



It's All about Your People

by Steve Kirkpatrick, Ph.D.

Interpersonal skills mean the difference between time and energy wasted on unproductive conflict, and teams achieving greatness.

Executives and other business leaders recognize these truths based upon extensive investigations by various organizations across a myriad of companies:

- Managers at all levels *spend between 25 and 40 per cent of their time handling interpersonal conflicts;*
- The *quality of the relationship between the individual and his or her supervisor* is the *No. 1 predictor* of the following:
 - The likelihood of workplace accidents and injuries;
 - Turnover, especially people essential to your organization;
 - The employee's willingness to perform well, and actual quality of that performance;
 - Employee morale, attitude, and engagement – will they follow their leader even if asked to produce extraordinary effort or make individual sacrifices;
 - Quality and responsiveness of customer support and customer service.

Technical skills and industry savvy are necessary, but not sufficient, to succeed today. Leaders have emphasized this need for centuries, the ability to build and maintain solid, genuinely reliable relationships. However, today, in the scandal-ridden, cynical environment where organizations conduct business, relationships are more important than ever.

Critical Questions - Essential Answers

A familiar question plagues experienced businesspeople:

Why do we so frequently see two people with equal technical skill and educational backgrounds start working in an organization about the same time, yet a few years later one of them is highly successful and the other is not?

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The tool for answering that vital question has been unearthed by the Denver-based company, Regis Learning Solutions. Regis Learning Solutions (RLS) has created a Web-based, easy-to-use assessment solution that evolved from a series of business school-based research projects, conducted across businesses and industries .

The tool, called Cornerstones of Success™, is based on eight critical dimensions of interpersonal skills that separate those who succeed in organizations from those who do not. These same skills *make an equally important difference for executive leaders, middle managers, salespeople, account executives, human resources staff, customer service personnel, or people working in other business functions.*

The Behaviors behind the Cornerstones can be Learned

Fortunately, all eight Cornerstones dimensions represent learned behaviors. These are behaviors people can understand, observe, practice, emulate, and master to improve success, productivity, and relationships in the workplace. These skills are not encoded within your DNA!

The Cornerstones of Success™ Assessment¹ identifies specific behaviors that make the difference in the eight critical interpersonal impact skill areas:

Open-mindedness	Influence
One-on-one Communication Style	Valuing Others
Group Communication	Feedback
Clarity	Conflict Management

Easily Deployed

Working closely with your organization, RLS creates a unique website, hosted on RLS servers, where your employees go to participate in the assessment. You designate employees to participate in the feedback process. Those individuals then provide their self-perceptions and a list of others they want to provide feedback for them; managers, peers, customers, and direct or matrix reports.

¹ The initial research called this assessment Interpersonal Impact; however another organization has trademarked that name for a different kind of product. RLS is now marketing the product as the Cornerstones of Success™.



Unlike most of its competitors, RLS' Cornerstones of Success™ Assessment uses only 19 feedback questions to gather the data. That means minutes, not hours or days will be spent responding.

Brief, Informative, and Useful Reports

Each feedback recipient receives an eight- to ten-page report. Utilizing bar graphs, the report directly compares each of the eight Cornerstones of Success™ dimensions received from their:

- Self-perception questionnaire
- Manager
- Peer or customer
- Direct/matrix report

Side by side, this information is then compared to two other data points:

- Company norms – the average across your organization
- National norms – the average for nearly 7000 managers from about 27,000 feedback cycles

Truly a Breakthrough

In some instances feedback causes more smoke and friction than light and heat, largely due to inappropriate uses and bumbling implementations. RLS has learned from the mistakes of others, and takes care to leverage the power of the Cornerstones.

Confidentiality is critical, for both eliciting candor and protecting feedback providers' anonymity. RLS takes great care to combine at least three persons' feedback in each category (except managers) to ensure the feedback is meaningful and confidential.

Immediately, the recipient can compare this feedback, and identify areas of strength and focuses for future development and improvement. In addition, responders are given an opportunity to write narrative comments, which RLS edits for appropriate language before adding them to the report.

RLS also requires that the Cornerstones of Success™ reports go to the feedback recipients **only** at the end of a session in which a trained professional explains both how to understand the report and how to accept and reflect upon feedback to improve business performance.



How do we know these are THE Cornerstones of Success™?

Short answer: Exhaustive research, with more than 1,500 people in various kinds of organizations, identified these eight behavioral dimensions.

Long answer: A distinguished professor and his doctoral students spent a decade inside businesses and other organizations uncovering these dimensions. First, they asked people to write essays on the question, "What makes a good co-worker or a good manager a good person to work with?" They reviewed several hundred of those essays, from which they extracted the eight themes that are the Cornerstones.

Next, they asked several hundred additional people to write paragraphs on what good, bad, or indifferent behaviors in each of the eight Cornerstone dimensions looked and sounded like. Based on the thousands of answers they received, the researchers listed behaviors, which formed the basis of the Cornerstones of Success™ assessment.

This research, and the subsequent uses of the product, has proven successful in a variety of industries, ranging from financial services to pharmaceuticals to heavy manufacturing, among the Fortune 1000 and government agencies. Managers say "this thing simply works", and attribute major productivity gains and improved team performance to the efforts leaders made to improve their skills after receiving Cornerstones feedback.

Cornerstone supports individual and collective improvement of interpersonal impact skills for all of these uses:

- Individual coaching and high-potential development;
- Team-building and relationship improvement;
- Organization-wide 180-, 270-, and 360-degree feedback processes;
- Targeted group development of managerial and leadership competencies.

When there is so much time and productive energy squandered on interpersonal friction, it is no wonder that satisfied clients and organizational sponsors have attributed huge performance improvements and productivity increases to this product.

Keep your best people. Help your leaders motivate them and achieve great things by building upon the Cornerstones of Success™.



A Case Study

Regis Learning Solutions (RLS) used Cornerstones of Success™ with a group of high-potential managers in a branch of a global mass media conglomerate. The target audience included a dozen technical, editorial, production, artistic, and financial managers.

These highly competitive, success-driven men and women came to a year-long leadership development process sponsored by their employer and facilitated by RLS. They began with individual Cornerstones of Success™ assessments, and received their reports in March of 2004.

Ten monthly leadership development sessions followed, which focused on the group's need to improve its interpersonal impact skills.

The participants, their human resources manager, and their executives all made great strides during the course of the year. At year's end, they revisited their Cornerstones reports and the plans for individual development they documented in the beginning of the process.

All of the individual participants saw progress. The relationships among member of that team improved. Their ability to lead people in their departments improved. These changes directly improved their chances for success in the future.

They all came with high-level technical skills in their various areas of expertise. Yet, they all faced challenges when it came to relating to others in the workplace. Today, they are more confident, more skilled, and much more likely to be among those who succeed in their organization.

Seeing these strong results, national management endorsed the product and RLS for a nationwide role in management development. The branch invited RLS back for another year of management and leadership development initiatives. All in all, the Cornerstones of Success™ assessment provided a strong foundation for the future leaders of this corporation.