



MODULE 6: BUILDING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK
LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMME



NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Know yourself	3
3. The relationship bank account	4
4. Develop your empathy.....	5
4.1 Identify emotions accurately	6
4.2 Expressing your empathy	7
5. Effective communication to build relationships	8
6. Give respect and trust.....	9
6.1 How trusting and trustworthy are you?.....	10
6.2 Interpersonal behaviours that build trust	12
7. When you disagree.....	13
8. My Action Plan.....	16
9. Recommended resources	17



The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.

Theodore Roosevelt

Module outcomes

By the end of this session, you will:

- Understand how your self-awareness influences the type of relationships you have
- Be able to describe how the relationship bank account works
- Know what empathy is and how to use it to build relationships
- Appreciate the importance of effective communication in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships
- Understand the importance of trust and respect in relationships
- Know how to handle differences in opinions

1. Introduction

Building and maintaining interpersonal relationships can sometimes seem complicated and challenging. However, we deal with relationships every day and therefore it is important that we build our skills to create effective relationships with others and hold onto them. Getting along with others will help us feel that we “fit in” and create a sense of belonging, both at work and in our personal lives, which in turn will help us feeling happier and more fulfilled.

ACTIVITY 1

Task



Think of a social situation, for example, where you had to introduce yourself to strangers at a party.

Now, answer the following questions:

1. What aspect of this situation do you find most stressful? Why?

2. What do you think are the interpersonal skills needed to successfully get through this situation? List at least three.

2. Know yourself

If you want to make the most of interpersonal relationships, you must be able to leave a lasting positive impression on the people that you meet. You can achieve this by knowing your good and bad points and being comfortable with who you are. People’s first impressions of you will determine if they want to get to know you any further. If you are consistent in how you behave and what you say, people usually want to remain engaged with you. You want to make sure then that you create a positive but accurate impact on people. This is done through your actions, your words, and your appearance.

ACTIVITY 2

Task



Write down how you would act, dress, and what you would say in the following social situations:

Social situation	Behave	Dress	Type of words used
e.g. Job interview	Professional, serious, calculated	Professional, business-like, formal	Formal English, subject references
Networking event			
Grandmother's birthday			
School reunion			
Office year-end function			

You need to understand yourself to adapt appropriately to the different situations while still staying true to who you are. How you behave at a sports event tends to be very different to how you act at a funeral. However, you are still the same person and you want people to recognise you in all situations, and appreciate the fact that you can appropriately adapt to “fit” into the environment. Self-awareness is understanding why you feel the way you feel and act the way you do when you are in a specific situation or interacting with a specific person or group of people. If you know where your emotions come from, you become more accepting of yourself and less self-critical.

We deal with self-awareness in more detail in the “Who am I?” module of the Life Skills Programme. Please try to also attend that class.


3. The relationship bank account

Stephen Covey compares human relationships to a bank account. The relationship bank account works exactly like a financial bank account: there is a balance which can be either positive or in the red, based on the number and size of deposits and withdrawals that have

been made. The more deposits and the fewer withdrawals we make with regards to a specific relationship, the stronger that relationship will be and vice versa. Relationship deposits and withdrawals have to do with how we treat other people.

ACTIVITY 3

Small Group



In the group, brainstorm as many as possible deposits and withdrawals that we (could) potentially make in our relationships with others:

According to William Glasser, relationships stay healthy when we show the following caring behaviour. These can be seen as the deposits in the relationship bank account.

- Supporting the other person
- Encouraging the other person
- Actively listening to the person
- Accepting the other person as he/she is
- Trusting one another
- Respecting one another
- Negotiating differences among ourselves

The opposite is of course also true. If you do not regularly show these behaviours, your bank account may run into the red and at one point, the bank account will be closed – your relationship with the person will be ended. Can you perhaps think of any person where you have to go and make some of these deposits to strengthen your relationship bank account with this person? In the rest of this course, we will give you some ideas on how to do this.

4. Develop your empathy

Empathy is one of the greatest interpersonal skills available to us. It allows us to communicate better with people, increases our understanding of others, and develops relationships built on trust and respect. When we show empathy, it means we perceive and relate to another

person's feelings and needs without blaming, giving advice, or trying to fix the situation. Empathy simply means to “put yourself in the other person's shoes”.

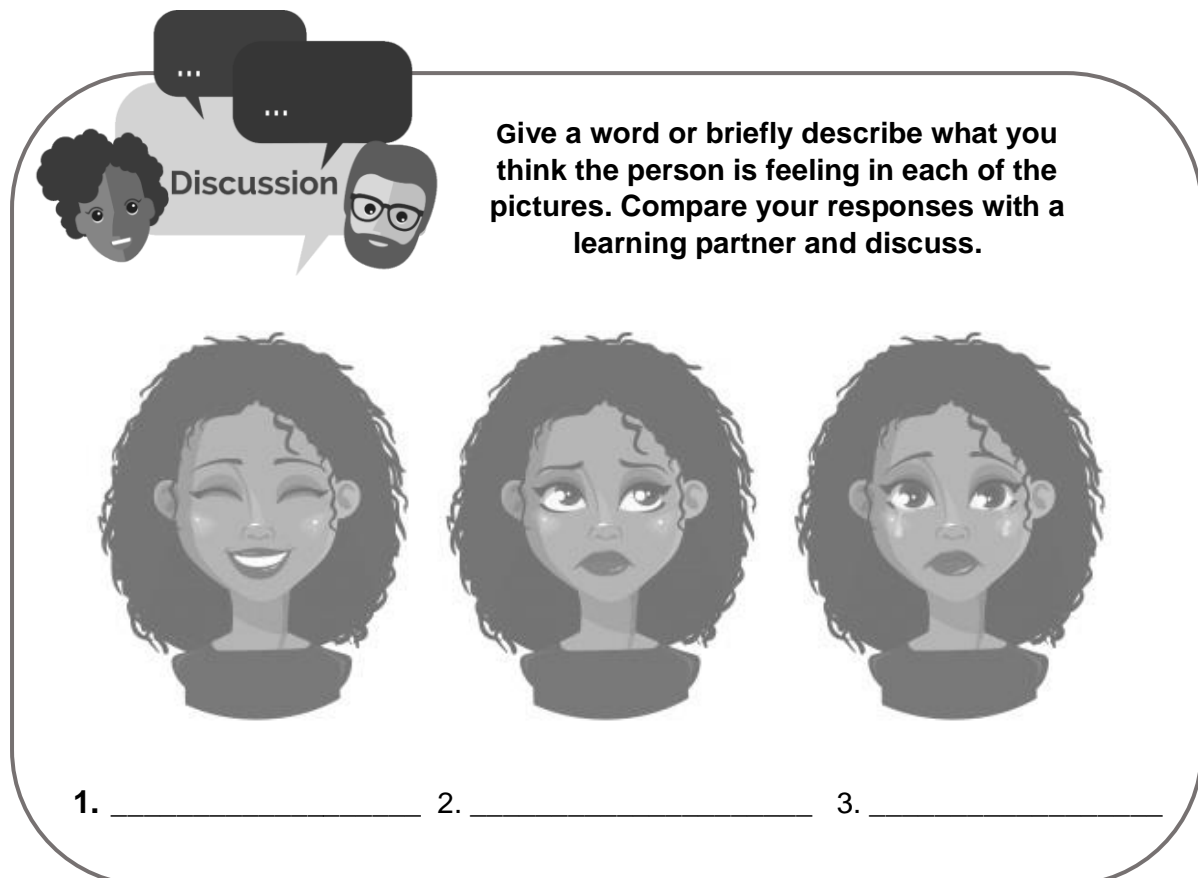
Stephen Covey talks about empathy as being the “psychological and emotional oxygen” that people need. Empathy is acknowledging another person's feelings, thoughts, and even views, without having to understand these. In some cases, Empathy could even be non-verbal. Empathy generally has two requirements:

- Accurately identifying someone else's emotion,
- Validating the other person's feelings by showing that you are aware of how it may be for them.

4.1 Identify emotions accurately

To communicate with and relate effectively to other people, we need to be able to accurately identify the emotions they experience. This is not as easy as it may sound. Many people do not express their emotions clearly and others sometimes choose not to as they might feel that expressing emotions is inappropriate. Emotions contain important information, so it is important that we read this information accurately. In the following activity we are going to see how accurately you can identify the emotions in another person.

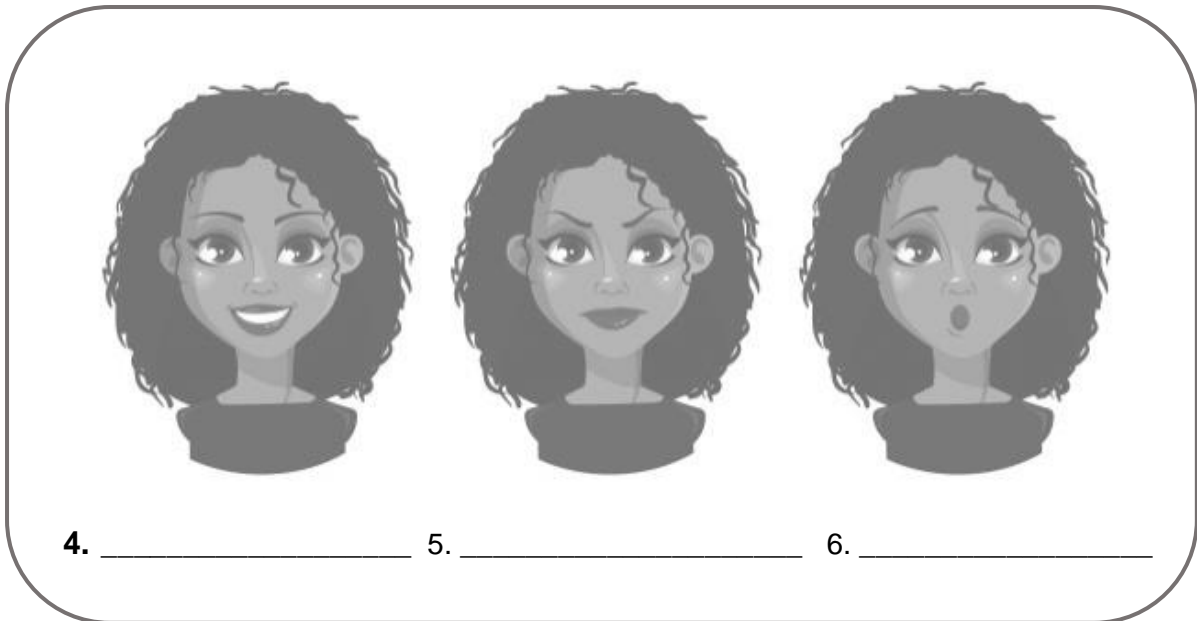
ACTIVITY 4



Discussion

Give a word or briefly describe what you think the person is feeling in each of the pictures. Compare your responses with a learning partner and discuss.

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____



4.2 Expressing your empathy

You don't have to understand *why* another person is experiencing an emotion, but you can still acknowledge their right to have the feeling. Avoid saying: "I know exactly what you are going through". Rather show caring and respect.

- Empathy must be sincere.
- Try to identify the emotion.
- Express your observation.

Steven Stein gives the following statements and questions that we can use to express our empathy towards others:



Key Learning

Statements

- You look like you're feeling somewhat sad.
- You look a bit anxious right now.
- You're showing a lot of confidence.
- You seem like you're in pain.
- You look like you're a bit tearful.

Questions

- Are you worried about something?
- Are you happy with how things worked out?
- Do you feel angry about what just happened?
- Is something making you feel ashamed?
- How pleased are you with your report?

5. Effective communication to build relationships


All of us must have workable relationships with the people around us. Although we sometimes feel that we can, or want to, get things done without the help of others, the truth is that we need each other's support. The first step to establish a successful relationship, is to *communicate* effectively.

The **words** you choose and the way in which you share your message will influence the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviour of the people receiving your message. Similarly, when you pay attention to the language and behaviour of others, you will understand what they are really trying to say. This will help you to respond appropriately and effectively.

Communication is also about **body language**, facial expression and the way we convey a message. Keep the following important factors in mind when you communicate with other people:

- The verbal and/or written **message** (what is being "said") must be **clear, honest, and appropriate** to the situation.
- Communication is a **two-way process**. Each person must be given an opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas, options, and feelings, while the other person(s) actively listen. Let's do the following exercise to demonstrate the importance of this point.

ACTIVITY 5




Task

Draw the shapes according to the instructions you receive. Unfortunately, you do not have any opportunity to ask questions.

- **Non-verbal communication:** It is not only *what* you say or write, but also *how*. Your body language and tone of voice often send a louder message than the words you use. For communication to be effective you need to make sure all the parts of the message match up.
- **Active listening:** To communicate effectively, you must not only hear what the other person is saying, but also listen actively to the full message. This requires that you:
 - listen to *verbal* and *non-verbal* messages;
 - show that you are listening by using *non-verbal cues* and responding appropriately;
 - *concentrate on what* the speaker says and don't get distracted by "noise";
 - be *empathetic* to the speaker's feelings and thoughts;
 - *paraphrase* what the speaker has said in your own words so that the speaker can see that you understand;
 - briefly and accurately *summarise* the main points as you understood them.
- **Ask questions:** When you ask questions, you get more details and clarity on what the speaker is. By asking questions, you also show that you are listening and interested in what he or she is saying. This not only helps you to understand better, but also helps to build the relationship. Let's look at the values of asking questions with the following exercise:

ACTIVITY 6

Small Group



Split into two teams. The trainer will decide on an everyday object. Each team is allowed to ask 10 questions to try and figure out what the object is that the trainer has in mind.

6. Give respect and trust

To help build and maintain strong relationships, you will need to respect the other person's time, opinion, and feelings. If you do this, others will also respect you. This helps to develop trust. The two quotes below demonstrate the importance of respect and trust.



I speak to everyone in the same way, whether he is the garbage man or the president of the university.

Albert Einstein

Your trust account is more important than your bank account.

Billy Cox

Here are some important facts about trust:

- Trust is essential for human beings to grow and develop.
- Trust is essential for teams and organisations to succeed.
- Trust in a relationship is not a constant. It varies and changes continuously. It does not just happen, it is earned.
- Trust is a two-way street where the actions of both parties determine the trust level.
- There are risks involved in trusting others, because:
 - The other person might be in a position to harm you or to be unworthy of your trust.
 - The outcome of the situation may depend entirely on the behaviour of the other person.
 - The harmful consequences often outweigh the benefits.

6.1 How trusting and trustworthy are you?

You can assess your own level of trust and trustworthiness with the checklist below. Once you have determined the level, you will know whether you will have to work on this to improve your relationships.

ACTIVITY 7

Task



Think about the past month. How often did you do the following?

1 = Never; 2 = Seldom; 3 = Most of the time;
4 = Always

How often did you ...	1	2	3	4
1. Openly share your thoughts and feelings?				
2. Do what you said you'll do?				
3. Listen actively with empathy and understanding				
4. Invite honest feedback from others?				
5. Give people the benefit of the doubt?				
6. Give people honest and constructive feedback?				
7. Admit that you were wrong?				
8. Acknowledge the successes/performance of others?				
9. Respond in a predictable way?				
10. Accept people for what they are without any conditions?				
11. Disclose something personal at the risk of being ridiculed?				
12. Indicate to others that you expect the best of them?				
13. Take people to task when they didn't perform?				
14. Express your convictions, even if they were unpopular?				
15. Coach and support people's efforts when they tried hard?				
16. Expect people to take advantage of you?*				
17. Expect people to let you down?*				
18. Expect fair treatment?				
19. Set limits/communicate boundaries?				
20. Get back at somebody unexpectedly to take revenge?*				
Total				

See scoring on next page

Scoring

Add up your scores. Reverse scores no. 16, 17 and 20 e.g. 1 becomes 3 and vice versa; 2 becomes 4 and vice versa. What is your total score? _____

If your score is between:

61 – 80, you have an optimal level of trust and trustworthiness, and need to maintain it;

41 – 60, you have an acceptable level of trust and trustworthiness, but there is room for improvement;

21 – 40, you have a vulnerable score and you have to work on your level of trust;

0 – 20, your level of trust and trustworthiness is very low. You need to work on this to improve your interpersonal relationships.

6.2 Interpersonal behaviours that build trust

If you want to maintain or improve your level of trust and trustworthiness, there are a number of basic habits that you should establish:

- Make **eye contact** with people.
- **Communicate clearly** – don't beat around the bush.
- **Listen empathetically**, for both content and feelings.
- **Express** your own **feelings openly**.
- **Accept** the **feelings** of others for what they are.
- Use 'I' messages – **don't blame others** for your feelings.
- **Build** other people's **self-esteem**.
- **Stay focused**, 'present' and involved, even if the person is longwinded.
- **Act consistently** and predictably.
- **Be dependable** – don't let people down.
- **Show congruence** between verbal and non-verbal messages. **Congruence** is a **match** between how **you feel on the inside** and how you **appear** on the **outside**. When you are angry, you look-sound-act angry. When you are sad, you look-sound-act sad. Congruence means that there are no superficial smiles or 'I'm fine' when it is untrue.
- **Be open** and willing to share your thoughts, feelings, and reactions. This shows that you care about the relationship; that you are wanting to create a close connection by being truthful and receptive to the other person's thoughts and feelings. When you are speaking to someone who always seems to hold things close to the vest and shares very little information, it's difficult to know what they are truly thinking or feeling. This creates a sense of distance from that person. Self-disclosure is a mutual process. The

more I know about you, and the more you know about me, the more effective and efficient our communication will be.

- **Give and receive honest feedback.** If you provide constructive feedback to others, it helps them to tap into their personal potential and can help to create positive and mutually beneficial relationships. Any feedback you receive is free information and you can choose whether you want to use it or not. It can help you to tap into your blind spot and get a different perspective.

7. When you disagree

Although we strive to have good relationships with other people, it is okay to disagree as well. We are all different and have different feelings and opinions. Some disagreement and conflict are actually good for strong relationships. If you do not speak up when you disagree with something, it may cause damage to your relationship.

There is a right and wrong way to share these opinions. The right way is to be assertive. **Assertiveness** is the ability to communicate opinions, thoughts, needs, and feelings in a direct, honest, and appropriate manner. Assertiveness involves standing up for your rights in a manner that does not offend others or deny the rights of others.

Less effective ways to express yourself would be either in a passive style or aggressive manner. Passive communication is when you put the needs of others before your own and accept others' decisions without question. Aggressive communication is rude, pushy, and insulting. This behaviour may not be intentional but can be very hurtful. Both passive and aggressive communicators are likely to have trouble developing or keeping close and trusting relationships.

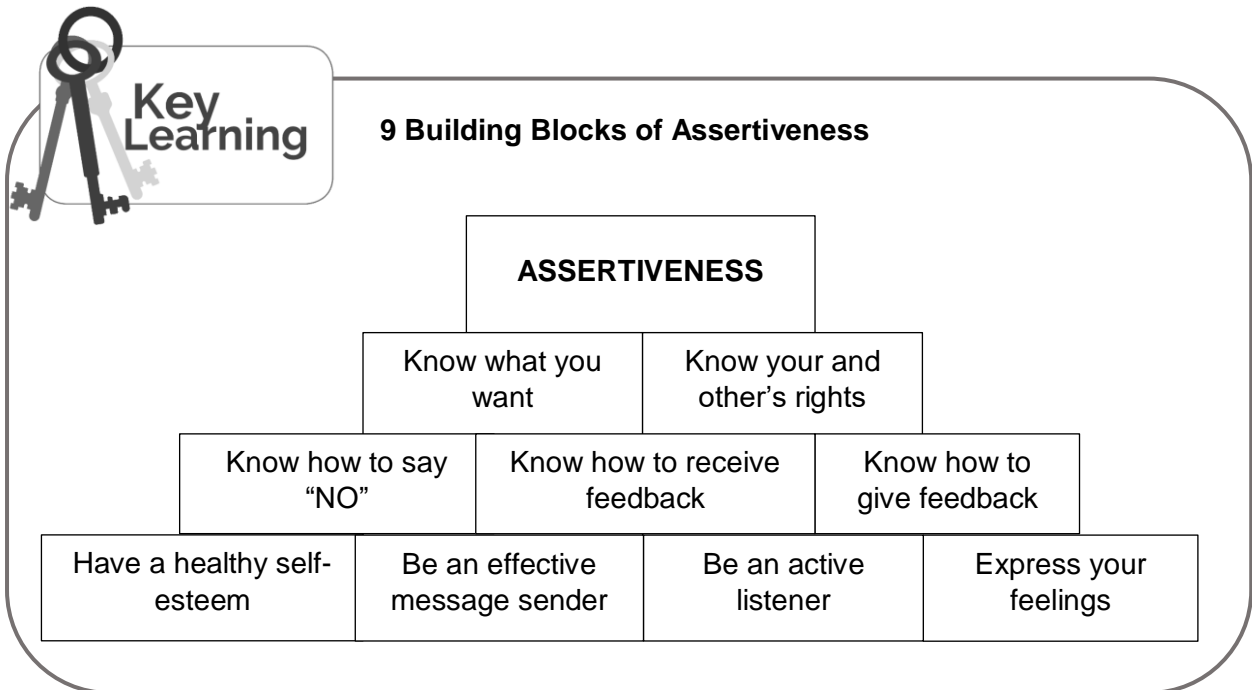
An assertive way to share your options, thoughts, and ideas assertively is to use I-messages, "I was upset when you interrupted me, as I felt you were not interested in my opinion" or "I am concerned about finishing this report on time, as your team is still busy with the analysis."

By using I messages:

- You take responsibility for your feelings and thoughts.
- The other person is less likely to feel blame and therefore not become defensive or resistant to further communication.
- The message is not perceived as a judgment statement.
- You open yourself up and therefore build trust with the other person.

The ability to be assertive greatly increases your chances of being with the kind of people you want to be with, getting the kind of job you want, and getting into the kind of interpersonal relationship you want. In short, a much **happier**, less **anxious**, and **less frustrated** you

The building blocks of assertiveness that you see below, are many of the skills that you have learnt in this module, and you will also learn more about this in some of the other modules of this Life Skills Programme.



To be passive is to let others decide for you. To be aggressive is to decide for others. To be assertive is to decide for yourself. And to trust that there is enough, that you are enough.

Edith Eva Eger



Making the best of the moment

As we all know, interpersonal relationships are not always plain sailing, and all too often they result in misunderstandings, disagreements, and fights. Richard Carlson developed a strategy of asking the question: “*Am I making the absolute best of this moment?*”, whenever things did not go smoothly. This is a great technique to use when dealing with other people.

Here is an example: You are looking forward to spending an evening with your best friend. You have already bought tickets for the movies and you are waiting for her to come pick you up, but she is almost an hour late. You are angry and you shout at her: “You knew we were going out, now we are late for the movie. Why can’t you ever be on time?”

How do you think this evening is going to turn out? If you are unlucky, she may just turn around, get back into her car, and leave. Had you stopped and asked yourself the question: “*Am I making the absolute best of this moment?*”, you may have reacted differently. You may have asked her why she was late (in fact, she had been on time but got stuck in traffic because of an accident on the way). And understanding her situation, you might have asked her what she would prefer to do now. Together you could have looked for a solution that would have made both of you happy and might have led to a nice night out after all.

So, when you interact with other people, here is a simple strategy to try: Every time you feel stressed, angry, upset, or overwhelmed, step back, take a deep breath and ask yourself the following questions: “What am I doing right now? Am I being negative? Am I justifying my belief to be upset?” If you say ‘yes’ to these questions, ask yourself: “*How can I make the absolute best of this moment?*” And then go ahead and try to find a positive solution. I am sure you will almost immediately see the benefits of this way of thinking in your relationships with others.

Carlson, R. (2007): *Don’t sweat the small stuff omnibus. Simple ways to keep the little things from taking over your life.* London: Hodder & Stoughton.

8. My Action Plan

Personal Reflection



Please take a moment to reflect on the value of this life skills module that you have completed now. Also think how you are going to apply what you have learnt to develop yourself as best as you can.

1. What was interesting and new to you in this module?

2. What was the most valuable insight that you had today?

3. How can you use what you discovered today?

4. What will you do differently from now on as a result of what you learned today?

5. What is the first step you will take?

6. What are some of the obstacles you may encounter?

7. What will be the best way to deal with them?

8. How will you know that you have successfully applied your new knowledge and skills?

GOOD LUCK WITH THIS!

9. Recommended resources

Contreras, M. (no date). Interpersonal skills for entrepreneurs. Online resource available at <https://bookboon.com/en/interpersonal-skills-for-entrepreneurs-ebook>

Edmondson, A. (2017). How to turn a group of strangers into a team. TED Talk available at https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_edmondson_how_to_turn_a_group_of_strangers_into_a_team#t-724175

Forsyth, P. Communicating with empathy. Online resource available at <https://bookboon.com/en/communicating-with-empathy-ebook#download>

Headlee, C. (2015). 10 ways to have better conversations. TED Talk available at https://www.ted.com/talks/celeste_headlee_10_ways_to_have_a_better_conversation

Johnson, J. (2018). How to deal with difficult people. TED Talk available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kARkOdRHai8>

Live Bold and Bloom. (2019). 11 Ways to build trust in a relationship. Online resource available at <https://liveboldandbloom.com/02/relationships/how-to-build-trust-relationship>

Turkle, S. (2012). Connected, but alone? TED Talk available at https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together#t-716716

Did you know?

We have many more modules that were specifically designed to help you develop those skills that are essential to function effectively in life and in the workplace. Ask your facilitator about the following modules:

1. Who am I?
2. Building my brand
3. Managing time
4. Becoming more resilient
5. Creative problem solving and decision making
6. Building interpersonal relationships
7. Effective communication
8. Dealing with conflict
9. Understanding the world of work
10. Personal development plan

For e-Learning and other resources, visit
www.nyda.gov.za

You cannot teach a man anything.
You can only help him discover it
within himself.

Galileo



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