

Interpersonal skills

- and human relations

4. Being open-minded

Introduction

Embracing new ideas, challenging our own biases and maintaining a curious attitude can greatly improve our personal and professional relationships. When we practice open-mindedness, we allow ourselves to grow as human beings, learning from various viewpoints and experiences. This mindset fosters empathy, humility, and a genuine interest in understanding others. Cultivating an open-minded approach, will not only enrich our lives, but also contribute to creating a more inclusive and harmonious work environment

In everyday use, the term “open-minded” is often used as a synonym for being non-prejudiced or tolerant. From a psychological perspective, the term is used to describe how willing people are to consider other perspectives or to try out new experiences.

Open-mindedness involves being receptive to a wide variety of ideas, arguments, and information. Being open-minded is generally considered a positive quality. It is necessary in order to think critically and rationally. Open-mindedness can also involve asking questions and actively searching for information that challenges our beliefs. It also encompasses the belief that other people should be free to express their beliefs and arguments, even if we do not necessarily agree with those views.

This doesn't mean that being open-minded is easy. Being open to new ideas and experiences can sometimes lead to confusion and cognitive dissonance when we learn new things that conflict with existing beliefs. Being able to change and revise outdated or incorrect beliefs is an important part of learning and personal growth.

The opposite of being open-minded is being closed-minded or dogmatic. People who are more closed-minded are usually not receptive to other ideas. They are only willing to consider their own viewpoints.

Even if we consider ourselves as being fairly open-minded people, there are probably certain topics on which we take a much harder stance, experiences that we are passionate about or social issues, for example.



Notes

Being open-minded

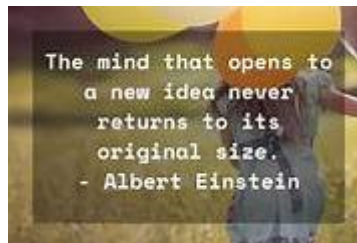
Open-mindedness refers to being receptive to other ideas and new experiences. Close-mindedness involves much more rigid thinking and a refusal to consider other possibilities.

In general, open-minded people tend to:

- Being curious to hear what others think
- Being able to have their ideas challenged
- Not feeling angry when they are wrong
- Having empathy for other people
- Considering what other people are thinking
- Being humble about their own knowledge and expertise
- Wanting to hear what other people have to say
- Believing others have a right to share their beliefs and thoughts

Advantages of being open-minded

Being open-minded has a number of advantages. In addition to help us learn new things and grow as people, it can help us become more optimistic and resilient in the face of life's challenges. People value professionals who are receptive to new ideas, flexible and ready to tackle challenges. By being open-minded, we will:



- **Gain insight**
Challenging our existing beliefs and considering new ideas can give us fresh insights into the world and also teach us new things about ourselves
- **Improve problem-solving skills**
Open-minded individuals are more likely to find innovative solutions to issues, as they can consider multiple perspectives and leave room for outside-the-box thinking.
- **Enhance decision-making abilities**
By acknowledging diverse viewpoints, we can make more informed decisions and avoid rigid approaches that could limit our success.
- **Foster a positive work environment**
Open-minded people contribute to a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere, which can lead to increased productivity and satisfaction.
- **Achieve personal growth**
Keeping an open mind can help us grow as people. We learn new things about the world and the people around us.

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Cultivating open-mindedness

Learning how to be more open-minded is possible, but it can be a bit of a challenge. Sometimes new information requires rethinking the things we thought we knew. It requires reevaluating our past experiences in light of what we have learned. In order to do this, we have to be able to set aside our judgments, take a serious look at the existing evidence, and admit that we were wrong. That process can be difficult, confusing, and sometimes painful or life-changing. It takes a lot of mental effort, but we can train our brain to be more open-minded.

Accepting change

Open-minded people are more adaptable to change. They understand that life is constantly evolving and that clinging to old ways of thinking can limit growth. We need to embrace change in our own lives by understanding the importance of learning from past experiences and being open to new possibilities. This willingness to accept change can help us grow personally and professionally.

Being curious

We should also cultivate curiosity and eagerness to learn. Open-minded people are interested in broadening their understanding of the world and exploring new ideas. They enjoy learning from others and find satisfaction in gaining new insights. We can stay curious by asking questions, trying new things, and constantly seeking to expand our knowledge. This trait will not only make us more open-minded but also increase our intelligence and creativity.

Embracing different perspective

One of the key traits of open-minded people is the ability to embrace different perspectives. They understand that everyone has unique experiences and viewpoints, which can be valuable sources of learning. They listen to others, even when they disagree, and try to see things from different angles. We should practice empathy and compassion when interacting with others, as this can help us gain a better understanding of their perspectives. This is especially important when discussing controversial topics, as accepting differing opinions can lead to more productive and respectful conversations.

Listening actively

As we work on developing open-mindedness, we need to focus on honing our active listening skills. This means genuinely paying attention to what others are saying, rather than just waiting for our turn to speak. We should try to understand the emotions, thoughts, and experiences behind the words. By doing so, we'll cultivate empathy for the people around us and increase our ability to understand different perspectives.

Thinking critically and asking questions

Open-mindedness requires the ability to engage in critical thinking and to ask thoughtful questions. When we encounter new or differing perspectives and ideas, rather than dismissing them outright, we should analyze them with curiosity and an open mind. We need to seek out additional information, look for potential biases, evaluate the merits and possible shortcomings.

Asking questions is crucial in this process. We shall not be afraid to inquire about the origins of ideas, the logic behind them, and the implications they carry. By doing so, we'll invite discussion and be more likely to understand the broader context of the topic at hand.

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What can prevent us from being more open-minded to new ideas and possibilities?

Which of the eight points, at the top of the previous page, do we need to improve?

What is most important for us to focus on when cultivating our open-mindedness?

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Open-mindedness and growth in leadership

Notes

A common misconception of leaders is that they have to know what to do all the time, especially in times of crisis or uncertainty. Even if some leaders may have a significant amount of expertise and experience at the current point in their careers, it is also important that they remain open-minded.

Open-mindedness, and the willingness to consider new information, can help everyone grow. However, leaders sometimes feel conflicted about welcoming outside perspectives and what that might mean for their authority.

Benjamin Franklin was quite a smart man, but he was also intelligent enough to understand that he couldn't be right about everything. That's why he said that whenever he was about to make an argument, he would open with something along the lines of, "I could be wrong, but..." Saying this put people at ease and helped them to take disagreements less personally. In addition, it also helped him to psychologically prime himself to be open to new ideas.

(Benjamin Franklin (1706 - 1790) was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States He was a drafter and signer of the Declaration of Independence for the USA)

Some leaders get caught in the trap of thinking they have to have all the answers and put pressure on themselves to figure things out on their own. They may think, "it's all up to me." Others might think that being open to others' opinions means having to change their view to match the others' as a result. They think they can't listen and still have a different perspective or opinion after.

In high-pressure situations, leaders might feel that they have to make decisions right away and that they don't have time to spend on listening to other voices outside of their own expertise area or that listen to all perspectives is too slow. They might also think that too much input or too many options can be confusing and lead to analysis paralysis, like being given a big menu at a restaurant. But all of this points to a fixed mindset due to an urge to self-protect.

What harm can truly come from being open-minded? It is just information after all, and we can make our decision on what to do about it after. Just because we have new data doesn't mean that we have to be completely swayed and change our whole belief system. But even if it does, information shouldn't be feared, but embraced, because of the opportunity it brings for a better future.



A growth leader mindset

As leaders we are encountering challenges on a regular basis. However, the thinking that created today's challenges won't be the thinking that gets us through them. When we encounter especially difficult issues that aren't easily solved, we probably haven't been through them before.

Therefore, the key to moving past these problems is being open to new information to help finding solutions, and simply being open to what shows a growth mindset.

Those with a fixed mindset often believe they have to be perfect from the start. They may not even start or could give up early on. With a growth mindset, we move from thinking, "I can't do that," to "I can't do that yet, but I can figure it out," and then take small steps forward. We should learn and be open to influencing and evolving our thinking. We need to have the humility to recognize gaps in our knowledge and the courage to take on new thinking when it challenges what we thought we knew. Both of these can build trust with everyone we are working with.

Generally, it's highly rewarding to learn new things. Being challenged and stretched is usually a strong intrinsic motivator. But some leaders may think that in their position, they should have already learned everything they needed to, in order to get to where they are. People with strong abilities can get caught up in feeling that if they need to grow, maybe they weren't good enough to begin with. However, that is where the mindset should change from learning being a corrective measure to something that is evolutionary. Open-minded leaders continue to evolve from a proactive and positive outlook.

Problem solving also gets much easier with access to more viewpoints. When we are always considering future perspectives and new thinking, we are less likely to feel like we have been caught off guard.

Some final words

Effective leaders are able to overcome fixed thinking, generate new ideas and take advice from knowledgeable colleagues. Being open-minded allows people in leadership positions to look for creative solutions and rely on people who have experience and expertise.

Being open-minded can be hard. It doesn't help that our minds are often geared towards conserving cognitive energy by relying on shortcuts and simplifications. Even if being open-minded doesn't come naturally to us, we can work to cultivate a receptive attitude that leaves us open to new perspectives, knowledge, people and experiences.

Remember, not everyone expects us to have all the answers all the time, but where we are is always a good starting point.

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What can we do to make it more natural for everyone to ask questions when feeling a lack of knowledge?

What can we do to be better in picking up and sharing new ideas among each other?

What will be most important for us when cultivating an open-minded working culture?

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