchase anything else you might think you need. Use only things you have in the fridge, and do a good search in your cupboards. Most probably you will discover spices you have forgotten they existed, or some nice tins, or nuts and dried fruit. Combine them creatively, and you will be surprised by your cooking abilities.



## Reflection

Mindfully think of the times you performed your best at work, figure out what lead you to a great performance, and stick to it. Understand that creativity is an ability we all have, but we also need to work on it, in order to succeed in life.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. In which period of my life did I feel more creative and why?
2. Which aspects empower my sense of creativity and innovation?
3. Am I more creative when going through difficulties or when everything is smooth?
4. Which habits help me become more creative, and which keep me in a more habitual way of dealing with issues?
5. Am I more creative when alone, or when working with others?

## 5) Problem Solving

Problem solving is “the act of defining a problem; determining the cause of the problem; identifying, prioritizing, and selecting alternatives for a solution; and implementing a solution.”

Source: Asq Organisation

### What are problem solving skills?

Problem solving is almost a synonym to human nature, as we all face and deal with problems, even without realizing it, since the day we are born. We grow up and every single day we try to find solutions in issues occurring either in our family life, school life or our social life. As we grow up, we face more and more challenges, and things are not as simple as they used to be. Problems have stop referring to if we got a party invitation or not, and disagreements on what show to watch, as real life emerges.

The ability to foresee a problematic situation and be prepared to find a way out of it, is gained with experience, and gets stronger in time, especially if we learn from our mistakes. Key component of problem-solving skills is focusing on the true core of the difficulty you face. Setting aside anything that is unnecessary and might blur your judgment, finding the deeper cause of why something went wrong, is fundamental.

Our brain, this almost magical gadget we own, analyses and breaks down in seconds every stimulation we perceive, and comes up with a solution. Needless to say, every one of us, has a different brain, and different way to acknowledge the facts. If we actively work on ourselves, being present and alert, soon our ability to see a setback, quickly analyse it, and then through synthesis come up with the best way to solve it, will go stronger.

In the 1940s Osborn an American advertising executive, and founder of the Creative Education Foundation started working his theory on problem solving, developed with the help of Sid Parnes in the 1950s and nurtured at SUNY Buffalo State and the Creative Education Foundation.(The CPS Process, Creative Education Foundation website n.d) Their work is considered one of the first to highlight the importance of creativity in problem solving, what is known as Creative Problem Solving (CPS) Process. Some of the basic principles that are still valid today are:

#### **Ask Problems as Questions**

Solutions are more readily invited and developed when challenges and problems are restated as open-ended questions with multiple possibilities. Such questions generate lots of rich information, while closed-ended questions tend to elicit confirmation or denial. Statements tend to generate limited or no response at all.

#### **Defer or Suspend Judgment**

As Osborn learned in his early work on brainstorming, the instantaneous judgment in response to an idea shuts down idea generation. There is an appropriate and necessary time to apply judgement when converging.

#### **Focus on “Yes, and” rather than “No, but”**



When generating information and ideas, language matters. “Yes, and” allows continuation and expansion, which is necessary in certain stages of CPS. The use of the word “but” – preceded by “yes” or “no” – closes down conversation, negating everything that has come before it. (The CPS Process, Creative Education Foundation)

## Why are problem solving skills important?

Problem Solving skills are important because our life is important. Accepting the fact that life is full of challenges, that relationships need work, that in our work environment we have to be ready to act and create and propose solutions, we get the idea why these skills are imperative.

Every day at work we face issues, things we might have misunderstood, mistakes we make and setbacks. We all have deadlines we have to meet, arguments with colleagues to smooth, projects to finish and unexpected obstacles occurring. In each of these situations, which are basically our day to day life, we need to practice our problem-solving skills, in order to achieve what we aim. We need to find the most efficient and creative way to overcome anything that keeps us back, and basically find the optimum solution for our concerns.

Think back, when you were younger; who would you turn to if you had a problem you could not resolved on your own? Usually there are people in our families, or groups of friends, that everyone turns to them when things get really hard. These people, have the ability to calm us down, offer suggestions, ways out, analyse everything and decide what is better to be done. In a work environment, these people are extremely significant. They are the ones everyone trusts, their opinion is appreciated, and their value is recognized. You have the chance to become one of these people, if you just pay attention, observe and work on your already numerous abilities.

## Tips to develop your problem-solving skills

**1) Pinpoint the problem.** Before starting to work on finding a solution in general, or get upset because things went wrong, calmly think and put your finger on the real essence of the problem. Identify the significance of it, and don't let your feelings get in the way. Try to clearly understand the issue, narrow it down, and find the core of it. No matter how difficult that might seem, we need to deeply comprehend what the problem is, and where our focus should be in order to solve it.



**2) Accept responsibility in case you made a mistake.** If we are honest to ourselves, we all know, that admitting we made a mistake, is one of the hardest things in life, as much as in our personal lives, as in our work. We have been taught, that making mistakes is, to put it simply, bad, and we all try to find excuses or lie if we fail. Own your own decisions, even if they were wrong. By taking responsibility for your actions, makes clear to everyone, that you are not afraid, that you are a strong individual, with ideas and aspirations, even if they are not always perfect. More importantly, you will get the chance to fix what went wrong, using the

knowledge you have about the mistakes made, and be more experienced next time you face similar issues.

**3) Snap out of disappointment quickly.** Easier said than done, I know. But we need to see the importance of getting back on track after we made a mistake. In theatre actors that forget a line, or get mixed up, or miss a cue, momentarily feel that the whole performance is ruined. That the audience knows everything, and that they are terrible and bad, and feel ridiculed. Think though, how quickly they have to forget their mistake, and go back to the performance, continuing as nothing happened. Try to do the same. Try to bounce back as fast as possible, in order to find a creative way to deal with the setback.



**4) Find the best doable solution.** When a problem suddenly occurs, we usually feel pressured by time to solve it, and either we get confused by many possible methods to follow, or shut down and think that there is only one way out. Critically think and evaluate all possibilities, without dismissing anything, try to open up your mind in new behaviours, and decide what the best thing is to do, under given circumstances. Don't feel trapped or stuck to act only in a certain way and just follow habits of the past.

**5) Be informed about everything.** Knowledge is power, as it is commonly said, and truth is that the more details about an issue we acknowledge, the more data we collect, the easier will be to deal with it. Gather all possible evidence, analyse them, go through even what seems insignificant at the time, in a way to broaden your understanding and realise exactly where mistakes were made.

**6) Make a plan of action.** Having accumulated all information and knowing what the problem is, decide on the steps you need to make, in order to find the solution. If working with others, collectively make a written plan, about the order of actions, possible outcomes for each scenario, and final decisions that will be made, depending on how things will progress. Writing down clearly this plan, will help everyone understand exactly what procedures will be followed, and it will be easier to avoid misunderstandings and confusion.

**7) Pay attention to everyone's opinion and feelings.** Many times in our lives we get carried away by an all or nothing feeling, or a sense that strict decisions need to be made here and now, in order to resolve an issue. Though it is helpful to be able to make decisions easily, usually when many people are involved things get a bit more complicated. When a problem emerges, give others the time and space to express themselves, listen to them carefully, and try to understand their point of view. A certain solution might not have the same impact on you as on others. Work collectively to find out the most suitable deal for everyone's interest.

**8) Address conflicted interests.** It may sound contradictory to the previous tip, but being honest about what you have to gain or lose, is very important. There are times, during our professional lives, when our profit might be a co-worker's loss, and the opposite. When trying to solve a problem, address that fact, and take it under consideration before you decide on the method you choose to resolve an important issue. If everyone is honest and clear, things will be solved quicker and more efficiently, than surreptitiously trying to gain profit only for their own.

**9) Take a step back.** This certain tip has a double effect. Firstly, when dealing with problems we all get very agitated and upset, and sometimes we cannot see clearly and collect our thoughts. If possible, give yourself time to relax, try to take the problem itself out of your mind, and take a step back. The next time you choose to resolve the issue, you will be able to see it in its right proportions, and maybe under a new light. Secondly, take a step back from your ego, and the notion that you are always perfect. Try to accept that other people might be in the right, and you may be wrong. Or that the solution they propose might be more practical and suitable for this certain issue. Don't let unnecessary egotistical feelings blur your judgement.

**10) Use your imagination.** How many times in life, don't we accidentally come up with an idea, or a practical hack to make our days easier. From this miniscule, trivial example we grasp the significance of being imaginative and creative. Imagination is such a powerful tool we all have, even though we tend to forget about it. When other solutions, or tried methods don't seem to work, trust your imagination. Let your mind create new ways, embrace your outside of the box thinking and let it guide you to the finest result.

## Examples of activities

### A. Play strategy games like chess, Stratego, Battleship.

Step 1. Invite your friends to play strategy games, and participate in your own tournament.

Step 2. After each game, discuss what strategy you followed, if mistakes were made, what solutions you tried to find and if they were effective.

Step 3. The winner of each tournament can choose what game the whole group will play next time you all meet.



**B. Volunteer in a local political campaign.** If you are into politics, you will possibly have already thought about it; if not, you might think it is odd, but possibly you will find it interesting in the end.

Getting in such a setting as even a local candidate's headquarters, you will be able to observe so many different personalities, get to know numerous issues concerning your community, and mostly get a glimpse on ways to deal with problems effectively and fast.

You will be asked to perform some duties, and even if volunteering might face some challenges, that will sharpen all your problem-solving skills. You might end up a politician yourself, you never know.

## Reflection

Take some time to think about your past, even the time you were a child, and acknowledge the way you used to deal with problems. If you were more sentimental or cool about them,



who usually helped you, if needed, and what qualities you now think are the most important when facing a setback. Try to work on things that were not useful in the past, and creatively change them to your benefit.

Try to find answers on the following questions:

1. Do I find better solutions to my problems when feeling upset or after I calm down and give myself time?
2. When dealing with a problem how much do I take under consideration other people's feelings and opinions?
3. Which was the last time I managed to use my problem solving skills successfully and what was the outcome?
4. How did the empowering of my problem solving skills changed not only my professional but personal life too?
5. Did my relationships with others change and how using my problem solving skills affected them?

## 6) Adaptability to change

Adaptability to change is “the ability or willingness to change in order to suit different conditions.”

Source: Cambridge Dictionary

There is no other more fundamental ability in human nature, than the one of change, than the deep knowledge to adjust to new circumstances, in the right time, and right way.

### What are adaptability to change skills

When we discuss adaptability, the first connotation, the first name that pops in our mind, is that of Charles Darwin. The English naturalist was of the first to study and talk about adaptability in nature, and formed the theory commonly known as the “survival of the fittest”.

Darwin did not consider the process of evolution as the survival of the fittest; he regarded it as survival of the fitter, because the “struggle for existence” (a term he took from English economist and demographer Thomas Malthus) is relative and thus not absolute. Instead, the winners with respect to species within ecosystems could become losers with a change of circumstances. (Encyclopaedia Britannica website, n.d)

What applies to nature, applies to our everyday life and our work environment too. We need to find the way to survive in our professional ecosystem, and not be left behind to end up extinct. Adaptability skills are natural, but they can also be evolved, and become stronger through practice. First and most important is the capability to notice changes around you, understand them, realize exactly what they are, and what they will bring, and accept them. Being open and perceptive is a prerequisite in order to adjust to new conditions, not losing any time in fear of change, finding creative ways to get a hold of fresh ideas, accepting that young people are able to help you more than you can imagine, trusting innovators, and having the will to fine-tune with your era, are some crucial skills we need to work on.

### Why are adaptability skills important?

How many times in our lives, don't we talk about change? We want to change something in our personality that keeps us back, something in our appearance, that we think it is not perfect, something in our relationships, and job environment we are not satisfied with. And then we find ourselves not being able to achieve the change we long for, the change we have been so much talking about and dreamt of. Human nature finds comfort in what it knows, and change sometimes is extremely scary, even if we don't realise it. Unfortunately, we all find comfort in old habits, we keep doing same mistakes, even though we constantly think of shifting them.

But that is what keeps us prisoners of our own selves. In order for us to become the best version of ourselves, we need to fully understand the need to be adaptable to change, and embrace it. In a personal level, we have to try hard on leaving mistakes of the past behind, and offer ourselves a better future, based on mindful decisions and actions. In our work environment, being adaptable will be our secret weapon to thrive.

Companies all around the world are seeking for people in tune with modern technologies, people that dream big, people that are not stuck to the past, people bringing new ideas and create new technological miracles. Because they understand, that whatever now is the present, in five minutes will be the past, and that brings only losses and failure. Imagine a world that didn't adjust to human rights, that didn't let women vote, a world where slaves still existed, where art hadn't progressed, where poetry and theatre were non-existent, where freedom of speech was not a basic human right, where you couldn't choose what work to do, who to love, and how to live your life. That world would have been a non-adaptable to change world. And that sounds like a total living hell.

### Tips to develop your adaptability to change skills

1) **Accept the fact that old ways might fail you.** We need to totally dismiss the “you can't teach an old dog new tricks” approach. On the contrary we have to accept that some of our already established skills, need improvement and shifting, in order to improve our life, not only professionally, but personally too. Don't be afraid to admit, that certain things we continue to do are not beneficial, and try hard to dismiss them, and replace them with an update more functional version. Computers need updating all the time; so do our brains, our skills, our life in general.

2) **Dismiss fear.** It might sound like a line from a dated self-help book, but it is extremely important. Coming from a person that had to adjust to many setbacks, and difficult health issues, I can surely tell you that stop being afraid is the cleverest thing to do. Fear has no use; it is totally pointless to live like that, and definitely it is not interesting and fun. By being afraid you don't gain anything, and you deprive yourself from anything good might occur. Leave fear behind; things will still come in your way, no matter if you are afraid or not. But only if you are not afraid, you will be able to see them, welcome them in your life, and embrace them. It is hard, it is something that many people cannot grasp, but living without fear is a gift you should get yourself.



3) **Try to not lose any time.** Stop finding excuses and obstacles every time you need to adjust in a situation. Especially in our work setting, things usually happen fast, and when a problem occurs, decisions have to be made on time. Stop putting hurdles to yourself and others, and don't procrastinate. Not dealing with a new situation on time, will not make it go away. On the contrary, the more you try to avoid it, the more complicated things will become, and the harder will be in the end. Throw yourself in challenges here and now, when the time is right, and not when you think you will stop being afraid of dealing with something new. Because that, is a tried way to stay stuck in the past, when a whole new future awaits you.

4) **Stop seeing obstacles everywhere.** It takes years to realise how many of us tend to find negative aspects in everything around us. Years of so thoughtlessly saying “this can't be done”, or “I am sure it will fail”, or “I am certain this will bring so many trouble”, even about

insignificant, miniscule stuff. That attitude, and constant nagging, not only pushes other people away, but is the cause for lost job opportunities, and setbacks. Being in such a negative mood makes our life so much worse in many levels. I am not suggesting not to think before we decide or act, or be ignorant and romantic without judgement, but we need to be more positive about life and during life. We don't know if the universe is there to make our wishes true, I doubt it, but I am certain that only when we don't see obstacles everywhere, only when we stop creating them before we see them, we have a greater chance to be happy, creative and successful.

**5) Keep your critical thinking.** As in every other aspect of life, maintaining a critical approach to things, is crucial. Change is inevitable, and obviously we have been praising its benefits and continue to do so. But is every single change happening worthy? Is every moral shifting valuable, every new technology accepted, every new law well-intended, every new way to deal with people decent? The answer is no. We shouldn't accept everything happening around us without analysing it, seeing between the lines, breaking it down in its components, understanding exactly what it is, and what it will provoke. Not everything new is beneficial for our life, our mental health, our jobs, or our relationship with others and ourselves.

**6) Keep your mind and body energised.** We have all watched and admired on the internet, videos of elderly people doing yoga, or running, or doing extreme sports, and we definitely feel in awe of them. The surprise comes because we consider certain things suitable only for certain age groups, and not the rest. That might be true in some cases, but in general the more active you keep your brain, the more information you receive, the more books you read, the more modern technologies you use, the more mentally powerful you become. And that is something we should all aim for. Keeping your body active too, even it may be difficult sometimes, is important too. You will feel much better, more content and capable to deal with any challenges. Living life with excitement and to the fullest is significant for youngsters too, as nowadays many of them are just bored with everything, and act like their grandparents.

**7) Ask questions.** Don't fool ourselves, we live in a very competitive society and competition is every job's middle name. We are afraid to show weakness, admit we don't know something, feel bad if someone is supposedly more efficient; all the above is our day to day reality. So, when something new emerges, we want to present ourselves in the best way, and end up



pretending we have understood everything, whereas we haven't. Don't let embarrassment keep you from asking questions about something you don't fully understand. Admitting you don't know doesn't make you look bad. Pretending you do and then not knowing what to do, is much worse. You are not expected to know everything about everything, so ask. Only by asking and understanding you will be able to accept the changes, and get a hold of them.

**8) Work with others.** Companies deal with challenges and changes on an everyday basis. Modern technology, new computers, new gadgets, new platforms to communicate, new needs to be covered worldwide. Teamwork is crucial when facing something new. Everyone has a different field of expertise, and by working collectively, each individual brings to the

table their knowledge and experience. To put it simply, someone else might be able to explain something you don't understand and vice versa. Instead of struggling alone, feeling confused and upset, trust others. Trust your own brain and willingness to change, but theirs too.

**9) Travel as much as you can.** Traveling is one of the finest pleasures, and definitely a life changing experience. From the first explorers to us today, unknown or just different places were always very tempting. Travelling makes us smarter, ready to deal with the unknown, keeps us alert and flexible in making decisions. This flexibility and constant searching of new adventures, new places to visit, new food to try, is the attitude we need to embrace. Life itself is a journey, full of surprises, unexpected events, good and bad adventures, interesting and boring days; the only certainty is that life changes all the time, and we have to be willing to adjust, for our own well-being.



## Examples of activities

**A. Try to use your left hand (if you are right-handed), or your right hand (if you are left-handed)** for a short period every day. Try to write, cook or iron, brush your teeth, or comb your hair. Use it to press the elevator button, turn your book pages, paint, or just pay for your groceries. Check how that makes you feel, if you find it weird or not, and keep practicing daily.

**B. Do something completely new every day for a week.**

<b>Day 1</b>	Wear something out of your comfort zone. Choose an outfit that is not similar to what you usually every day. Wear something different, something that suits you, but slightly out of your normal dress code. Check how this new style makes you feel.
<b>Day 2</b>	Listen to a kind of music, you have never listened to before in your life. Even if you are the biggest music fan, there must be a genre you might have missed. Listen to an artist you randomly find on the internet, an opera you didn't know existed, or even weird rock music from a country you don't really place on the map.
<b>Day 3</b>	Take a different route to work. Don't follow the same routine as usual to go to your working establishment. Walk from different streets, get off the bus or train at a different stop and walk, or even take a taxi for a change. Just don't do what you do every single day.
<b>Day 4</b>	Change your gym routine. Try a new method of training, even for a day. If you are more of a yoga/Pilates kind of person, try lift weighting, or if you are only into running, give Pilates a try. Train your body, and mind, in a new-fangled way.

<b>Day 5</b>	Shift your lunch habits. If you tend to bring packed lunch at work, for once try not to, and instead, go have lunch outside of the office at a restaurant you like.
<b>Day 6</b>	Participate in an activity you have only heard of, no matter what that is. Go wine tasting, go running, go to the park, go to the theatre, cook ethnic food- just do something that breaks your weekend routine.
<b>Day 7</b>	Plan a daily trip to a town near you. Invite friends too, or go alone. Don't look on the internet where to eat and what to do, just go and let your own experience guide you. Be open to adventure.

## Reflection

Go back through your childhood photo albums, not to reminisce the past, but in order to realize how many challenges you faced, and how you embraced change without realizing it. From your first steps, to your first birthday cake and blowing the candles, to school, and activities, and friends, everything is a reminder of your constant change and evolution. Trust yourself to be willing to change now too.

Find the most suitable answers to the following questions:

1. Can I pinpoint a specific moment that I realised I had to adjust to a new situation, and how did I feel?
2. Do I feel fear or excitement when trying something new?
3. Which aspects of my life improved after embracing my adaptability to change skills?
4. How other people reacted to my effort to adapt to changes and did their feedback influence my own willingness to try different things?
5. How did the pandemic effect on my adaptability to change process and what have I learned due to this extremely difficult and unexpected event?



## 7) Willingness for personal development

Personal Development is “the conscious pursuit of personal growth by expanding self-awareness and knowledge and improving personal skills.”

Source: UK College of Personal Development

Willingness on the other hand is “the quality of being happy to do something if it is needed”

Source: Cambridge Dictionary

So, we can easily retract that wanting to try to improve your skills, and being ready to expand your self-awareness is what this ability is all about.

### What are willingness for personal development skills?

It might be the trickiest skill to pinpoint, since it is strongly entangled to deeper psychological and inner aspects than any other soft skill. What everyone defines as willingness, or personal development for that matter, can totally vary and be extremely different from person to person. Keeping in mind that we live in a world full of diverse cultures, numerous economical systems, different religions, various philosophical approaches, we will try to narrow it down, to what applies to most of us as humans.

Knowing who you are, and being in touch with your true self, is the first step towards achieving personal development. It is not always easy to truly understand your own self, and in this complicated and hasty life we live, we can get confused and disorientated. Each one of us, though is a completely unique being. Figuring out your own uniqueness and accepting it, leads to self-awareness. The will to become the best version of yourself lies in your desire to have the most exciting life ever; to create, to have a job you long for, or make a family, or travel around the world, or all of the above.

Being adaptive to changes, not fearing of the future, being able to break old habits that are not beneficial, keeping your mind open, taking care of your well-being, taking care of your body and mind are some of the key components building what we call willingness for personal growth.

Abraham Maslow (1943) an American psychologist and great contributor to humanistic psychology, developed a very significant theory on the “hierarchy of needs”. Starting from the most basic physiological needs, to safety needs, to love and belonging needs, to esteem needs, so we reach the top of the pyramid, where self-actualization lies.

Meaning, that all humans, having covered their basic needs, aspire to be the perfect version of themselves. The top accomplishment is to become your true self.



## Why are willingness for personal development skills important?

The answer to that question is more or less obvious and self-explanatory. Without the urge to progress and develop, humans wouldn't have achieved anything since the dawn of time. If our brains, our neurological systems, or souls, didn't push us to evolve, we would still be living in caves. We are the living proof of willingness to progress.

When extremely successful people are asked about their triumphs, usually the bottom line of their responses, is that they were not afraid to dream, that they believed in themselves, and they had an endless need to accomplish their dreams. The strongest our will to develop, the greater chances we have to actually achieve it.

We can't ignore the fact that life has unexpected turns and setbacks, that is full of sudden events and difficulties, and that sometimes, no matter how hard we try, things seem to be stuck or not happening the way we want. That is a part of reality. The way to deal with this harsh reality is to empower our own willingness to prosper, under any circumstances. It is what will help us float, when the waves are strong and dangerous. It is what people will see in us, believe in us, help us if needed, it is what will make us stand out and succeed in the end. Willingness for personal development makes people more attractive, happier, lovable and appreciated by their environment.



## Tips to develop your willingness for personal development skills

1) **Set a clear goal.** Find out what you want in life, regardless how crazy it may sound. Finding out what will make us happy is a bit complicated, and obviously it might change as years pass by. But we reach a point at some time, where what we need and how we imagine ourselves in the future becomes clearer. Maybe you want to write a book, maybe you imagine yourself travelling, or moving to a different country, going back to your hometown, become a journalist, or open a restaurant. Maybe you realise that your life as it is, is not satisfactory, and you dream of something utterly different; go for it, accept the fact that this is what you want, and work on achieving it. You will be a step closer to personal fulfilment.

2) **Make a list of all the things you want to do.** Sometimes people feel pressured by the existence of their own lists, as they are obliged to tick all their boxes daily and constantly, and think they have failed if they don't. Let's not get to that point. Let's only realise that when you write something on a piece of paper, or your computer, it becomes more real. It becomes more tangible and makes us more responsible to work towards achieving it. Create your own lists, writing down whatever you want, significant or not, small daily goals, work related goals, personal aspirations, even gym routines, or movies to watch. Try to sign off your list as many completed tasks as possible.



3) **Don't be afraid to change.** Don't stay stuck to decisions you made about your future, if you are not feeling satisfied anymore. It is very common for people to feel somewhat trapped by their own decisions, and not feeling free to change them and take a different path in life. Something that was appealing to our younger self, or our parents made us believe was right for us, might not be what we want in the end. We should not be afraid to change our minds, dismiss past decisions, and seriously work on what will make us happy. That is what willingness for personal development is all about.

4) **Consciously break disruptive habits.** The path to personal progress is not an easy path to follow. Our self, more often than not, tends to sabotage our efforts and creates traps we tend to fall in on a regular basis. If you figure out what keeps you from being your best version, if you pinpoint all those habits you don't need, but still follow, and change them, you will be so close to your dream life. There is nothing more powerful in human nature than habit, and there is nothing more difficult to change than that. We grow up and we are used to find ways to survive, methods that bring us success, usually momentarily; all these tricks we perform, in the end create a version of self we don't necessarily like. Only if we break them, and replace them with new more beneficial ones, will gain the important things in life. It is hard, but it needs to be done.

5) **Create meaningful relationships.** The more friends we have, the richer we are. Invest in your relationships. The more meaningful our bonds are, the more we develop as humans. Usually the people who truly love us, are there to support us, want the best for us, and urge us to become what we aspire to become. The less meaningful a relationship is, the more we lose our paths, get confused, and possibly end up in toxic situations, which only cause great problems. Meaningless and toxic relationships get in your way, whereas important ones will aid you towards your dream fulfilment.

6) **Take care of yourself.** Cliché sounding, but so true and important. You will find it hard to empower your willingness for personal development, if you are not feeling well, if you don't take care of your overall health, and if you are not happy enough. Take care of your diet, exercise in moderation, go out with your friends, enjoy nice meals, choose activities you find fun and interesting and do them on a weekly basis. Figure out what pampering yourself means, and spoil yourself a bit. Choose good quality fresh produce, take your vitamins if needed, don't miss medical check-ups, train quite often, and avoid extremes in all senses. Love and treat yourself as you would treat your best friend. You wouldn't let your best friend starve, or be sad, or bored, or stuck to the same mistakes. Why would you let yourself?



7) **Take on responsibilities.** Believe in yourself and ask for more responsibilities in your work environment. If you feel even a bit confident, push yourself a tad more, and ask if you could do more things. Suggest ways in which you would be useful and productive and convince your superiors about your skills. The more productive you feel in your work, the more satisfied you will be, and your self-esteem will rise to the roof. Feeling confident and capable of dealing with more complicated tasks, will empower your desire to develop, will broaden your way of

thinking, will prove to your own self of your endless abilities. At least give it a try and see how it goes. Even if it is not the right time for you now, the perfect time will be closer.

8) **Be productive in everyday life.** Even if you do not work, or you are currently unemployed looking for a job, try to have a daily schedule and be active and productive every day. Wake up quite early and do some exercise, clean your house, go for a walk, help your family or friends, cook your own lunch and dinner, and to put it simply, just get out of the bed and act. If you are feeling blue, if you are disappointed, act opposite of what you feel and try to reverse the situation. The more things you try to do, the more effort you make, the easier will be to snap out of negative feelings, and work on yourself and your progress. Stay active even in the house, don't let yourself be dragged down.

9) **Don't procrastinate.** Don't leave for tomorrow something that can be done today. Either it is a new language you want to learn, a book to read, a friend to call, a trip to plan, just do them now. Don't let yourself wait longer than necessary. It is very easy to postpone something, and ending up not ever doing it, as life can be hectic, and you never know what the future will bring. Don't wait a second longer to change a bad habit, do it now. Stop finding excuses, and act. Don't just passively wait for a miracle to happen. Become your own decisive miracle.

10) **Live your life fully and mindfully.** Be present every second of your life. Either you experience a very happy incident, or you are dealing something tough, be there. Breathe calmly, acknowledge the facts, let yourself feel all sentiments of joy or pain and grief. Be mindfully there every single day. And then offer to yourself as many beneficial experiences as possible. Travel, sing, meditate, swim, go dancing, go to bars and museums, make friends, work creatively, and fall in love. Learn new skills, new languages, join art classes, go fishing and hiking; whatever it is you enjoy, do it to the fullest. Whatever it is that makes your brain function more, and your soul happier, do it. Even the tiniest things, usually they are the most fulfilling.



### Examples of activities

A. "Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." George Bernard Shaw

"The only journey is the journey within." — Rainer Maria Rilke

Step 1. **Discuss with your friends the meaning of these phrases**, by two great thinkers (writer George Bernard Shaw and poet Rainer Maria Rilke). Talk about the deeper essence of these words and what they mean in our lives today.

Step 2. Decide on an activity that could help you realise more the meaning of these quotes. Either it is a new hobby, or an effort to meditate, or take the singing lessons you always wanted.

Step 3. After you experience the activity of choice, meet up with friends to discuss your thoughts and feelings. Share your ideas, how you felt, what that step you took means, and if it made you happier or not.

Step 4. Create your own inspirational quote, based on your personality and your inner voice.

### **B. Organise movie nights about great personalities.**

Step 1. Form a group of friends, that you have common interests with, about cinema, and more importantly about great women and men of history, modern or ancient.

Step 2. Find and watch movies about their lives. If many movies are made about them, watch them all, so you have a more spherical view of their personalities.

Step 3. Discuss with your friends, your thoughts about them, exchange views, and try to think what these people would do if they lived today. What their everyday life might be like, what choices they would make, in what activist movements they might participate.

Step 4. Try to think an activity they might have enjoyed by today's standards and do it with your friends. It might be the weirdest way to choose a hobby for you and your pals, but it might be great fun.

### **Reflection**

After a month of mindfully acting on your personal development, go back and think of the things you achieved. Keep notes on how many times yourself was trying to sabotage you, but you overcame the obstacle, and moved forward. Give credit to yourself for everything, and also pay attention to the details, such as your psychological ups and downs, and if they affected your judgement, analyse when it is easier to make a beneficial decision for yourself and when not. Keep a journal of everything and go back every month to check how things have gone. Find an inspirational quote for every month.

Reflect on the following questions:

1. How do **you** define personal development, and how would you describe it to someone that is not familiar with the term?
2. What ways did you find during the pandemic to continue your personal journey towards self-growth?
3. Which activities were the most empowering for your willingness to grow as a person?
4. Which books or movies inspired you the most during the process of personal development?
5. What factors you consider to be an obstacle to your personal development and how can you change them in your every-day life?

## 8) Time management

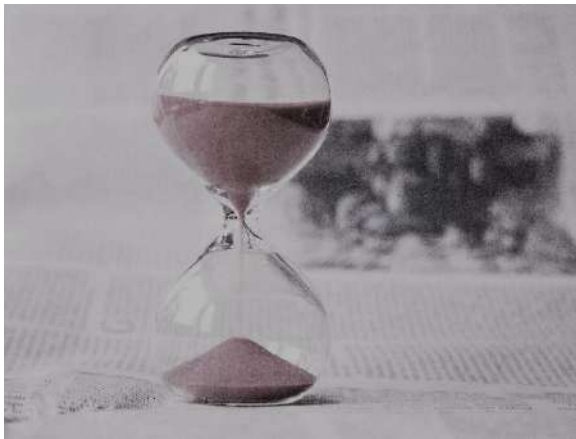
Time management is “the practice of using the time that you have available in a useful and effective way, especially in your work.”

Source: Cambridge Dictionary

Time management is a practice, that turns into an essential ability not only for our professional life, but also our personal.

### What are time management skills?

Isn't time the greater issue of all? Since the day we are born, we deal with the fact that every second passing by, will never come back. What this moment is the present, in a second has become the past and so on. Man has always tried to figure out time, created a system to measure it, and then threw himself in a constant battle to master it.



Being organized and knowing what your daily tasks should be, is the first step to manage your time more effectively. From domestic errands, to deadlines and projects, if you are specific about what needs to be done, you give more chances to yourself to actually achieve it. Being organized is a key component of time management, alongside not procrastinating, not postponing your chores for another day, another month, that leads to not ever doing what should have been done. Being a bit more disciplined than you might be, is quite

important too. It is not useful deciding what you should accomplish in a day, writing it down even, and then not sticking to the plan. Obviously, we can't plan our days to the tee, as life cannot be planned, but trying to stick to your daily program is imperative.

Prioritising can be tricky, and sometimes confusing if you have too many things to do, too many errands to run, but setting priorities will help you a lot in being productive and efficient. Quick thinking is a great skill in general, and especially when setbacks occur, and priorities need to change. Life is full of surprises, good and bad, and we have to be quick on our mind and feet, to deal with shifts and changes.

Being realistic about your goals and how long they need to be reached, is a key element to successfully managing time. Using our past experience, and knowledge, our personal abilities and also knowing our flaws, is important in setting a doable schedule. Taking in consideration as many details as possible, leaving only very few things to luck, leads to a more organised routine, and better results, unless of course something extreme occurs. Being calm, and not losing your temper, bouncing quickly back, getting back in track, trying to foresee setbacks, sticking to the plan, being flexible to make changes if needed, finding the most efficient ways to finish a task, being creative in your daily routine, are all key components of time management skills.

## Why are time management skills important?

Time is such a great philosophical and practical issue, one feels small to try to analyse it, but it is crucial for all of us to at least try. If we are honest, we all know the feeling of days lost, of time just passing by without anything exciting happening, we all feel that time flies when we are happy, and seems endless when we are depressed or sad or stressed. Time has a huge effect on humans, and our minds often struggle to deal with it.

In many ancient religions, time was often considered a God figure, and in Greek mythology we also find minor goddesses called the “Hours”. That only proves how grave time as an idea is, and how humans felt small in front of it.

Today, especially after the sudden events of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, we all felt how much we needed to manage our time schedules. We understood how important it is to have a daily routine and stick to it, how unexpected events can shift the future of the whole world, how flexible we have to be to deal with all these difficulties, how businesses and schools and universities had to find a new way to deal with everything, and time managing was of great significance. Even without a pandemic occurring, being able to manage your time effectively is what makes life better, and your work more productive. It is a way for a more satisfactory life, and a more profitable job. Setting timetables, personal deadlines, not losing time, in the end sets us free, and makes us more efficient and content.



## Tips to develop your time management skills

1) **Be realistic.** You are not Superman. Don't create more pressure to yourself to accomplish a million things a day and don't just mindlessly say that you don't need all this time provided to finish a task in your work, in an effort to show how capable you are. We have all found ourselves getting carried away and pretending, benevolently, that we can just finish everything in an hour or two, or be ready for a presentation in no time, and that we are quicker than Flash. No, take all the time provided, set realistic goals, take under consideration your mood, your sentimental state, your knowledge on the subject you will deal with, your overall health, if you feel tired or not, and be truthful to yourself and others. It is much better to set fewer goals and actually accomplish them, than trying to finish a hundred things and failing.

2) **Keep your room clean and tidy.** Like a previous tip, about making our bed in the morning, it may sound irrelevant and old fashioned. But, keeping our house, or room, or the space we work in, clean and tidy creates a more welcoming environment to create, to think and accomplish our tasks. A chaotic atmosphere around us, usually leads to a chaotic way to deal with issues, and that, is rarely productive. We have all been in this tragicomic situation to search for our notes, or an important piece of paper, or a phone number we need under tones



of clothes, or overstuffed drawers and feel desperate in the end. Having a relaxed, tidy and organised room, sets you in the mood for an organised day, and saves so much time.

**3) Find your own personalised way.** We are not all the same, on the contrary we are all very different. A routine that might work for your friends or colleagues, does not necessarily mean that will be effective for you too. Other people need less or more time to accomplish the same thing, and each one of us needs to find what better suits us and no one else. To be able to do that, we need to know our strengths, and our weaker points, observe and understand the effort we make in order to do things, when we work more effectively and when we get tired, what helps us be more productive and what not. Observing and knowing ourselves is the stone to step for creating the best feasible and effective personal program.

**4) Find the balance.** As per usual, the word balance would come up as a tip, and truth be told, it is quite important. Try to not overestimate or underestimate your abilities, your free time, others, in a few words, everything. Understand your limitations, and don't over plan, as you will be left disappointed if things don't go as arranged. But also, don't underestimate your own self and mind, and stop being afraid to do more things. Furthermore, don't dismiss the fact, that, especially in your work environment, you can work with others collectively and more efficiently, and manage your time in a better way.



**5) Pick your battles.** We sometimes need to make hard decisions, choose what to do and what not. You might end up in a situation that seems impossible. Having to combine work stuff, and family stuff, or job-related challenges and personal ones, even trivial everyday things. Think wisely and do whatever you feel will be more beneficial for you as a person. We have to accept that sometimes we cannot do everything, so decisively do what you feel is more severe, and try to find time another day to finish what you couldn't. Don't be scared to make decisions.

**6) Try to not overindulge.** Easier said than done, I know. We all enjoy nights out with our friends, we all want to head to the pub after a long day's work, or party on weekends-and not only. Obviously, we are humans, and we will do all these things, and have a great time, and maybe a headache in the morning, but growing up, we realize there needs to be a limit in overindulging and mindlessly having fun. If you have a presentation in the morning, and know that you can't have just one drink, or drink some soda, or leave the pub first, just don't go. If you are easily tempted to party more, don't go out, instead prepare a nice dinner and stay at home to rest and be prepared for the next day. Usually alcohol and partying, though fun, makes us sluggish, tired, feeling ill the next day, so limit these wild nights to the weekend.

**7) Check public transport timetables.** In more countries than not, nowadays, you can easily track on the internet, exactly when your bus will pass, when the next train to your office comes, and even calculate exactly the time needed to get from one place to another. Use this information to organise your day more effectively. You don't need to lose any time waiting for a train, or on the other hand, be late for work, and feel bad about it. Knowing your daily

routine, creates a sense of security and calmness, which is very beneficial for the overall outcome of your days.



**8) Work seriously on ditching procrastination.** It seems our flawed human nature, is easily distracted, and tends to avoid difficult decisions, finding momentarily happiness in procrastinating. Truth is, we all feel bad when losing time, when knowingly we avoid to finish something important just to watch a TV series, but still do it. So, since we feel bad, we need to actively get rid of our procrastination habits, and take our life more actively in our hands. We need to set as a goal to not delay again in completing tasks, set time limits, before we enjoy other activities, we need to not miss medical appointments out of boredom, run our errands on time, don't just let days pass by. The sense of accomplishment and you will experience is immensely empowering.

**9) Be creative and don't compare yourself to others.** Find not conventional habits to be more efficient, if that helps you, and don't just mimic what others do, or what the latest trend on Instagram and Facebook seems to be. If you are into sports, find some time to train in the day, if you are a night owl, finish some tasks when the rest are asleep, if you are a morning person wake up even earlier in the morning to have a whole day ahead of you; you know what works for you. Some people need to eat while working to fuel their bodies, others prefer not to, because they feel sleepy or tired if eating a lot. Some people can work outside, others not at all. People need total silence, others music. Understand what helps you perform in your efficient way, no matter if others think is weird, and stick to it.

**10) Eliminate distractions.** We all, without failing, work keeping our mobiles on our desks, secretly checking them all the time, post of social media, have many tabs on our computer open so we have a peek at celebrity gossip, or online sales, and this is the reality. In order to gain more time and work more efficiently though, we should really try to ban all these distractions, especially in our office. It might sound difficult, since we are all attached to our phones, but it is very important. Don't check your messages, don't try to find the best bargain while you are working, focus on your job and not on what your friend posted. You will be surprised how quicker you will finish everything; plus, you can always check your social media during lunch break and do some shopping too.

### Examples of activities.

**A. Step 1. Find an activity you enjoy, but it is hard to do due to lack of time.** (having a bath, or a massage, or a beauty routine, or just twenty minutes of stretching)

Step 2. Calculate exactly the time you need to enjoy this activity.

Step 3. **Every day write down exactly how much time you gain**, by sticking to your schedule, add all these minutes, but also subtract minutes of time you lost procrastinating.

Step 4. After 15 days, check if you have times to spare and enjoy your activity of choice, even twice, if you have gained all this time. If your result is negative, be more organised, and try again.



**B. Step 1. For 15 days set the alarm clock 30 minutes earlier than the time you usually wake up.**

Step 2. Do not hit the snooze button and actually wake up.

Step 3. Use this time, to prepare your morning drink, do just some stretching, and have a shower.

Step 4. Even if hard, continue the same pattern for fifteen days, and then make it a month.

Step 5. Set the alarm clock 45' minutes earlier, if possible, and add another morning activity.

Step 6. After two months, check your mood, your productivity, your energy levels, and if you found this system helpful. You will be surprised.

## Reflection

Keep on a daily basis, notes on how you managed your time more efficiently, and all the small changes you make in order to gain time. In your notebook, write down the time you need to accomplish various tasks, and how you managed to do them, by finding time in the day just by being organised. Talk with friends about the method you use, in case it can be helpful for them too.

Find the time to answer to the following questions:

1. Under what circumstances did you feel more prone to procrastinate and how did you resist?
2. Did planning and keeping notes about your schedule help with your time management skills?
3. What time of the day do you feel more able to complete your tasks and why?
4. Did your time management skills change your habits and your every-day routine for the better?
5. What changes did you notice on your professional or educational performance during your time management effort?

## 9) Negotiation

Negotiation is “an interactive process between two or more negotiators or parties seeking to find common ground on issues of mutual interest, where the negotiators or parties seek to make a mutually acceptable agreement that will be honoured by all.”

Source: Negotiation experts



### What are negotiation skills?

Negotiation is part of our lives, since a very young age, realising it or not. Our first relationships in our family, with our parents or siblings are often based in negotiation tactics and efforts to find a solution for everyday occurring issues. Starting from what game to play, where to go out, or what food to cook, if both parties don't simultaneously agree, an underlying negotiation begins.

Negotiation skills are “qualities that allow two or more parties to reach a compromise. These are often soft skills and include abilities such as communication, persuasion, planning, strategizing and cooperating”

Source: indeed website

Needless to say, that the same rules apply regarding negotiation in our workplace, or our interpersonal relationships. Having the ability to balance all these elements, being respectful, not losing your temper, trying to figure out the best outcome for all parties, understanding the long-term effects of any deal, can be quite challenging. When more than two people are involved in any practice, things become more complicated, and need effort from everyone in order to achieve the most profitable solution.

### Why are negotiation skills important?

Negotiation is “nothing but a discussion among individuals to find out an alternative which takes into account the interest of all and nobody is at loss. In a win- win negotiation people try their level best to come to a solution where everyone is benefited and nobody is at loss. Negotiation is essential in corporates to avoid conflicts and improve the relations among the employees.”

Source: Management Study Guide

Mnookin (2010) in his seminal book *Bargaining with the Devil, When to Negotiate, When to Fight* dedicates a whole chapter to Nelson Mandela. He cites Mandela's patience, tenacity, pragmatism, and strategic thinking: *“He rejected the simple-minded notion that one must either negotiate with the Devil or forcibly resist. He did both. He was willing to make concessions, but not about what was most important to him. With respect to his key political principles, he was unmovable.”* Hackley, 2020)

You don't need to have the fate of a whole nation in your hands to realise the gravity of being a successful negotiator. We cannot all be Nelson Mandela, and it is not expected from us. Still we have to understand that it is only beneficial to sharpen our negotiation tactic, avoid unnecessary conflict, but also stand for what we believe. History is full of examples of interesting, unexpected, genius negotiations that transformed the world and peoples' lives.

### Tips to develop your negotiation skills

1) **Be flexible.** Nothing can be as harming in a negotiation process as two rigid parties, not actually wanting to discuss anything, but only bringing concrete suggestions to the table, not moving an inch from what they believe. Especially in your workplace and relationships between co-workers, being stuck in your own beliefs, and not wanting to change even a tiny bit, is the only way to fail. We don't live totally alone in an island in the middle of the ocean, we are all parts of a society and we need to have flexibility in order to survive, communicate with others, and achieve our goals.

2) **Communicate.** The more communicative you are, the best results you will have if a negotiation occurs. Through communication you get to understand people better, you know where they are coming from, what they want and how they react in given situations, and more importantly you build trust and confidence, key components for a win-win process. Be open to discussion, always keeping your mind on what is said, and maybe more to what is not said, but you get the sense of it. Nonverbal signals are strong and might be extremely useful in successfully closing a deal or not. Communication is the fundamental aspect in negotiation, so keep your brain active, your mind ready, and all of your senses present and alert.

3) **Listen carefully.** The smartest thing to do in a conversation, is to remain silent, and let the other part do the talking. When silence, people have the subconscious need to break it, and they talk more than they have planned. We are not saying you have to deceive anyone, obviously, but the more you let someone do the talking, the more information you receive, the more



you comprehend their personalities, their strengths and weaknesses, and you get a clear idea what will work and what not. Let the other negotiating party open their cards, and listen what they are saying, and what they are trying to hide. Don't rush at all, and don't share more information than needed, as that might backfire, and you will end up with the wrong end of the stick.

4) **Set a clear goal and also your red line.** Especially in serious negotiations between companies, where the stakes are extremely high, knowing exactly what you are trying to achieve and how much you are willing to give in return is crucial. You have to be very precise on what you strive to accomplish and how much you are willing to compromise. All your minor goals should lead to the main goal you want to reach. No matter what that is, the process stays the same. The better you know exactly what you aspire, and what your red lines are, the more chances you have to succeed.

5) **Plan your strategy.** You can't just throw yourself in the battlefield of negotiations not having a perfectly orchestrated strategy plan. History has taught us of great strategy plans thriving, and some obviously not, but it is certain you need to execute one. If you are negotiating on your own, stay true to what you have planned, and leave some space for flexible decisions, made on the spot. If part of a team, you have to make sure that everyone understands in full detail what the goal is, everyone has to perform their part with great



responsibility and diligence. Before entering a negotiation, the team and their leader should have decided how to play their game, what exit plan they have, and stick to it. Don't change the team's tactic at any point, unless you are so certain that what you are going to do will save the situation, or else the deal might be a disaster. Risk is definitely an aspect of negotiations and life in general but be wise.

6) **Cooperate.** Cooperate with your colleagues, but also the other party or parties. Before you sit around the negotiating table, work closely with your fellow co-workers, using everybody's abilities in the most gainful way. We all have different strong points, and in order to gain something, the combination of them all, is the winning combination. Like a football team, or a theatre group, or music band, each one has a certain key role, according to their knowledge, their talent, their expertise, and the mixture of those, creates a strong squad ready to play. But even when negotiating, realise that what both parties want, even if contradictory at some levels, can be materialised if you work ethically, trying to achieve the best for everyone. No one wants to lose, no one wants to end up defeated and in total loss. So, work together to score the win-win result.

7) **Maintain your coolness.** Don't let your feelings get the better of you. To be honest, negotiations are in a way mental games, where the strongest wins, so perfecting your poker face, might be very useful. Your personal feelings towards other members of your team, or the other party, should be left outside the negotiating process, and in no way get involved. Don't let the other party understand from your emotional reactions more than they should. Try to remain as collected as possible, no matter what the outcome seems to be. Creating an atmosphere of confidence, and power, will be much more to your advantage than anything else. It is hard not to let emotions affect you, but you should try to leave them aside for as long as a negotiation is taking place. Even if things don't go your way, be cool, collected, and bounce back quickly.

8) **Be informed about the negotiator.** The more detailed information you have about a company, their strategies, their past, even their employees, the more you comprehend what strategy you should use when negotiating. Don't assume even the smallest thing is insignificant, since every little piece creates an image, and you never know what might prove to be useful in the end. Knowing the culture of the person you are negotiating with, is of great significance. Knowing how to show your respect, what in their culture is considered offensive, what rules they follow, how they show friendliness and appreciation, are key elements of a

successful deal. Showing you have knowledge on someone's cultural background, speak their language, or even some words, and know their habits, can be game changing.

9) **Accept compromise.** We cannot win every single battle in life, or negotiations. Often, things don't go exactly as we want them to go. The main issue is that we have to work for the best outcome, aim for the top, and at the same time be prepared to compromise. Don't go beyond the red lines you have set, don't do anything that is against your moral values and ideas, but know that you might need to adjust your plan as well. If you cannot



succeed the very best option, go for the second best. Don't sabotage a deal because you might lose something you wanted to gain. Understand that in many situations, compromise is necessary. As long as you stay true to your values, and work for everybody's benefit, some kind of compromise will not be harmful in the end. Pick your battles and understand when is time to give something more than expected.

10) **Be smart and persuasive.** There are some people that seem to have a natural talent of making others do what they want. Like magically succeeding with ease in persuading others. In negotiation, that is the most useful skill, and it is something we can all work on excelling. Find the right arguments to convince the other party, don't just state the obvious, but look deeper and come up with creative ideas. Use the more effective words in order to make your message clear, use the most effective verbal and nonverbal communicative signs, and others will follow without even realising it. Persuasion is a very delicate matter and has many components both psychological and practical. Use all your mental and even psychological abilities to your benefit.

11) **Aim for the win-win.** Last but definitely not least, is what you usually see as the very first goal of any negotiation anywhere in the world, since the dawn of time. But we need to understand all the in between steps, so we reach the win-win result. Yes, everybody wants to win, everybody wants to achieve the best for themselves, but it is even better if both parties can come up with an advantageous deal for everyone. Long-term these deals tend to be the most effective ones, and lead to better relationships among companies, or colleagues. When everyone is happy, bonds are tighter, financial prosperity closer, creativity rises, and the future seems more exciting and lucrative.

### Examples of activities

**A. Step 1.** Organise a night with your friends at your house. Divide them in two teams and ask them **to decide on a menu each**, either to be cooked or ordered in.

**Step 2.** Each team should try to convince everyone on their menu of choice, and argument on why they should choose their menu and not the other.

**Step 3** Try to find a solution so that everyone orders something they fancy, and no one is left hungry in the end.

Step 4. Pay attention to all arguments used, so you realise what works and not, even in a trivial situation like this. Repeat as many times as you and your friends want.

**B. Step 1.** Even if you have decided on what film to watch, or which bar you will go to, or theatre performance, **try to persuade your friend to go to a different one, on purpose.**

Step 2. Write down all the arguments you think might be effective on this certain friend, and pretend you are negotiating seriously.

Step 3. Even if they seem surprised keep up the act, until you reach to a compromise.

Step 4. If your friend just chooses to do what you want easily, and you don't really use much negotiation or persuasion, then you are lucky.

**C.** Form a group of friends, and choose the **most important negotiations in history**, study them, find all details about them, and then exchange what you found out. It doesn't have to be dull or boring. Have dinner or drinks and talk about how the world might have been different if negotiations had failed, or if leaders had made other choices. The more you look into various leaders' lives, and the more you study history, the sharper your own skills will become.

## Reflection

Mindfully observe how you negotiate in your family and work environment, how you react when things don't go as planned, what your weaknesses are, which are your strong assets, if it is easy to persuade someone or not. Accept your failures, if occurring, and use your strengths. Be present and understand what works for you, and what needs to be changed.

Negotiate with yourself and find the answers to the following questions:

1. What is the first word that comes in your mind when you hear the term negotiation?
2. In which aspects of your life did you find negotiation skills to be extremely useful?
3. Did you feel that using your negotiation skills enabled you to succeed more in your professional or personal life?
4. Which was the most successful negotiation and which the most catastrophic one, if so, and why do you think that was?
5. How much the other part's negotiating tactic affects you and how can you find the balance in a negotiation process?



## 10) Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution can be defined as “the informal or formal process that two or more parties use to find a peaceful solution to their dispute”.

Source: Katie Shonk (2020) Program on negotiation, Harvard Law School website

### What are conflict resolution skills?

We live in a world tantalised by nonstop conflicts since the dawn of time. The tendency for violent encounters may or may not be encrypted in our DNA, but it is definitely provoked by financial and territorial reasons, religious disputes and totalitarian ideologies. Man has managed to create for himself a global history covered with blood and endless suffering due to battles, wars and conflicts.

Conflicts don't have to be of that global scale to affect our lives. Every day we get into some kind of dispute, argument or disagreements, even in our families, or school, or work setting. Conflicts seem to make the world go round. In order to achieve a more serene and fruitful living, we must be ready to quickly handle situations causing tension and know how to easily resolve conflicts of any kind.



As per usual, our brain and personalities will either help us or become obstacles that we have to overcome. When in conflict with someone, don't rush to speak your mind, try not to jump to conclusions and assumptions, understand the facts, don't let your emotions blur your judgement, and try to remain as calm as possible. It might seem unimaginable, if things are heated up, or if countless amount of money are on stake, or a great injustice is taking place, but we need to try, in order to have some chances. Understand exactly what your goal is, what you want to achieve in the end, and stay focused on that. Getting in the other person's shoes, and trying to comprehend where they come from, and what they want, will be extremely helpful. Being cool and collected, and staying true to yourself, is an arrow in your quiver. When all hell breaks loose, and that can often happen, you remain polite, try to be helpful, stay impartial, give people the time to explain themselves, and don't run away scared.

### Why are conflict resolution skills important?

There are people fearing conflicts and disagreements, trying to keep everyone happy and satisfied, and others believing that through conflict they thrive. Conflicts are not always destructive, on the contrary they can be creative, and open new paths to more interesting solutions and better results. In order for that to happen though, we need to realize the significance of conflict resolution skills and try to act on them.

Imagine an office where all people were terrified to say their opinion so not to cause any disputes, or a different office where everyone was ready to fall into battle to defend their



opinion, not accepting anything else. It is like a scenario from a horror film. Nothing would be able to be done, no new ideas, or mistakes pointed out, constant bickering, no creative thinking, no resolution to occurring issues.

Every single company with no exception, prefers people that can resolve conflicts fast, not losing valuable time, not letting their personal issues get in the way, as time is money, and the work needs to be done no matter what. On the other hand, creative thinking and collaboration is promoted, and more often than not, that leads to some kind of problems. We all know that disagreements in our work environment is an everyday phenomenon, and that is normal. Nobody expects that things will run smoothly for ever. At the same time, companies expect from their employees to know how to deal with conflicts, and cultivate their skills to this direction. The more people are willing to resolve issues fast and effectively, the easier our lives will be, the more profitable companies will be, and in a larger scale, maybe the world a better place.

### Tips to develop your conflict resolution skills

1) **Listen carefully.** We will not be bored to stress the value of listening and paying attention to others. You might disagree with a colleague, or a friend, but before you let your anger take over, focus on what they are saying. Try to figure out exactly what they mean, and not what a preconceived notion orders you to understand. Don't rush to mindlessly respond, but take your time to see their point of view and let them explain. Many times, people tend to think out loud, and sometimes they might start saying something but realise as they do, that it might be wrong, and end up in another conclusion. Listen to people, let them space to explain their thoughts, and if you do disagree in the end, then calmly make your point.



2) **Take care of your relationships.** It might sound too much or sentimental, if we are discussing work related issues, but it is not. Building warm and honest relationships with people, will form a bond that both parties will not easily want to break in front of a conflict or a problem. If you get to know your fellow workers more and more substantially, instead of treating them as strangers happening to working together, your everyday life will be richer, and when a problem occurs you will have allies and not opponents. Go out with your colleagues, ask about their lives, share common activities, get to understand them, and have fun together if possible. The more humane the relationship, the easier obstacles will be overcome.

3) **Know your weaknesses.** That is a tip applying to everything and everyone to be honest, and so hard to achieve. Admitting we have flaws and weak points that keep us back, takes a lot of self-work, and courage. If you know that you have temperamental issues and get easily angry or upset, admit it to yourself and try to work on it. If you know you tend to underestimate others, actively try to stop it as much as you can. If you know that in general you tend to be late, and that can cause arguments, work on it. Don't just do whatever you tend to do mindlessly. Nobody is perfect, and the more we realise it, the more we can work on our own problematic habits, and change them.

4) **Your ego is less important than the general welfare.** Numerous times conflicts are caused due to strong egos, and not actual setbacks or crucial disagreements. We all want to be better than anyone else, smarter, more capable, more appreciated, especially in our competitive society. Obviously, wanting to succeed is not a bad thing per se. But letting it come in the way of a collective goal is. Work on accepting that sometimes we need to take a step back, even if our egos are hurt, in order to accomplish a greater objective. It is more mature and smarter to take a step back, than arguing just because your ego is wounded. People will see it and appreciate it a lot.

5) **Take the first step.** We should take a step back regarding our egos, while taking the first step to reconcile and make amends. When an issue occurs that leads to conflicts and arguments, relationships suffer, and the atmosphere usually is unbearable and unpleasant. If you argue with one of your colleagues, the whole office gets tensed, people tend to take sides, and that might lead to even more tension and so on. Be generous, and try to resolve the issue after work, talk to the person you argued with, ask if you can have a drink together to talk things through, and show your willingness to patch things up. Nobody wants to work in a hostile environment, not feeling safe and creative. It is ok to be the first to apologise if necessary. Relationships are more important than trivial disagreements.

6) **Don't be offensive for any reason.**

Especially in our work setting, we need to be very careful of the way we talk and behave, the comments we make, the words we use. There are rules to follow, no matter how low or high in hierarchy we are. Don't use any words that could be considered as derogatory or degrading, or humiliating to another individual. Keep your temper, and select your words carefully. Nothing good can come up after sexist comments, racist comments or hate speech. It is of great importance to realize that attitudes as such, are extremely problematic, and not accepted.



7) **Try not to let your personal feelings get in the way.** Easier said than done, we know. Obviously, it is very hard and complicated to put aside our feelings for someone, and have a totally objective and disassociated opinion on their work, or efforts, or points of view. We don't judge the same way someone we like and appreciate, and someone we find annoying and cannot be friends with. And that is only human. We all tend to be less strict to people we love or are our friends, than people we don't like. In a workplace though, things are a bit more complex. We can't just take our friend's side no matter what. And definitely we cannot disagree just because we don't find our colleague nice enough. In both cases, it would be disruptive for the work per se. The more objective and realistic we try to be, the better.

8) **Don't hold any grudges.** Whatever it is that happened, unless something extremely severe, don't let it ruin your relationships in total. The more you are still upset and angry after a conflict, the more you will carry it around the office, and the more possible will be to get into more conflicts caused by your own grumpiness and attitude. Try to get over things quickly, don't think of even getting back at someone, or make their life miserable just because you disagreed and things got tensed. Try to forget about it, understand that these things happen in our workplaces very often, and be your normal self.



9) **Don't be harsh and judgmental.** Everybody has a different background story, faces challenges outside the workplace, and in the end, is just another human being full of insecurities and flaws, like everyone else. Don't easily jump to conclusions and offend people. Treat them as you would like to be treated, respecting them and understanding that sometimes we all make mistakes. Take care of people as you would like to be taken care of. In your professional and personal life, people around you are your family, your friends, your allies, and even after a big dispute, don't just dismiss them and definitely don't be harsh on them. We are all humans.

### Examples of activities

**A. Step 1.** Plan a weekly sport activity with your colleagues, or fellow students, but one that needs **the presence of a referee**.

Step 2. Each week one of you will take the role of the referee, in rotation.

Step 3. As a referee decide on various ambiguous matters occurring during the game.

Step 4. When home, keep notes about your decisions, why you made them, how you felt about them, what consequences they had in the game's progression.

Step 5. Be honest.

Step 6. Meet up with your teammates/friends/colleagues and exchange notes and thoughts on the decisions made, if they caused tension, how everybody reacted, how people were surprised or not by certain attitudes, and try to pinpoint what was beneficial for the group and what not.

**B. Step 1.** On a monthly basis, meet up with your colleagues to **discuss great historical conflicts** that affected the whole world.

Step 2. Each one of you could focus on a conflict that occurred in their country of origin, so it is easier to find information.

Step 3. Make notes about everything you dig up, analyse the reasons these conflicts took place, what made leaders take certain decisions, what influenced them, and how people reacted.

Step 4. Listen carefully to one another, ask questions, try to understand the differences in various cultures, try to figure out how things could have been done better and more efficiently, or not.

Step 5. Suggest for each case, your personal opinion on how everything could have been dealt with, in order for the world not to suffer from wars, battles, and lives lost.

## Reflection

Take examples from your personal life, thinking back all the times you found yourself either in the middle of a family conflict, if your parents were arguing, or when you were a part of it, and pinpoint all the things that caused trauma to the parties involved.

Try to realise and even write down your feelings through these conflicts, understand that everyone is human and feels the same, and try to change anything harmful in your present situation.

Answer the following questions, trying to find the most accurate answers for yourself:

1. Did you find it feasible to work on your conflict resolution skills in everyday life or not?
2. How did other people react when you tried to help resolve a conflict?
3. Did your ego come in the way of a conflict resolution, and if so, how much did it effect the outcome of the conflict?
4. Which specific words and attitudes you used were the most effective when dealing with a conflict?
5. Did the knowledge of conflict resolution skills change your way of dealing with issues in your professional and personal life?

## 11) Confidence

Confidence is defined as “a feeling or consciousness of one's powers or of reliance on one's circumstances” and also as “the quality or state of being certain”

Source: Merriam-Webster Dictionary website

### What are confidence skills?

The most precise decipher of confidence skills, would be knowing and acknowledging your best traits, your strengths and abilities and feel certain about your competences. As a skill per se, confidence is a very tricky one, as so many people most often than not feel insecure or inferior which leads to a negative perception of themselves and creates the vicious cycle of self-sabotage and even self-hate. It is very simplistic to believe that by just quoting inspirational lines and saying to someone that all they need is to believe in themselves will solve the deeper issue of confidence, as it has its roots in the way we were brought up, the relationship with our parents and family, our performances in school, and also our individual personality and character. Confidence is something that can be built, can be empowered, and it is quite essential for thriving in the professional world.

The first thing that comes in our mind when discussing confidence skills is probably an assertive, strong and in a sense positive person, fearless of sharing ideas and thoughts. Knowledge of your strengths and your limitations is the first step for confidence. Knowledge requires honesty about ourselves and mindful observation of our performances on a daily basis. Confidence is one of the most sought after skills nowadays, with companies all over the world searching for employees fulfilling this specific requirement. Confidence skills are totally interlinked with almost every other soft skill, as they are the foundation on which you can build all your other skills. To make it even more comprehensible, not having confidence in yourself affects your overall attitude towards life, professional and personal, makes you more timid and indecisive, resulting to poor time management, poor communication, and most of all weak willingness to self-develop. On the contrary, being confident leads to improved communication, as you know exactly what you want to share with others, and what you want to achieve, more efficient time management as you are certain of the things you have to do, and know how much time you need to spend, and definitely more adequate decision making. Being confident makes other people trust you more, creates a positive atmosphere, a more relaxed environment alongside the sense that everything will be ready on time and will have the optimum outcome, which are all essential traits in a working setting, and not only.

Fully understanding the fact that it is easier said than done, confidence skills exist in each one of us, just in different levels. It is in our hand to work on them and make them even stronger.



## Why are confidence skills important?

Confidence is a key element of and for human progress. Imagine a world where nobody was confident enough to try new things, materialise ideas, travel to unknown places, even try new recipes. Sounds like a nightmare, like a dystopic place where nothing changed, and everything stayed the same. The importance of confidence is quite clear and applies to so many levels of our existence. The tricky thing about confidence is that it requires a great level of self-understanding, self-knowledge and honesty in order for it to be a beneficial skill and not turn into arrogance or narcissism. Confidence is a complicated skill, as it is created through the combination of multiple aspects such as hard skills' confidence, body confidence and mental abilities' confidence, to name a few. As human beings sometimes we lack assertiveness and we doubt ourselves, which is only normal, especially nowadays with all the extra pressure from social media for a perfect life, a perfect body, an exciting every day routine, a perfect relationship or job. It is important to resist to all that, and gain confidence in order to live your life, not someone's else image of life. The vitality of this specific skill is so easily grasped, but difficult to practice.

From the moment we are born we need to face life's hurdles and growing up we have to find our inner strength in order to thrive and accomplish our dreams. It is common knowledge that when people feel appreciated by their surroundings and believe in themselves perform much better than people who lack confidence or feel threatened by their environment. Confidence manifests itself in the way you carry yourself, the way you talk and sometimes even in the clothes you choose to wear. It is significant to realise that a person exuding positivity and strength gets almost immediately more liked and appreciated and it is more possible to get hired if we focus on the professional aspect of things. Employers want to see your drive and strength, obviously combined with responsibility and accountability, but their first impression needs to be one of confidence and power.

Confidence is important in every aspect of life, as it is the skill that makes us ask for more, pushes us forward, makes us achieve the best for ourselves and allows us to dream even bigger. Usually the obstacle is our own self, and it is a very big one, indeed. The constant battle with ourselves is understandable and it is what makes us humans, but you need to take the situation into your hands and allow yourself to find strength and also practice towards that direction. Life will never be same after your work on your confidence skills, and you will soon realise it. Just put yourself for a second in other people's shoes, and

think who would you choose to work with you, or become your friend, or to whom would you trust an important task? Wouldn't you prefer a confident person, someone that has more chances to succeed, someone that you feel secure with therefore you can trust? Become the person you already are, and don't let fear come in the way.



## Tips to develop your confidence skills

1) **Do not compare yourself to anyone else.** It has been previously mentioned, but in all honesty, it is the most useful tip, even though hard to put in practice. Living in a society where social media seem to rule, and the power of image is almost absolute, we easily fall in the trap to compare ourselves to everyone else, and usually finding that we lack. We lack in beauty, money, fame, holiday destinations, friends, or partners. Subconsciously we make ourselves feel less, which leads to a timid attitude towards life, and makes us shy and scared to claim what we want. We all need to understand that each one of us is different, we have completely different lives, different strengths and weaknesses, and it is absolutely pointless getting into comparisons. Embrace your uniqueness which is most probably your best weapon, and what will make you stand out.

2) **Take good care of yourself as a whole.** Confidence derives from the way we feel about both our mind and body. The better we feel, the more confident we become. Therefore, we should try to provide ourselves the best food and food for thought. By no means this is an advocacy for diets or body image fixation; far from that. The same way to nourish our body, we should also nourish our minds. Taking care of your dietary habits alongside your mental and sentimental health is very important and will lead to more confidence and happiness. Find what suits you as a person, what makes you feel at ease with yourself and go for it. Exercise, go out for walks, treat yourself when you feel like it, read books and watch movies, go hiking or swimming. Find your ideal combination and stick to it.

3) **Be honest to yourself.** It seems that every tip of this list becomes harder and harder, but it is the only way to follow, in order to become not just confident, but also happier. We cannot do all the same things, we are not good in everything, and we all have to accept that, and be at ease with our weaknesses. Understanding of one's self is the first step to a more wholesome personality and attitude. Find your weak spots, and if feasible try to empower them, change them, and make them stronger. Know your numerous assets and make them shine. Aim to jobs that are suitable for you depending on your personality and studies, but don't have a narrow perspective. Understand to what you excel and go for it. Knowing our limitations and being honest about them, makes us confident about the things we are good at.

4) **Mindfully visualise yourself succeeding.** Believe it or not, visualisation helps a lot when we try to ensure the optimum result. Find just a couple of minutes to close your eyes, relax your muscles and see in your mind yourself completing a specific task, or delivering a perfect presentation, or anything else that you have to do. See yourself in detail performing excellently, create with your imagination the surroundings, the other people involved, and live through your own mind the feeling of success. Have all your senses alert, stay mindfully present at the time of your visualisation, and repeat it as many times possible, until you actually have to perform. It will certainly boost your confidence and help you dismiss fear or worries at great extent.



5) **Practice on the things you feel more insecure about.** Accepting our weaknesses in terms of knowledge, skills or competence is the first step, that has to be followed by our own active effort to become better in the things we are currently not. Without putting much pressure on yourself start engaging more in activities you are not familiar with or actually study a subject you feel you do not own as much. Practice on your digital skills, if that is concerning you, watch online tutorials, or even play video games. Practice your writing skills, or learn a new language, there are numerous online applications that you can use. Do not let fear push you away from the things you don't fully understand, on the contrary, accept them, and try to improve them. Find clever and fun ways to learn, and always keep in mind that everything needs time. Sooner than later you will the change you want and your confidence you will surely rise.

6) **Accept yourself.** Sounds like a cliché, but it is true. We cannot move forward in life if we do not fully accept our own being. It is hard, and usually takes time to reach that point, if ever, but we should all work towards this direction. Accepting our self with all our insecurities, problems and weaknesses is a constant struggle, a battle with our own mind, that we need to conquer. People who have found an inner peace with themselves, and not just pretending they have, are possibly the happiest people, and definitely the most confident ones. We have to fully realise that the only thing each one of us has is ourselves and come to terms with it. Accepting our faults, but also all our abilities will make us stronger and more efficient.



7) **Control negative thoughts.** We all know that especially when we are feeling low, it is easy to find a comfortable yet disruptive routine, that usually leaves us unsatisfied, worsening feelings of self-pity, feeding our inferiority complex. The recent events of the pandemic had a huge impact not only on our physical health, but our mental health too. Feelings of insecurity, fear, mandatory lockdowns, were the worst thing that could happen to already fragile personalities. You need to fight back this negativity, find in your mind and soul the necessary love for yourself, and keep going. The more control you get on negative and disruptive feelings, the better and healthier you will feel, and the stronger your confidence levels will become.

8) **Own your mistakes.** Don't be afraid to take responsibility for your actions. Everybody makes mistakes, but only a few have the courage to own them, accept them and be honest about them. This kind of honesty makes you become more responsible, more honest, which in the long run will lead to extra confidence. People around you will appreciate your open and

sincere attitude and will trust you even more. Taking responsibility of our own faults, is a sign of growing up and maturing. Confidence comes alongside it.

9) **Stay active and live mindfully.** And by that, we mean going out and living your life to the fullest, not holding back because you don't feel at your best. Do not let numbers or measurements define you, on the contrary you should define them, or not pay any attention to them. The more experiences and happiness you have, the more complete your personality will become, and you will gain all the confidence in the world. Might be a long run process, but you will get there sooner or later. Be present in every single moment of your life, don't let others bully you and definitely do not allow insincere comments rule your existence. Keep in mind that you are unique, and able to become whatever you want to become.

### Examples of activities

A. **Try an activity you were always afraid to try.** Be it drawing or water colouring, creative writing, dancing, or singing, push away all your fear and go for it. Commit to it throughout the course's lifetime, so you can see all your progress, and check if you honestly enjoy it or not. You might be pleasantly surprised, and more importantly you will have gained extra skills and knowledge that can lead to new paths for you and your life. Plus, you will be proud of yourself and definitely more confident.

B. **Create your own self affirmation routine.** Find some time, most preferably in the morning, to stretch your whole body and then relax your muscles and close your eyes. Visualise yourself in happy moments, repeat in your mind that you deserve all the happiness in the world and that you are a unique human being full of talents and abilities. It might sound weird, if you have never tried it before, but truth is that it works. Engage both your body (stretching and relaxing) and your mind in this daily routine, and soon you will feel much more energized and stronger within yourself.

### Reflection

Mindfully go back in time and think all the moments where you felt more confident and powerful. Acknowledge the parameters that made you feel strong and at ease with yourself and try to create them again. Understand what helped you and what not and try to recreate only the helpful conditions in the present. The more you understand about your past, the clearer your present will become.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I let my insecurities affect my professional performance, and if yes, how can I change that?
2. When do I feel more confident and capable to achieve my goals?
3. Do I find it hard to express myself and my ideas in a coherent and confident way? And if yes, what is the reason?
4. Other people's comments on my behaviour or appearance affect me a lot or not?
5. Which are my strongest traits and which the weakest ones? How can I develop more as a person?

## 12) Leadership

Leadership is defined as “the state or position of being a leader” but also “the ability to be a leader or the qualities a good leader should have”

Source: Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries

### What are leadership skills?

The first phrase that comes in mind when we discuss leadership comes from ancient Greek, and translates into “power reveals the man”, which basically means that only when someone has power his true self is disclosed. Being in a position of great power can change one’s personality, as with power usually comes privilege, and humans are prone to mistakes, especially if they feel they can control everything around them. It has historically been proven quite hard for leaders not to develop illusions of grandiosity to the extent some of them believing they were God himself. When you have the fate of people in your hands, it is usually difficult to stay humble and sincere. Becoming and being a leader is extremely complicated and comes with great responsibilities. The way one deals with such power is what makes him a truthfully great leader or not.

Being a leader is different to being a successful leader, and definitely what constitutes great leadership has developed through the years. We cannot straightly compare a leader of modern history to one of ancient history, we cannot even compare leaders that ruled in different centuries, even decades, as things change so rapidly. There are certain skills though that in theory at least form leaders. The ability to inspire people being the first of them all, followed by excellent communication skills, strength and reliability. For the sake of our own analysis, we will break down the skills of an ideal leader, otherwise we might get lost and confused in contradictions and historical examples.

The ideal leader brings people together, provides security for the present and the future, cares, is understanding and honest, as honest as possible that is. Most of all, a leader should lead by example, which is easier said than done. Accepting diversities, truthfully listening, helping, being calm and collected when others struggle to do so, being objective and decisive, putting others first, are only some leadership skills. Someone that others will look up to, admire, respect, and not fear, someone that people know they can rely on, is a successful leader. No matter if you rule a whole nation or a company, being the director of a play or a football team leader, these traits should be the ones defining you, in order to thrive and help others thrive too.

## Why are leadership skills important?

One could argue that being a leader is not everyone's cup of tea, and that would be true. Still, trying to develop our leadership skills is crucial for each one of us, even if we are not currently aiming to rule. These specific skills make us more responsible, more certain for ourselves, and we in any case, we never know what the future brings, and to what position we will end up. You don't have to become president or prime minister to put your leadership skills in practice. Being confident and trustworthy, having a vision and working towards achieving it, are skills essential to each one of us in order to accomplish our dreams and aspirations. Owning leadership skills does not necessarily translates to you being a leader per se, but more to you having the potential to be someone others can trust and admire. Showing initiative and strength, is always attractive when going to a job interview, or when having to complete a task in your work setting.

Leadership as a skill is nowadays on the top of the list of enterprises globally. Companies are actively searching for people that can communicate with others, can influence and inspire their team and have the ability to enhance team bonding. Being flexible, knowledgeable, empathetic, having big dreams, are traits that leaders possess, and everyone finds them extremely useful and appealing. Let's say that two people have exactly the same academic accomplishments, and the same hard skills. Who would you want to work with? Someone that can stay calm when setbacks occur, or someone who will easily collapse and leave you alone? A person that has ideas and listens to you or a person with no future vision and useless ideas? Even in your personal life, would you rather be with someone you can rely on, someone you can trust or someone that is afraid to take responsibilities? The answer is quite clear.

## Tips to develop your leadership skills

1) **Don't be afraid to take on responsibilities.** Maybe if you are new to a working environment you might not feel confident enough to ask for more tasks or projects but given time you should start showing more initiative and zest. The more tasks you complete, the more appreciated you will become, and others will understand you are trustworthy and reliable. Furthermore, you will become more aware of how a company works, you will gain knowledge and come across new challenges. Gradually, you will develop your leadership skills, and you will have a more spherical view of things, which is crucial for a successful leader.



**2) Embrace your uniqueness.** It is what makes you stand out and that is a great asset. Even if you sometimes feel out of place, your individuality is what makes you shine, and you should rely on it. Accept your own personality traits and find your own leadership style. Use your strengths, but also understand your weaknesses, and be prepared to face them. Not all leaders lead in the same way, so

you have to accept yourself and lead in the best way you can.

**3) Enhance your creativity.** A very characteristic trait of leaders is that of innovation and creativity, in the sense of future developments and planning. Only by looking forward you can achieve the best for you and your team. Empower your own creativity and also challenge your colleagues to do the same. Brainstorm, think outside the box, keep an open mind to ideas and suggestions, and work on finding ground-breaking ways to deal with issues and discover revolutionary solutions to problems. Creativity is highly appreciated, leads to amazing results, and also inspires everyone around you as well. The more inspiring you are to your colleagues, the more they will trust and respect you.

**4) Lead by example.** Maybe the most difficult task of all, but we should all try to practice it. Being a leader comes with great responsibility and puts you in the spotlight which means that your actions and attitude not only is an example for everyone else, but also will get scrutinised. You cannot expect people to respect you if they find your actions inconsistent to what you are advocating. In an ideal world this specific tip would be common practice, and we would not even discuss it, but in our faulty world we should always keep it in mind and put it in practice. The more consistent your choices and your life are, the more admiration you will gain, and a better leader you will become.

**5) Communicate.** The more you understand people, the more you get to know them, the more you realise what is it they want from you and what is the most appropriate way to help them. Understanding the individuals around you, talking to them and most importantly listening to them, can give you great insight on the real problems they face, the challenges they have to overcome, and consequently you will grasp the right way you should assist or lead them, if that is your role already. A great leader is one that knows exactly what is going on around him, what reality is, and doesn't have a twisted image of it. That is achievable through honest communication and active listening.

**6) Be rewarding and generous.** Everybody needs to be rewarded for their success, when completing a task or when overcoming difficulties. People expect from their leaders' positive feedback and recognition. Don't be stingy with your praises. If a colleague performs well, reward them, make them understand that their work is valued and appreciated, and they will appreciate them in return. A leader should be generous with his followers, making them feel respected and valued.

**7) Keep motivating yourself and others.** Without motive no one has the willingness to work, be creative, try new ideas and risk. Being motivated is crucial for a successful leader but also

for the team as well. As an interlinked relationship, the leader should constantly create motives for his team, and the more motivated the team the more motivated the leader gets too. Wanting to develop, to expand and grow comes through motivation and personal development. Keep yourself mentally motivated, stimulate other people's intellect, and soon you will become a winning team.

8) **Take calculated risks.** Try to avoid being careless and reckless. Find your balance between being timid and extremely risky. Many times, leaders lost everything because they got arrogant and thought they can control the world, which led them taking extreme risks. Risking is a trait of leadership, but you should try to control your urge to make decisions you are not certain about. Don't fall in the same trap as leaders of the past. Use your instinct, your brain, listen to what others have to say, and then decide with a clear mind.

### Examples of activities

#### A. Read biographies of leaders you admire or watch films about their lives.

Step 1. Form a group with your friends, read books and watch documentaries or films about some of the great leaders in history.

Step 2. Focus on their strengths but also weak points, try to understand them not only as leaders but also as human beings.

Step 3. Make notes about their more characteristic traits and discuss them in your group.

Step 4. Imagine and write down how you would handle things if you were in their position and discuss with your friends.

Step 5. Describe their leading style and try to imagine and name your own style of leadership.

B. With your friends, discuss and exchange ideas on who was your **favourite hero when growing up**. Feel free to choose a character from literature, mythology, a superhero, or anyone you looked up to as a child.

Discuss the reasons you admired this specific character and share your thoughts with your friends.

### Reflection

Mindfully think back and try to find out if your criteria of successful leadership are the same today as when you were younger. Realise what has changed and what not in the way you define leadership.

Ask yourself the following questions and the answers that suit you the most:

1. What I, personally, think that constitutes a great leader?

2. Is honesty an important trait of great leadership?
3. Do I feel comfortable being a leader, or do I prefer not being in the front line?
4. Is being ethical mandatory for a successful leader?
5. When was the last time I admired a leader and when was I disappointed by one, and why?



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