



## Interpersonal Skills

Take steps to improve your interpersonal skills and move up the career ladder



By [Joe Escobar](#)

**Editor**

You have probably heard the saying that an A&P certificate is a “license to learn.” We get that hard-earned certificate in our pocket and begin the process of learning more specific technical information and skills that help us advance as an aircraft mechanic. For those wishing to advance in an aviation career, it takes more than learning technical skills. Yes, improving your inspection, maintenance, and troubleshooting abilities is important. But don’t forget — it’s just as important to develop your interpersonal skills — the skills that allow you to effectively interact with other people.

Libby Wagner, “The Influencing Coach” and president of Seattle-based Professional Leadership Results Inc. says that being competent in technical skills is not enough in an aircraft maintenance environment. “One error that people in technical fields make is they believe that if they are competent in their technical skill areas that’s really all they will need to succeed and to continue to advance in their career. But in the workplace, we are being asked to perform in two areas — both technical skills and interpersonal skills.”

### **Reduce stress**

One way that we can begin to improve our interpersonal skills is by reducing our level of stress says Debbie Mandel , a stress-management specialist and author of Turn ON Your Inner Light. “To develop interpersonal skills, I tell people they need to first manage their level of stress,” Mandel shares.

“You have to let go of your anger. You have to step back and objectify a situation which might be unpleasant for you at work so that you can come off as assertive and not aggressive. It means respecting other peoples’ opinions and unique perspectives.”

Reducing stress in the workplace can also lead to a less-stressful home life. “If you can’t manage your stress, it will be impossible to develop your interpersonal skills, and it carries over to the home,” Mandel adds. “When you manage your stress, you think clearly, you don’t fly off the handle, you don’t get a crystal ball of negativity that everybody’s out to get you.”

There are several ways to manage stress. Remember that stress and anger are not caused by situations in the workplace (or at home), but rather by how you choose to react to those situations. The important thing is not to let those situations get you stressed out. “If you are angry, take a deep breath, or take several if you need to, and get your blood pressure down,” Mandel says. “Take a walk. Get the stress hormones out of your body because they are inflaming you. When you are inflamed by stress, your language becomes inflammatory. You become negative and inflamed. Take a break and relax. Get your blood pressure down so you can think straight. When you can calm down, you will be able to focus better on the situation.”

Make it a goal to be positive and motivated at work. Being negative not only brings you down; it also brings down the morale of the team. Do whatever it takes to reduce your level of stress. If you try to reduce your stress and have a positive attitude, but still find yourself in a bad work situation, consider a job change.

### **Public speaking**

Public speaking is usually toward the top of the list of things mechanics hate to do — right up there with fuel cell work and cleaning the “honey bucket.” But don’t underestimate the importance of good speaking skills. “You have to be a good communicator to be seen as a leader and as one of the best,” shares Suzanne Bates, president and CEO of Bates Communications and author of *Speak Like a CEO: Secrets for Commanding Attention and Getting Results*.

Just about anyone can become a good speaker. “Contrary to common myth, the ability to be a good speaker is not a natural-born skill,” shares Bates. “I don’t think there’s such a thing as a natural-born speaker. Everybody has to learn. There is a common misconception that people were born to do it.”

So if anyone can become a good speaker, what can we do to improve our speaking skills? Practice! “Think about how many years it took to learn your craft — to develop your skills,” Bates tells AMT. “You learned the little nuances. You learned from your peers the things they didn’t teach you in school. Just like developing your technical skills, if you spend time developing your speaking skills you get better and more confident.”

Develop your speaking skills as early in your career as you can. Joining an organization like Toastmasters will get you speaking in front of a crowd and provide feedback on improving your public speaking skills. The more you speak, and the more you practice, the better speaker you will become.

“When you see somebody who is giving a presentation who appears to be very comfortable, chances are the reason they are comfortable is they have done it a lot — they have a lot of experience,” shares Bates. “And they also practice. That’s another thing that people don’t understand. You need to do it over and over again to get better at it.”

### **Listening**

If speaking is an important interpersonal skill to develop, being a good listener is even

more important. “There are many courses, both credit and non-credit, on teaching people how to speak,” Bill Lampton, Ph.D., author of *The Complete Communicator: Change Your Communication: Change Your Life!*, shares. “But how many courses are there on teaching people how to be good receivers of communication? Being a good listener is the most important, and yet the most neglected, communication tool that we have.”

Why are many people poor listeners? “Most of us hear but don’t really listen,” says Linda Finkle, executive coach and CEO of Incedo Group, an organizational coaching and consulting company. “You can’t be formulating a response and listening. Listening requires you to be really present and hear not just what is being said but what is not being said.”

**“Be an active listener,” shares Jamie Yasko-Magnum, president of Successful Style & Image Inc., and author of *Look, Speak & Behave*. To actively listen, stop what you are doing, make eye contact with the speaker, concentrate on the speaker’s message, digest the information, craft your response to answer the question, and respond.**

While it is important to be an active listener, you must be genuine. “Don’t pretend,” Finkle stresses. “If you don’t care what the person is saying don’t pretend you do. They always know. If the timing is off for a conversation or you aren’t interested at all, tell them. They may be upset but they will be more upset if they try to talk to you and realize you don’t care.”

### **Meeting new people**

Remembering peoples’ names is an important interpersonal skill. But many of us have difficulty doing that.

So, how can we remember names better? Well, it goes back to listening. “You may have a hard time remembering someone’s name after you meet them for the first time,” says Dr. Lampton. “One reason is you never hear it. Why? You aren’t listening. You are thinking of what you are going to say next. I tell people to listen and make sure you get it. Pronounce it. If there is any question, ask them to spell it. And use the name during the conversation. Repetition is important.”

And what do you do if you do forget someone’s name? Don’t panic. If you are at a convention or seminar, he or she may have a name tag. If it is easily visible, you can try to take a quick glance to see if you can catch the name. Whatever you do, don’t wing it by trying to get through the conversation without mentioning their name. Doing so might buy you a little time, but will more likely prolong the inevitable. It is better to say out front something like, “I’m sorry, I forgot your name.” Although it may seem a little embarrassing, it is much less embarrassing than making it through the conversation never remembering the name, only to be placed in the same situation again at a later date. If you do ask for their name because you forgot it, be sure to focus so you remember it next time.

## **Teamwork**

Teamwork is an important element in a successful organization. Being a good team player is another common interpersonal trait of successful people.

Teamwork involves communicating with fellow team members, cooperating on projects and assignments, and collaborating with your peers.

It also involves sharing your knowledge and expertise with others in the organization. Some workers may be hesitant to do this for fear they are helping someone else move up in the company ahead of them. Are you hesitant to share your knowledge? “Don’t be,” says Gayle Lantz, president of WorkMatters Inc., an organizational development consulting firm. “Share your knowledge. You will be viewed as a person who is open to sharing and to achieving the goals of the organization. The risk is greater not to share information as opposed to sharing it. I’d rather gain the reputation of being the go-to guy who wants to help others grow and learn as opposed to a person coming from a place of fear who hoards information.”

Improving interpersonal skills takes time and practice. Don’t be afraid to take risks and step outside your comfort zone. Most importantly, improve your skills in small steps. Trying to accomplish a radical transformation will only leave you stressed, and could set you up for failure. “If you want to make changes, make them in small increments,” Mandel tells AMT. “Making a radical change can be stressful. Small changes are easier to accomplish.”

So what are you waiting for? Start taking the steps necessary to improve your interpersonal skills and chart your course for career success!