



**PEOPLE SKILLS**

## PEOPLE SKILLS VERSUS INTIMIDATION AND PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

### GOALS

1. Engender a sense of personal pride regarding the ability to think clearly about processes and outcomes, even though intimidation is apparent.
2. Encourage positive overt people skills that enhance effective healthcare attitudes and behaviors.
3. Identify researched gender-related discriminatory behaviors.
4. Reinforce the meaning of operant conditioning and effectively use this skill in nursing behaviors.
5. Contrast positive people skills with the negative influence of intimidation.
6. Encourage nurses to compassionately recognize personal intimidation and still perform with a positive application of people skills.
7. Provide a positive list of people skills that enhance the positive role of the nurse.
8. Recognize the overt and covert intimidation behaviors of all employees.
9. Know unintended personal negative intimidation nursing behaviors to help curtail their use with other individuals.
10. Recognition of passive-aggressive behavior as a response to intimidation.

### KEYWORD APPLICATION

1. Communication
2. Intimidation
3. Passive-Aggressive
4. Operant Behavioral Conditioning
5. Positive People Skills
6. Negative Intimidation

### INTRODUCTION

In my many years as a nurse, educator, and leader, I have learned a little bit about many things and a lot about a few *very important things*. As a part of the few very important things I have learned, I know that OVERT people skills are a great positive asset to lead and work with others. Your leadership ability to effectively use communication and conflict resolution skills will positively impact your personal life and professional nursing success as a leader!

I know this, also. Personal feelings of intimidation and passive-aggressive behavior between employers and employees (usually covert and sometimes unintended) are very real, with significant negative outcomes. Mainly, this negativity stifles effective communication and productive behaviors between employers and employees like an invisible cloud.

***Comparing positive people skills/behavior to negative intimidation and passive-aggressive behavior provides an intellectual dichotomy in human behavior. It gives a perfect reason to emphasize positive rather than negative behaviors.***

## DEFINITION OF PEOPLE SKILLS—A POSITIVE PEOPLE SKILL BEHAVIOR

People skills in nursing involve a pattern of positive behavior and behavioral interactions. It includes personal effectiveness, interaction skills, interviewing skills, and intercession skills. Positive communication ability is one of the most important leadership skills. It provides a unique and humane connection between people to receive needed information, provide support, and experience workplace productivity. The informed and intellectually astute nurse recognizes the implications of all types of communication (positive and negative) and knows the ramifications of all shared communication.

## RECOGNIZING A FEW PEOPLE SKILLS IN THE WORKPLACE

1. Learning a person's name—and be willing to address them by name at any time in the future.
2. Recognizing work well done—and be willing to acknowledge the positive contributions of work.
3. Accepting suggestions and opinions without negative feelings or negative statements.
4. Looking at a person and listening to a person without interruption.
5. Finding creative ways to use a person's abilities to enhance the goals of an organization.
6. Sending a written note of appreciation or complimenting another person for positive performance.
7. Responding to a written or email communication.
8. Listening without interruption and, then, verbalizing what you heard for validation or correcting.

## OPERANT BEHAVIORAL CONDITIONING—POSITIVE PEOPLE SKILLS IN THE WORKPLACE

Operant Behavioral Conditioning (a Behavioral Psychology/Behaviorism concept) includes positive reinforcement for positive behavior. By its very nature, nursing involves reaching out to others with positive aspects of hope, love, compassion, and understanding—which emulates positive behavior.

Because nurses are caring, it is not hard to give ourselves to elevate others. As human beings, nurses know what it feels like to receive compliments for a well-done job and how it feels to be ostracized, even though we have given our best! However, we sometimes forget as nursing leaders that *every* person within the work setting—including all employees and the employer—needs our verbal acknowledgment and approval for positive work efforts. Nurse leaders who give positive reinforcement to others of kind words spur *more and continued* positive behaviors by all other nurses. The key factor is to ensure the positive reinforcement is legitimate and specific to the experienced or observed behavior process, not just the final results—as per the latest findings of Yale University.

There is a reasonable belief that where the employee gives much to meet work standards, at least some positive attention is expected from the employer/administrator. The nurse employee's expected work ethic includes physical and mental work commitment, knowledge related to the work assignment, concern for others, and the willingness to do an exceptional job related to their job description. The employee's job success may or may not have much to do with the job's *hard work* given the workers' talents; however, it may be the ability and desire to be thorough and the fact the person loves the *personal rewards* from the work assignment. This committed employee might not ask for *more* money; however, they deserve positive recognition as their *reward*.

## **CORRELATION BETWEEN INTIMIDATION & PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR**

### Behaviors depicting intimidation:

Recognized signs of someone who is intimidated are as follows: (Note the correlation between passive-aggressive behaviors used by someone who is intimidated)

- Exhibits feelings of being afraid and a desire to flee or fight
- Experiences personal discouragement and timidity
- Avoids eye contact
- Uses dismissive body language--(A turning of the body away from a person when attempting to communicate)
- Never asks for advice
- Never questions, shows interest, or discusses a person's ideas
- Does not recommend or provide a person/employee with new opportunities
- Rejoices at a person's mistake—an "I told you so" attitude
- Criticizes and says lies about others behind their back
- Makes efforts to sabotage another person's work
- Threatens an employee's job or does not allow work opportunities
- Refuses to deal with or converse with an employed person
- Spreads rumors of failure or lack of leadership
- Divides and conquers by giving something of worth to another person
- Tries to find errors of behavior that are incongruent with policy
- Does not prepare or share policies or expectations about the job—verbally or as a job description
- Actively looks for job behaviors contrary to policy or expectations
- Uses passive-aggressive behaviors (see a list that follows)
- Does not respond to written or email communication
- Shows no interest in suggestions --- "We have always done it that way!"
- Language is dismissive, or communication does not occur

### Behaviors depicting passive-aggression:

Even though this behavior is not a distinct mental illness/disorder, the behaviors are seen in an intimidated person—and often are found in the academic definition(s) of intimidating behavior.

- Shows inaction when another positive action is more acceptable
- Negative attitude
- Shows passive resistance to being involved or participating in social and occupational situations
- Shows resentment and opposition to the demands of others
- Exhibits indirect expression of hostility
- Intentionally procrastinates and makes intentional mistakes to the demands of others

- Makes statements of feeling unappreciated or cheated
- Intentional and unintentional deadlines are missed

### **AN INTIMIDATED PERSON OFTEN EXHIBITS BOTH BEHAVIORS OF INTIMIDATION AND PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS.**

What does a nurse do with all this negativity? It makes the positive nursing role difficult! Understanding negative behaviors separate the intellectually informed nurse from the uniformed nurse. Recognizing negative behaviors gives the impetus to make nursing and administrative/leadership decisions. It also provides the overt and necessary information required for a specific nurse's job description or job placement. Negative behaviors challenge nursing compassion, a spirit of kindness, and leadership skills. As a nurse (particularly a nursing leader), never let another person's negative behavior become a part of the positive qualities of your nursing spirit!

### **GENDER COMPARISONS OF INTIMIDATION**

Gender-related intimidation tactics (especially in the workplace) are common. It also has been shown that isolation (ignoring and quiet "badmouthing" to others) are common forms of gender intimidation.

The following use of intimidating behaviors:

- Men are known to use more humiliation behaviors and physical violence than women.
- Women are known to use more bullying and harassment than men.

### **COUNTERING PERSONAL INTIMIDATION EFFORTS**

If you believe and there are signs that you intimidate someone (that is, a person or groups show signs of intimidation or passive-aggressive behavior toward you), find comfort in this: Someone/some group might be (probably is) telling you that you covertly know "your stuff" and are *doing a good job!*

It is amazing how others are often intimidated when they realize that you know what they do not or should know. Find comfort and strength in retaining your commitment to "knowing" what others do not know. Find a sense of pride that you have the fortitude, experience, and knowledge to be appropriately concerned and make appropriate recommendations known—regardless of the intimidating outcome experienced by others.

There is some satisfaction in identifying intimidating behaviors in other people, especially when they do not recognize the behavior in themselves. Effective nursing communication skills in working/dealing with these behaviors will help identify the observed behavior to the person doing the behavior. Just stating the behavior observed (and not judging) allows the person doing the intimidating, offensive behavior (and passive-aggressive behavior) to consider *their presented behavior*. The ability and extent

for that person doing the intimidation to introspect positively about their undesirable behavior(s) will help provide insight for all sorts of current and future decisions required of a nurse leader.

Perhaps an employee is afraid of losing their job by speaking up for a person's/group's healthcare needs. Another person's attempted and intentional intimidation to deter communication is a desperate attempt to bully the person into *surrendering personal or professional rights* to be involved in important aspects of a person, job, or community. The intentional effort(s) to intimidate another person is/are desperate, and the behavior is meant to tell the person to "Back Off!"

**The key: STUDY THE SITUATION, THEN SAY WHAT NEEDS TO BE SAID TO SUPPORT YOUR VALUES.**

## **RESOLUTION OF INTIMIDATION**

Now that you can recognize negative, intimidating behaviors in others, you, as a nurse, will refrain from exhibiting such negativity. An effective nurse continues to have the fortitude to appropriately challenge the existing power sources with better ideas, better solutions, and more appropriate behaviors with expected more positive outcomes for quality healthcare—despite the attempts of intimidation and passive-aggressive behavior witnessed in others!

Recognizing personal intimidation and passive-aggressive attempts by others is the first step to help resolve the situation. Then, acknowledge your unique individual abilities that might intimidate others (i.e., talents, education, good looks, intelligence). Jealousy is a common reason that could cause intimidation! It is a natural human behavior for some people to attempt to elevate themselves through the "put-down" of others—hence, the behavior of the intimidated person. Even if an employer does not say so, you know they are fortunate to have an employee, such as you, with such knowledge and ability!

Regardless of experiencing unfortunate intimidating behavior(s) and related passive-aggressive behaviors, continue to be the best in all you do. Continue to set an example of personal strength and source of superior knowledge and ability as a sign of personal integrity. Be an intelligent employer/employee/leader who seeks enriched skills to enhance the work of nursing. The winner will ultimately be a stable employee, regardless of intimidation efforts by others.

The known fact is that some employers see their leadership position as requiring employee compliance associated with their leadership intimidation of the employee. Employers often use leadership intimidation directed toward an employee to *control*. If you learn to recognize and understand the attempts to intimidate, your tolerance of such unfortunate intimidating attempts by others loses its negative impact and power to control.

## THE ULTIMATE LESSON LEARNED REGARDING POSITIVE PEOPLE SKILLS AND INTIMIDATION

A saying goes like this: You can only control yourself and not others. However--

- Knowing people skills make you and others successful. You, as a nurse, have an opportunity to perform those skills to make a positive difference in the lives of others and set an example for others to follow.
- Suppose you, as a nurse, *knowingly* demean others and use your knowledge and power to intimidate others. In that case, you, as a nurse, know the negative outcomes of such unkind behavior toward others.
- If you, as a nurse, become aware of someone's behavior toward you, indicating the other person is intimidated by you, recognize their weaknesses and retain *your* positive efforts and demeanor by trying to understand why their feelings of intimidation have occurred. Be kind and understanding. There is a reason for everything. However, you might not deter their intimidation feelings that are probably part of their personality.
- As a nurse, if you feel intimidated by others/someone else, recognize their inappropriate intimidation efforts toward you and find strength and confidence in retaining your appropriate personal knowledge and abilities.

Of course, if there is *anything worthy or of good report* in a person's behavior, seek after those qualities. Chances are, the nurse will not change destructive and negative, intimidating and passive-aggressive behaviors in others—it is usually a lifetime rewarded behavior that has proven successful for the person who attempts to intimidate.

*However, personal information and knowledge are empowering and enlightening to the human soul.* When we become knowledgeable about our cohorts' positive and negative behaviors, we can better understand and accept the person's quirks that probably cannot be easily changed. We might even start to pay more attention to the better part rather than the human imperfections of the person. And, who knows, we might learn to eventually like a person for just the way they are!

*"When you stop expecting people to be perfect, you can like them for who they are."  
("A Million Miles in a Thousand Years. What I Learned While Editing My Life." By Donald Miller)*

### REFERENCES:

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Mayo Clinic: Several Articles on Passive- Aggressive Behavior  
Intimidation: Understanding the Power and Control Wheel (YouTube)

**SUGGESTED READING FROM AUTHOR'S WEBSITE---[leadershippoweronline.com](http://leadershippoweronline.com)**

Communication Skills (Verbal and Nonverbal)

Behavioral Psychology/Behaviorism: A School Nurse and School Teacher Collaboration

Entropy: A Factor for Change

School Nurse: An Exceptional and Worthy Challenge

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