Frustration

Imagine that you’re in your car heading to the airport. The vacation you’ve waited for all year will begin in just two hours. Suddenly, your tire blows out. You pull over to the side of the road, jump out of the car, and open the trunk. Your dream becomes a nightmare when you see that your spare tire is flat. There’s no way to make it to the airport and catch your plane.

This situation is an example of frustration. Frustration is the feeling you get when events beyond your control keep you from reaching a goal. As you’re surely aware, frustration occurs in everyone’s life. Some frustrations are small, like jumping into the shower and finding no hot water. Others are much more meaningful, like losing an election for public office.

Frustration levels rise when we feel out of control and unable to reach our goals.

Frustration is almost always blamed on events we can’t control. Think about the flat tire example above. The frustration is the result of the flat tire. If you missed the plane because you overslept, you probably wouldn’t feel frustrated. You might be angry with yourself, but because you were at fault, you wouldn’t feel frustrated.

Frustration occurs throughout our lives in various forms, including the following:

- Financial frustration: You want to buy a new car, but you don’t earn enough to make the payments.
- Family frustration: No matter what you say or do, no one will help you clean up after dinner.
- Social frustration: You go to a concert with friends. Upon arriving, you find that the tickets are sold out.
- Career frustration: You’re in line for a promotion but you don’t receive it.
- Education frustration: You work hard on a paper and get only a “C” for your efforts.
- Political frustration: The candidate you favor isn’t elected.
- Athletic frustration: Your team loses the championship.

Another type of frustration is perhaps the most difficult to deal with: the general frustration you feel
when everything seems to be going wrong. You might know the feeling.

Gary’s roommate, Chuck, promised to wake him before he went to work. He didn’t, and now Gary was going to be late for his job interview. He got ready quickly and arrived half an hour late. Because he was late, the interview didn’t go well. He was sure he wasn’t going to get the job. Gary left the building in a foul mood. Things didn’t get much better when he stepped outside and found it was raining and he had no umbrella. Gary decided to take a bus, and he saw one coming. At least that was going okay. He ran to the corner, and as the bus arrived, it hit a puddle and splashed his new suit.

Almost all of us have had a day like Gary’s. Lots of little things and one big one went wrong. Gary is feeling general frustration. His insides are tied in a knot, and he thinks he can’t do anything to solve his problems.

Think about something you find frustrating in your life.

Aggression

One of the results of frustration is aggression, the need to strike out physically or verbally. The goal of aggression is to remove the obstacle that is causing the frustration. If there isn’t a clear obstacle that has caused the frustration, we sometimes strike out at whomever or whatever is around us.

Recall the example of the flat tire at the beginning of this assignment. Go back and read the example again. What is a typical way to show aggression in this situation? Why, kick the tire, of course. In this example, the aggression is aimed at the obstacle that caused the frustration.

Now read the example about Gary again. He’s suffering from general frustration, but he doesn’t have a tire to kick. He’ll return home and aim his aggression at his roommate. Not only will he blame Chuck for his being late, but Gary will probably blame him for everything that went wrong on a very bad day.

The relationship between frustration and aggression is predictable. An obstacle comes between a person and a goal and causes a feeling of frustration. To remove the obstacle and relieve the feeling of frustration, the person becomes aggressive. Sometimes the aggression is aimed at the obstacle that is causing the frustration. At other times, the aggression is aimed at any convenient target. When this happens, serious problems can occur.

Marian had just received bad news at work. She wasn’t going to get the pay raise she expected. She was sure her supervisor gave her a bad rating because she took some extra time at lunch and on her breaks. When she arrived home that evening, her mother called and asked Marian if she wanted to come over and help her hang new drapes. Marian snapped at her mother and said, “Can’t you do anything yourself? I don’t live there anymore, remember?” Then she hung up on her mother.

Marian didn’t handle her frustration very well. To her way of thinking, her supervisor was the obstacle that was keeping her from getting the raise. She couldn’t do anything about the obstacle, her supervisor. Instead, she took out her aggression on the next person she encountered, her mother.

Marian’s behavior points out two facts about aggression caused by frustration. First, we often take out aggression on a person other than the cause of the frustration. Second, the most likely person is one with whom we have a strong relationship. When frustration strikes, the targets for aggression will often be family and friends.

Does this mean that we don’t like our family and friends? No, not at all. The chief reason they become targets of our aggression is that they’re convenient. Aggression often follows closely on the heels of frustration, and because our family and friends are around us so often, they become targets for aggression.
We also become aggressive toward family and friends because of the strong relationships we have with them. At first, this doesn’t seem to make much sense. Wouldn’t family and friends be the last people to suffer our aggression? After all, we live with family and experience much enjoyment with family and friends.

We become aggressive with family and friends because our relationships can usually survive the strain. Family and friends are forgiving, understanding, and accepting. When we become aggressive toward them, they usually accept it. The actual person we feel is responsible for our frustration might not be so tolerant. Talking back to a supervisor at work can cause you to lose your job. Snapping at family members or friends will hurt their feelings, but we believe they will get over it.

Problems occur when aggression aimed at family and friends gets out of hand. A little aggression felt over a long period of time can damage a relationship forever. What’s worse, aggression can become physically violent, which is a very serious problem.

Aggression isn’t the only way to handle frustration. Other techniques make us feel just as satisfied and cause far fewer problems.

Dealing with Minor Frustrations

No matter what you do, there will be times when you become frustrated. By and large, your frustrations will usually be minor. The way you handle these frustrations will help determine your success.

Frustrations often result from simple situations:

- The alarm clock doesn’t go off.
- Traffic is heavy.
- The door to your car is frozen shut.
- The electricity goes off just before your favorite TV show.

Other frustrations are people problems:

- Your supervisor asks you to do a job you don’t like.
- The server in a restaurant spills water in your lap.
- Your date cancels at the last minute.

Situations such as these are frustrating, but anyone will admit they’re not very important.

How could you best handle these situations? There are several possible solutions, all of which help to relieve the feelings of frustration and aggression in an acceptable way.
Perform a physical activity. The most frequent way that people relieve their aggressions is through physical activity. Some people jog. Others clean the house, split wood, or wash the car. The physical activity serves as a substitute for actual aggression against people, as the following example demonstrates.

Joanie is a hospital aide. Her job can be very frustrating. So many things can go wrong and keep her from performing her job well. Instead of aiming her aggression at people, she keeps a slip of paper in her pocket. Whenever she becomes frustrated, she puts a check on the slip of paper. After work, when she goes to the gym to work out, Joanie takes the paper with her. After completing each exercise, Joanie crosses out one check on the piece of paper. In her mind, she solves her frustration through her exercise program while taking good care of her health.

Blow off steam. There are many ways to “blow off steam” without aiming your aggression at someone. Some common ways to blow off steam are slamming a door, shouting, and throwing something into the trash. Of course, you don’t want to do these things with people around. Instead, they should be private activities which no one else shares. The secret to blowing off steam is to find a harmless activity that reduces your aggression.

Rick works in the neighborhood print shop. Many things can be frustrating in a print shop, from customers who are in a hurry to machines that jam. Rick feels frustrations but has a secret for handling aggression. Each night before he goes home, Rick takes a package of paper from the shelf. Then, with no one else around, he drops the paper. It makes a satisfying whack when it hits the floor. Rick then returns the package of paper to the shelf and leaves the print shop and his aggressions behind.

Use positive self-talk. Remember positive self-talk? Earlier in this course, we discussed how it can help you to keep a positive attitude and be productive. Self-talk is also useful in reducing frustration and aggression. Self-talk works because frustration and aggression are both created in our minds, so we can “un-create” them. The following example shows how self-talk works to reduce frustration.

Stan is a shipping clerk who packages customer orders. The orders are delivered to him in a bin from the warehouse. Occasionally, the wrong items are delivered and Stan must go to the warehouse to exchange them.

Some of the other shipping clerks are frustrated with the warehouse workers. Stan, however, handles his frustration well. He uses positive self-talk, telling himself, “The workers in the warehouse are doing their best. They must fill many orders, and they sometimes make mistakes. We all make mistakes, so I can’t be angry with them. Getting the correct items from the warehouse is a task we share.”

Because of positive self-talk, Stan isn’t frustrated about his job. When he goes to the warehouse, he isn’t angry, and he treats the workers with respect. They like him because he doesn’t aim his aggressions at them. They always help him to exchange incorrect items and have begun to take extra care in filling his orders. His human relations skills are paying off.

Handling Major Frustrations

We’ve suggested ways to handle the little frustrations in life. But what does it take to handle the major frustrations? These frustrations include problems involving your career, your family, and your financial situation.

Take Control
A good way to handle major frustrations is by taking control of your life, setting goals, and working toward those goals, such as going back to school.

One solution is to gain control of your life. Remember, frustration is the result of situations that get out of control. For example, you might feel frustrated because you want a new job or a promotion and your education is keeping you back. Instead of feeling frustrated, begin taking steps to improve your education. Whenever an obstacle stands between you and your goal, think about what can be done to remove the obstacle. The following example shows how this can be done.

Heather was unhappy with her job in a fast-food restaurant. She was a good worker who wanted to progress to a supervisory position. Her problem was that she couldn’t qualify without a high school diploma. She was a single parent with a one-year-old son, so she couldn’t afford to return to school.

One day, a friend told Heather that she could finish high school by taking online courses. The idea sounded perfect to Heather, and she signed up for the program.

At first Heather felt frustrated. Her time was limited and she was tired when she got home from work. But she learned to set up a schedule so she could study in the morning before work. Heather made it a point to study every day and she worked hard on her tests. She couldn’t go out as often with her friends, but she decided this was a small price to pay to get control of her life. It took her almost two years, but Heather did finish the program, and she earned her diploma. It wasn’t long before Heather was promoted to shift supervisor. Soon she began thinking about taking some online business management courses.

Heather faced a situation that many people have. Some become frustrated that they didn’t finish high school and blame others. Heather didn’t blame anyone. Instead, she took control of her life by continuing her education. She worked hard and earned her high school diploma. She began building a better future for herself and her son.

Persevere

A second way to handle major frustrations is to persevere. Perseverance is the process of continuing to work at something until you reach your goal. You must be patient and not expect immediate results, as the following example demonstrates.

When she was little, Diane was in a car accident. Her legs were injured so that she had a difficult time walking. For many years, Diane felt frustrated because she could not play sports. She had a
dream, however, of learning to ski. She loved the snow and the mountains and pictured herself gliding through a winter wonderland.

She decided to make her dream a reality. One day at work, Diane joined some of her friends for a lunchtime walk. They were walking just a few blocks, but it was the farthest Diane had ever traveled on foot. She felt wonderful when she finished, but the next day, her legs were terribly sore. It took a few days for the pain to go away, and when it did, Diane took another walk. In a few months, she was able to walk over a mile.

Eventually Diane tackled her dream of skiing. She visited a ski area near her home and talked with an instructor. He gave her some exercises to practice and a DVD about skiing. She practiced the exercises for weeks and watched the DVD every day.

By February she was ready to take her first lesson. At first it was a disaster; Diane kept falling and became cold and wet. This was no winter wonderland. But she stuck with it. By the end of the day, Diane was able to get down the slope without falling once. It was a wonderful feeling, and she knew that she was on her way to fulfilling her dream.

Diane succeeded because of perseverance. She overcame her frustrations by working slowly toward her goal and by never giving up. It will be years before Diane skis as well as she would like. But with great perseverance, Diane will succeed and become a good skier.

Change Your Goals

A third way to handle major frustrations is to change your goals. If you realize that you simply can't achieve your goals, you should avoid frustration by changing them.

Changing goals doesn't make you a quitter. If you honestly realize that you can't reach your original goal, choose another that you think you can reach. The following example explains how one person did this.

Leo loved cars. As far back as he could remember, he was interested in cars. He enjoyed fixing cars, driving cars, and waxing cars. His dream was to be a race car driver.

There was one problem—Leo didn't see very well. His vision was okay for normal purposes, but it just wasn't good enough for fast driving. If he drove much over 60 miles an hour, Leo had a hard time focusing. He realized he was never going to be a race car driver. Instead of getting frustrated, Leo decided to become a race car mechanic. If he couldn't drive race cars, then he would learn to fix them. He worked hard at learning all about racing cars and their engines. He gained a good reputation and was invited to join a racing team. Eventually, he became the head mechanic. As part of the team, he got just as much of a thrill from winning as the driver.

Changing your goals is one effective way to deal with insurmountable obstacles and take advantage of new opportunities.
Leo learned an important lesson. If a goal you’ve set for yourself is impossible to reach, you shouldn’t let it ruin your life. Instead, you should pursue another goal that makes you feel just as good. Life is filled with opportunities. If you find that one goal is impossible to achieve, choose another goal rather than become frustrated.

Reflect and Respond

Think of a time when you aimed your aggression at a friend or family member. Did it make you feel better? Did it hurt your relationship?
Write about a time when you used aggression due to frustration and how you could have handled the situation better. Then write a way you can blow off steam without hurting other people.

Enter your response here.
Key Points

- Frustration is the feeling you get when events beyond your control keep you from reaching a goal.
- One of the results of frustration is aggression, the need to strike out physically or verbally. The goal of aggression is to remove the obstacle that is causing the frustration.
- Ways to deal with minor frustrations include physical activity, using positive self-talk, and blowing off steam.
- Good ways to handle major frustrations are perseverance, taking control of your life, and setting goals and working toward them.
Getting Time on Your Side

People who live satisfying lives and pursue successful careers always seem busy. They accomplish much and yet never appear to be rushed. Their days are filled with activity. At the end of a day, they know they have accomplished something meaningful. What is the secret to their success?

There’s no secret at all. These people know how to use their time well. They’ve made time their friend and have organized their lives so that little or no time is wasted. In other words, time is on their side. To achieve success you must learn how to get time on your side, also. As you’ll see, learning how to use time wisely isn’t very difficult. The hardest part will be making a commitment to be more efficient.

Does this mean that you’ll be a “slave to time”? Not at all. In fact, once you get time on your side, you’ll have more freedom. You won’t find yourself rushing, arriving late for appointments, or apologizing for being late. Instead, you’ll be more efficient because you’ll reach your goals without wasting time. You’ll be more productive, and you’ll get along with others more easily. They’ll know that you respect them because you know how important their time is.

Planning Your Day

The first step to getting time on your side is planning. You should plan your day using the available time to accomplish your tasks. To devise a plan, begin with a time analysis of your work schedule. Performing a time analysis is simple. Just list the different tasks you perform and indicate when you do them.

PAT’S DAY

The schedule below shows a typical workday for Pat. He has a full-time job and is taking a course on his own to learn about computers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>Get up, shower, shave, and so on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>Have breakfast and read the news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30</td>
<td>Leave for work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:55</td>
<td>Arrive at work and punch in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45</td>
<td>Return to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00</td>
<td>Leave work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:20</td>
<td>Stop at the mall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>Arrive home and begin dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>Eat and clean up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30</td>
<td>Watch TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Go to bed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Look at Pat's schedule. Is it a good one? You can't really answer this question without knowing more about Pat. But suppose Pat found that he wasn't finishing his assignments on time. What could he do?

Well, one thing might be to study earlier. As the schedule indicates, Pat is studying late at night. Perhaps if he studied earlier, he would be more awake and could study better. Another possibility is for Pat to study longer. If he started at 7:30 instead of 10:30, he would have more time to study if he needed it. Also, he could relax before bedtime by watching TV.

Once you complete your time analysis, you must decide if you're spending your time as productively as you can. Building a daily schedule reveals how you're spending your time. It also gives you a chance to decide if you should make changes. A schedule helps you determine if you're wasting time or spending too much or too little time on certain activities.

### Organizing Longer Time Periods

Along with arranging your daily schedule, you should organize longer periods of time, such as a week or a month. When you do this, you won't have as much detail as in a daily schedule. Your goal is to organize the important tasks you must complete. This will help you remember important tasks so you can schedule enough time to complete them.

Maria didn't write down everything she does during the week. She omitted many things she does every day, such as go to work, eat lunch, come home after school, and so on. Her list includes only important things she might otherwise forget.

Notice that Maria has planned a number of important things for Saturday and Sunday. This is a good idea because most people waste a great deal of time on weekends. She's going to bake cookies, read, study, and wash the car. These are the kinds of things that people sometimes put off and never get done. Because Maria has included them on her weekly schedule, it's likely that she'll do them.

Here's a good tip for organizing your schedule. If you have a major event or long-term goal in the future, such as taking a test or going on vacation, don't include just that event on your schedule. Consider the short-term goals you must achieve to reach the long-term goal. For example, if you have a test a month from today, you should decide how much you want to study each week. Then when you make your schedule, include these short-term goals. By spreading your study time over four weeks, you won't have to cram at the last minute.
Showing up and Being on Time

Whether you “punch a clock” or are salaried in the corporate world, your employer expects that you put in a full day’s work for a full day’s pay.

Take a look at the title for this section. It states the one rule of business that’s more important than any other: Show up and be on time. Everything else you do is of secondary importance. If you aren’t at work, then you can’t do a good job. And if you arrive at work late, you’ll hurt both your productivity and your reputation as a worker. Naturally, there are sometimes good reasons for not showing up at work or for arriving late. Serious illness, family considerations, personal tragedies, or important matters that can’t be handled except during your normal working hours are a few acceptable excuses. Employers are aware of these problems and will make exceptions for legitimate excuses. But as a rule, your employer will be very annoyed if you miss work or show up late.

Why is being absent or late such a problem? There are several reasons, and all of them are important.

Being late or absent can cause your work to fall behind. As we mentioned in the previous study unit, each employee is expected to carry his or her own weight. When you’re late or absent, the activities you perform or the products you manufacture might not get completed. The following example shows what we mean.

Michelle operates a computer that prints forms. One Monday morning, she decided that she was just too tired to come to work on time. She slept in and showed up for work at noon. Her boss was furious because she didn’t have a very good excuse. Michelle’s being late meant that the job she was working on wouldn’t be done that day. Her boss had promised the customer that the job would be finished on Monday. Now the customer would be angry and might not pay for the job. The customer would also take her business elsewhere in the future. Because Michelle slept in on Monday, her employer suffered.

Being late or absent means that other people who depend on you can’t finish their work. As you now know, team productivity depends on individual productivity. When you complete your work, others who depend on you can finish theirs on schedule. When you’re late or absent, other people are held up and can’t do their work, as the following example shows.

Tito works in a factory that ships automotive parts. His job is to move the parts from the warehouse to the packaging line. All the workers on the packaging line depend on Tito for the parts they need to fill orders.
Almost every morning, Tito gets to work at 7:40. His shift starts at 7:30. All the other workers are supposed to start at 8:00. But because Tito is 10 minutes late, some of them can't begin working on time because they need parts from the warehouse.

Tito makes the people on the packaging line miss their daily performance goals. Even though they start on time, without the right parts, they can't fill orders. Tito's tardiness has caused everyone's productivity to suffer.

Being late or absent might force other people to do your work. In some cases, an employee's work is so important that someone else must do it if the employee is late or absent. This means the workload of other people increases, which isn't very fair. The following example indicates why this is a problem.

Judy works in a chemical plant. She and two coworkers deliver samples from different work stations in the plant to the lab where they're tested. Her job is very important because the testing can tell if the chemicals made at the plant are safe.

One afternoon, Judy went to lunch with some friends. They were having a good time and Judy didn't want to leave. She decided that she would just be an hour late going back to work.

Because she was late for work, her two coworkers had to work extra hard to deliver the samples to the lab. They had to do their own work and Judy's, because you just can't shut a chemical plant down. The tests still had to be run, but only two people were available to do the work of three. It was very difficult for her coworkers.

Being needlessly late or absent will damage your relationship with your coworkers and supervisor. Think about the examples we've just discussed. How do you think the coworkers or supervisors will feel about the people being late or absent? Quite likely they will be angry, and their relationships with the thoughtless employees will be damaged. This is perhaps the greatest problem with being late or absent: people will develop a negative attitude toward you.

When you're needlessly late or absent, you're sending a message to people that you believe you're more important than they are. You're also suggesting that you don't have to follow the same rules as everyone else. In effect, you're saying that you're a special case and that everyone else is just ordinary. No one will appreciate getting this message.

The ultimate cost of being late or absent is losing your job. If you're often late or absent, your employer will have to replace you. And because of your poor performance, you won't get a good recommendation. Therefore, you'll have a hard time finding a new job. The following example is a story about how dreadful this can be.

Jake is everyone's good buddy. He's a pleasant young man who is always quick with a joke. If the gang wants to go out after work, Jake is the first in line to join them. And as you may have guessed, Jake is always the last to leave a party.

The problem is that Jake's personal life is affecting his work. He often has a hard time getting up, so he's frequently late for work. Also, he misses at least one day each month. Jake's supervisor has spoken with him, and Jake has promised to do better. Within a few weeks, however, Jake goes back to his old habits.

Recently, business has been bad for Jake's company. It looks like they will have to lay off some workers. When the supervisors met to decide who would be cut, they looked first at who was late or absent. Jake's name was at the top of the list, so he was the first one to lose his job.

Jake has lost more than his job; he has also lost his reputation. And it's unlikely that his supervisor will give him a recommendation for a new job. Unless Jake changes his ways, he'll have a very limited future.
Breaking Bad Habits

The pattern of being late or absent can be broken. The following are some suggestions for breaking bad work habits.

**Adopt a new “on time” attitude.** Use positive self-talk to convince yourself that being on time is important to your career and to your relationships. Put yourself in the place of your friends, family, coworkers, and supervisor. How would you feel if one of them was often late or absent? The following example might help you understand this feeling.

Al promised to pick up his daughter Caitlin from school one afternoon. It was near Christmas, so they were going to go shopping for family gifts. As he often did, Al waited until the last minute before picking up Caitlin. On the way, he decided to get gas. There were a few cars in line ahead of him, and it took longer than he expected. By now, traffic was getting heavy because of school buses and people getting out of work. It took him almost an hour to get to Caitlin’s school.

When he arrived at school, Caitlin was standing outside in the cold with her teacher. Tears were in her eyes and she was shivering from the cold. Her teacher told Al that Caitlin had stood out in the cold for more than an hour waiting for him. She didn’t want to come inside because she might miss him.

Al felt terrible. He had no excuse for being late. He apologized to Caitlin and her teacher for his thoughtlessness. He also promised them both that he would always do his best to be on time.

**Plan your time better.** At the beginning of this section, we discussed how you can plan your daily and weekly schedules. Making a schedule will help you break the lateness habit because you won’t be surprised by events you’ve forgotten about. It also lets you see “the big picture”; that is, you’ll be able to see everything you’ve planned for a day, week, or even a month. Seeing the big picture lets you arrange enough time between events so that you don’t have to be late. The following example shows how one woman broke her lateness habit by arranging her schedule better.

Roberta was sick and tired of always hurrying. Her life seemed to be one rush after another. She wanted to get it under control, so she decided to keep a schedule. At first, Roberta had a hard time. She would write things down, but then she ignored her schedule.

Within a few days, however, seeing the schedule began to have an effect. She didn’t forget her appointments and was able to get almost everything done on time. She wasn’t rushing so much and began to enjoy the relaxation she felt from arriving at appointments ahead of time.

**Be realistic about how long something will take.** Part of the problem faced by people who are often late or absent is that they’re not good at estimating how long a task will take. They might think, “Oh, we’re only 15 minutes away,” when in fact the actual time is closer to 30 minutes. Or, they might say, “I can have this for you on Friday,” when it realistically won’t be done until Monday. As this example
shows, if you estimate time badly, you can find yourself in a heap of trouble.

Chet really wanted to get to the football game on time. He figured it would take him at least three hours to get there. Kickoff was at 11:00, so he got up at 7:30.

It took Chet longer than expected to get ready, and he didn’t leave the house until 8:30. “No problem,” he said to himself, “I can just drive a little faster. I might even have 10 minutes to stop and get some breakfast.”

Chet stopped at the local diner for breakfast and met some friends. After eating, he stayed and talked for almost 20 minutes. Now he was really late. When he reached the interstate, he drove faster than he should have to make up the lost time. It wasn’t long before a trooper pulled him over for speeding. The trooper took his time writing Chet’s ticket and followed with a lecture about speeding. It looked like Chet would be lucky to get to the game by halftime.

If You Really Must Be Late or Absent

As already mentioned, there are good reasons for being late or absent. The following are some guidelines that will help you decide if your reason for staying home or being late is a good one.

Acceptable reasons for staying home from work:

- You’re so sick or injured that you won’t be able to perform your job.
- Your illness can be transmitted to other people.
- Traveling to work would be dangerous.
- Your emotional state is so bad that you won’t be able to perform your job.
- There has been a serious illness, injury, or emergency in your family and you must be a caregiver.
- There has been a death in your immediate family.
- An uncontrollable situation occurs, such as bad weather, a disaster or emergency, or an automobile breakdown.

Acceptable reasons for being late for work:

- There’s a personal or legal situation you must handle during regular business hours.
- There’s routine health or medical care that you must handle during regular business hours.
- You encounter unexpected traffic problems, such as a road closure or bad accident.

Note: Always check your company policy about lateness and absences.

When you have an acceptable reason for being absent from work, you should handle the situation professionally using the following steps.

1. First, call in and explain your situation to your supervisor. If you can’t reach your supervisor, then be sure to contact the person responsible for informing him or her. Let your supervisor know what the problem is and why it’s a good idea to stay home.
2. Tell your supervisor when you expect to return to work. Remember that you’re an important part of a team. When you’re away from work, special arrangements must be made to handle your workload. As a courtesy to your supervisor and your coworkers, you should let them know when you’ll return. If you expect to be out for more than one day, call in to let your supervisor know how you’re recovering.
3. Don’t use a sick day for entertainment or recreation. Imagine how your supervisor might feel if he or she sees you shopping or fishing after you’ve called in sick. If you’re too sick to go to work, then you’re too sick to do other things. The best advice is to stay home.
4. When you return, try extra hard to make up any work that was missed because of your illness. Even if you have the best excuse in the world for missing work, your absence caused difficulties for your supervisor or coworkers. To show that you understand this, work extra hard when you return. Show that you want to get things flowing smoothly again. By working hard, you’ll also show
Reflect and Respond

Think about a friend or coworker who is often late or absent. How has this bad habit hurt the person's career or relationships?
Think about a typical day—maybe even today. Write down the time you wake up and what you must do to get ready. Then repeat the process until you’ve listed everything you do during the day. When you’re finished, you can analyze how productively you’re scheduling your time.

Enter your response here.
Key Points

- Being organized and learning how to use time wisely will help you have more free time.
- Plan your day using the available time to accomplish your tasks.
- The one rule of business that's more important than any other is to show up and be on time.
- The pattern of being late or absent can be broken through a change in attitude, better planning, and realistic estimation of time.
Four Common Human Relations Mistakes

Up to this point, you’ve focused on ways you can improve your human relations skills. Now it’s time to prepare you for some problems you might encounter in dealing with people. These problems are really human relations mistakes. And like many other mistakes, if you’re aware of them, you can learn to avoid them.

Failing to Listen

We’ve stressed how important listening is to getting along with people. It’s one of the foundations of human relations. It makes sense, then, that not listening well is a major human relations mistake. There are several ways that people fail to listen.

**Not giving other people a chance to talk.** You do this by talking too much yourself, interrupting the other speaker, or by simply ignoring the other speaker. In the worst cases, you bully the other speaker or shout him or her down. No matter how you do it, if you don’t give the other person a chance to speak, you’ll never be able to listen. The following example focuses on a poor listener.

Everyone knows Tina is a talker. When she meets you, she starts talking when she’s about 10 feet away. If Tina sees you talking to someone else at the supermarket, she interrupts the conversation and begins a new conversation. And if you discuss a problem with Tina, it isn’t long before she has changed the discussion to her problem or a similar problem she has heard about.

Tina is so good at talking that she never listens. She’s attractive and a nice person, but she has few friends. People just don’t want to be around her because it always seems like “The Tina Show.” Tina has made communication a one-way street and expects people to listen to her. She doesn’t understand that other people expect her to listen too if their relationship is going to continue.

**Letting someone talk without paying attention.** You might look away or think about something else when the person is talking. The next example is about a man who’s very good at not paying attention.

Marvin works for an office cleaning service. He and his coworkers come into businesses at the end of the day and clean up. His supervisor gives the crew directions at the beginning of the shift and then lets them do their jobs. The supervisor comes back at the end of the shift to check on their work.

The problem is that Marvin never pays attention to his supervisor. When the supervisor is talking, Marvin is looking at the women leaving the office building. This means that Marvin’s coworkers must tell him what to do later that evening. Marvin’s behavior annoys his coworkers and his supervisor, who’s also aware of the problem.

This isn’t Marvin’s only communication problem. He also has the habit of letting people talk, ignoring what they say, and then starting a new conversation. A coworker might comment, “Did you see the football game last night?” A typical Marvin answer might be, “No. I went to the gym and worked out. Did I tell you I’m lifting 200 pounds now?”
Marvin’s inability to listen is hurting his relationships with other people. It’s also damaging his chances for success in his job. His problem isn’t as great as Tina’s, but it isn’t much better. Marvin’s friends and coworkers feel frustrated because they’re unable to communicate with him. They show their frustration by becoming angry with Marvin or by ignoring him.

**Paying attention to what people say but misinterpreting the message.** This is the most common listening problem. Most people don’t even know they’re doing it. But as you’ll see in the following example, it’s still a problem.

Cindy is a dental assistant who tries very hard at work to do a good job. Her problem is that she just seems to get things mixed up. When the dentist asks her to get the file for Mr. Smith, she might come back with Mr. Miller’s file. If she has to make an appointment for a patient, she sometimes puts down the wrong date or time.

Cindy has the same problem in her personal life. Cindy is frequently late when she must meet her friends. She often misunderstands what they say and gives people the impression that she isn’t very smart.

Cindy’s problem is that she confuses herself. She’s so eager to please the dentist that when he tells her what to do, she starts thinking about what she should do instead of listening until he has finished. She gets only half the job done or does it only half right. With her friends, Cindy has a similar problem. When they make plans, Cindy starts thinking about what they will do instead of listening. She often misunderstands what they say or misinterprets their meaning.

When it’s important that you understand someone, listen carefully to what they say. Look at people when they’re speaking and repeat their words to yourself. Don’t begin thinking about your answer or what you should do until the person has finished speaking.

**Misjudging Others’ Abilities**

Another major human relations mistake is misjudging other people’s abilities. Why is this such a problem? Because when you misjudge someone’s abilities, it shows a lack of respect for the person.

Respect means more than saying nice things about people. It means that you truly believe they’re capable, that their opinions matter, and that their lives have value. A great human relations mistake, then, is misjudging other peoples’ abilities. The following example shows how it can happen.

Suzie and Marty answer phones and take orders at a business. They get a bonus for the number of orders they take. Suzie thinks Marty works too slowly and wastes time with customers. She works very quickly and handles 20 percent more calls than Marty. Marty spends a little extra time with each customer. After he takes the order, he repeats all the information to the customer. He also tells
the customer any items that are on sale.

At the end of the year, Suzie expects a large bonus. She thinks Marty will get no bonus at all because he wastes so much time. She's surprised to learn that Marty's bonus is larger than hers. She has taken more orders, but Marty has made fewer mistakes. He has almost no returned orders. Marty's customers buy more items that are on sale, and these items have extra bonuses. Suzie decides that she'll talk to Marty and learn how he works so accurately.

Suzie made the mistake of thinking her method was the only way to do things. She misjudged Marty's abilities because he had a different style of working. Fortunately, she was smart enough to learn from her mistake and change her attitude about Marty and his method.

Don't be hasty to think that other people aren't capable or are doing things the wrong way. Give them a chance to demonstrate their abilities. If you have a chance, discuss why they do things a certain way. You might be surprised at their abilities.

Failing to Accept Responsibility for Mistakes

We all make mistakes. It's part of life. Making mistakes is also part of learning how to do things better. Successful people are those who can look at their mistakes honestly, correct the situation that caused the mistake, and improve their productivity as a result. People who can't admit they made a mistake pay a great price.

Trudy was a receptionist in an office. Her work was okay but not great because she spent more time talking to her coworkers than doing her job. Then, because she wasted so much time, she had to rush to get her work done and made lots of mistakes. Whenever this happened, she would blame other people in the office.

It wasn't long before Trudy's coworkers would have nothing to do with her. They knew that if she made a mistake, she would blame one of them. Trudy's boss wasn't happy with her, either. The boss knew that even though Trudy blamed other people, she was at fault.

When it came time for raises, Trudy didn't get one. She also didn't get a promotion she wanted. Because she was unable to accept responsibility for her mistakes, Trudy was losing her friends and didn't have a very good future in her job.

Now let's look at another example.

Howie had a tough time growing up. His parents split up and he got shuffled from relative to relative. He hated school, and the day he turned 16, he dropped out and got a job in a service station.

The job was good for Howie. He learned a lot about cars and became a top-notch mechanic. The owners of the service station liked Howie, and the customers thought he was wonderful. But as the years passed, Howie regretted not having finished high school. He admitted to himself that quitting was a mistake.

Instead of just complaining about how rotten his high school was, Howie began working toward his high school diploma. It took him several years and a great deal of effort. He didn't have very good study skills, but his desire was strong. Eventually, he earned his diploma. Within a few weeks, the owners of the service station decided to send him to a special training school. When he returned, he would be the head mechanic.

Trudy and Howie handled their problems very differently. Trudy blamed other people and never got control of her life. Howie recognized that he had made a mistake by not finishing school. He didn't blame his mistake on unfortunate childhood experiences. It was his problem and he would have to solve it. He took control of his life and was able to change for the better because he accepted responsibility.
for a decision he had made a long time ago.

Don’t get a bad attitude if you make a mistake. Admit that you were wrong and find out how you can change the situation. People will respect you for being responsible.

Lacking Self-Motivation

Motivation is the incentive that begins and sustains the things we do. Sometimes motivation can be provided by another person. A coach can motivate a team so they play better. A supervisor can motivate workers to do a better job. These are examples of external motivation.

Internal motivation is motivation we provide ourselves. It usually takes the form of positive self-talk that pushes us to succeed. Successful people almost always have very high self-motivation. They’re successful because they can do their best even if no one else is around or encouraging them to work harder. The following example shows how much of a difference being self-motivated can make.

Cisco and Ginny inspect furniture before it’s shipped to customers. Their supervisor, Edie, works with them for an hour in the morning and again in the afternoon.

When Edie is with them, both Cisco and Ginny do a good job. For the rest of the day, Cisco takes it easy and doesn’t look very closely at the furniture he ships. “The customers will never notice a small scratch,” he tells Ginny. Cisco isn’t very motivated when he isn’t being supervised.

Ginny works just as hard when Edie is gone as when she’s there. Ginny is motivated to do her job as well as she can whether or not a supervisor is around. She has a strong sense of responsibility and has high internal motivation.

At the end of the year, the owners of the furniture company give an award to the employee with the best performance. This year, Ginny won the award. The owners said that company records showed that the furniture Ginny shipped was in good shape and was almost always accepted by their customers. They commended her for her motivation, as they gave her the award and a bonus.

When you’re self-motivated, you’re able to overcome the problems you encounter in everyday life. You rarely suffer from “burnout,” and if you have a bad day, you don’t blame other people. Instead, you bounce back the next day and continue to do your best.

Learn to motivate yourself. Use positive self-talk to keep yourself “up” so you always do your best.

Dealing with Injured Relationships

No matter how hard we try, there are times when our relationships are damaged. Good human relations skills will make it less likely that this may occur, but nothing can eliminate the risk completely. It’s therefore important to learn how to handle injured relationships so they can be restored.

Identifying Injured Relationships

The first step in dealing with injured relationships is to recognize them. The following list includes several clues that can help you know when a relationship has been damaged.

- You have a strange feeling of discomfort with the other person. One of the first signs of a damaged relationship is a feeling you can’t put your finger on. You know something is wrong, but you just can’t describe it clearly. You know it isn’t good, but you’re not sure it’s bad. This is a warning signal. It doesn’t necessarily mean you should begin to repair your relationship with the person as soon as you get this feeling. You should pay attention, however, so your relationship doesn’t become worse.
• You find yourself behaving differently toward the other person. Relationships affect our behavior. If you find that you're behaving differently toward a person, it's possible that your relationship has been injured.
• The other person in the relationship behaves differently toward you. Think about the situation we just described. Imagine that the other person in the relationship suddenly decided not to have coffee with you anymore. How would you feel? The feeling probably wouldn't be good.
• Other people comment that something isn't right between you and the other person in the relationship. Sometimes the people sharing a relationship aren't very good at noticing that something is wrong. This happens when you're too close to the situation. For example, parents sometimes don't notice that their children are growing up. They see the children every day and don't recognize the small changes that are happening. When a friend or relative comes along and comments, “My, how your son has grown,” the parents notice the changes. Relationships can become injured in the same way. Close friends might slowly drift apart because of a small problem. They might never notice the change in their relationship. When someone else asks whether something is wrong between the friends, they notice the problem themselves.

You've known someone for about five years. Once a week, you meet for coffee, sometimes at your house and sometimes at hers. One day, you don't feel like having coffee with the person anymore. You might say that you're too busy or make another excuse. Deep down inside, however, it's likely that your relationship with the person has developed a problem.

The four signals listed here can let you know that your relationship has been injured. Relationships don't heal themselves, however. You must make the effort to put things right. This is when good human relations skills become useful.

Repairing Relationships

Decide if the Relationship Is Worth Saving

Assume for a minute that one of your relationships has been damaged. It doesn't matter very much how it happened. The first step to repairing the relationship is to decide that it's worth saving. Everything else must follow this decision. If you don't think the relationship is worth saving, your efforts probably won't restore it.

How do you decide that a relationship is worth saving? One way is to think about what you and the other person gain from the relationship. Upon consideration, you might find that the relationship offers you many worthwhile rewards.

Another way is to think about how the damaged relationship affects other people you know. You might be surprised at how one relationship affects others. Consider the following example.

Adam and Cory had been friends for years. At a party, Adam said something that made Cory angry.
Almost two weeks later, things were still not right with them.

The problem was also affecting their other relationships. Adam and Cory played softball on the same team, and their damaged relationship was affecting the whole team. Their wives were also good friends and wished Adam and Cory would straighten things out. Adam decided that his relationship with Cory was worth saving. He would give Cory a call to see if they could work things out.

**Look at the Problem from the Other Person's Point of View**

An important step to saving a relationship is to look at the problem from the other person's point of view. This is called “putting yourself in their shoes.” When you approach a problem this way, you might view it differently. The following example shows how this happens.

Laverne had worked at the same place for five years. She was getting bored, so she applied for a job at a different company. She was disappointed when she didn't get it. Then she heard that her friend Judy had gotten the job. She was furious with Judy and stopped speaking with her.

After a few weeks, Laverne thought about the situation from Judy's point of view. Judy didn't have a job at all and really needed one. Laverne was also sure that Judy didn't know that she had applied for the job. There was no reason for her to be angry with Judy, so she gave her a call and apologized. Judy was happy that Laverne called, and they decided to get together for lunch that Saturday.

**Communicate Honestly and Openly**

Communicating honestly and openly is another important step in saving a damaged relationship. Let the other person know how you feel, and ask the person to be open with you also. Focus on the issue that damaged the relationship and try to put it behind you. The following example is a continuation of the situation between Laverne and Judy that we just presented.

When Laverne and Judy met for lunch on Saturday, things were a little tense at first. Neither of them felt comfortable, so they made small talk about their friends and family. Then Judy said, “Laverne, I know how angry you must be about my getting the job. I never knew that you had applied, and I really needed a job badly. I'd been out of work for six months. Things were getting desperate.”

Laverne felt awful and answered, “I feel terrible about this. It was thoughtless of me to become angry with you. I guess I was annoyed that I didn't get the job. When I heard you had been hired, I got mad and blamed you. It's not your fault, and honestly, I knew you needed the job. I'm sorry, and I hope we can patch things up.”

**Change the Behavior that Caused the Problem**

Sometimes the preceding steps are all you need to repair a relationship. This is true when there has been a misunderstanding between the people involved. There are some situations, however, in which a fourth step is necessary: changing the behavior that caused the problem. This step is required when the behavior of one of the people sharing the relationship is the cause of the problem.

Let's consider the problem between Adam and Cory that we discussed earlier.

Adam said something at a party that annoyed Cory. Their relationship was damaged, but Adam followed the first three steps and more or less straightened things out. He also took a good look at his behavior at the party.

Adam realized that he had gotten carried away when poking fun at Cory. Adam was known for his sense of humor, but in this case, he wasn't alert to Cory's attitude. In the future, he would be more
sensitive to other people's feelings. It was okay to joke with other people, but only if they also thought it was funny.

Think about what Adam has done. To repair his relationship with Cory, he has admitted that he made a mistake. This is a critical decision. By accepting responsibility for his actions, Adam has made it easier to rebuild his relationship with Cory. There's nothing wrong with admitting a mistake and then trying to correct it. This ability will help Adam get along better with his family and friends. It will also make success more likely in his job.

Reflect and Respond

Think about a time when one of your relationships was damaged. How did you discover there was a problem?
Read the scenario below about a broken relationship and then give an idea for how to fix the relationship.

Tom is a big joker. One day, while sitting at the lunch table with several coworkers, he made a joke about the old clothes that his coworker, John, was wearing. John didn’t say anything at the time, but it really bothered him. He was having financial difficulties and couldn’t afford new clothes. He started to eat lunch by himself, but it really bothered him because he really enjoyed eating lunch with his coworkers.

1. How should John address the situation?

2. By addressing the situation, what do you think will happen?

Enter your response here.
Key Points

- The four most common human relations mistakes are (1) failing to listen, (2) misjudging others’ abilities, (3) failing to accept responsibility for mistakes, and (4) lacking self-motivation.
- Motivation is the incentive that begins and sustains the things we do.
- Internal motivation is motivation we provide ourselves.
- External motivation is provided by another person.
- Relationships can be damaged by thoughtless behavior and misunderstandings.
- Relationships can be repaired by considering the other person’s point of view, changing problematic behavior, and communicating openly and honestly.
Wouldn't it be nice if our relationships, our careers, and our lives in general always moved in a positive direction? Unfortunately, this isn't the case. Life isn't a one-way elevator that always goes up. To succeed, we must learn to get through times when things aren't going well.

Plateau Periods

Many aspects of life constantly change. Your education, career, and relationships, for example, change as time goes by. The change is usually positive, but there are times when nothing seems to happen. These times are called plateau periods. The word plateau comes from geology and describes a steep mountain with a flat or level top. Thus, a plateau period can be defined as a time when there’s little growth or development (leveling-off) in certain life processes.

Almost everyone has experienced plateau periods. The following examples show three common plateau situations.

Marsha was bored with her job. She had worked for the same company for three years now and had moved up quickly from job to job. Recently, she had been stuck in the same job for six months. She wondered if she should start looking for new work.

Paul had dated Nicole for almost a year. At first, their relationship was fun and exciting. They just couldn’t spend enough time together, and they did many fun things. Then the excitement died down. Paul and Nicole began staying home on Friday nights instead of going out with friends. In general, their life together seemed dull.

Harriet closed her book and stared out the window. Frankly, she was bored. She had begun taking an online course in business a few months ago. When she began, she had studied hard and had done well. Now, with just a few lessons left, she had slowed down. She wanted to be done with the course so she could get her promotion and spend more time with her friends.

These three examples show plateau periods. Plateaus aren’t necessarily bad; they’re a normal part of growth or change. It’s difficult, however, for the people on the plateau to understand what’s happening. Before they can deal with the plateau, they must take a look at their situation and understand what’s taking place.

- Marsha was frustrated because she hadn’t been promoted for six months. She didn’t realize that as she climbed the career ladder it would take longer to move up. Although she worked hard and advanced quickly when she first started, promotion would come more slowly at higher levels. There’s nothing wrong with Marsha or her current job. Her situation has changed and she must learn to be patient.
- Paul faces a different problem in his relationship with Nicole. They have settled into the “comfortable” stage. The excitement of a new relationship has passed, and they’re learning to share more of their lives with one another. Later in this study unit, we’ll discuss how they might move on to the next stage of their relationship.
- Harriet faces a problem almost every student has experienced. She has worked hard and has come close to her goal. Now she’s facing what runners call “the wall,” a loss of mental energy as they near the end of the race. Harriet has the ability to finish the course and succeed. What she must do is find ways to regain the enthusiasm and determination that inspired her in the first place.
Handling Plateau Periods

Many aspects of life are processes. That is, they’re always changing. Life processes have hills, valleys, and plateau periods. Sometimes matters go very well and we’re at the top of the hill of life. At other times we feel that we’re down in a valley. During plateau periods, things seem to stall or slow down. Think of a plateau as a time of rebuilding. Processes require energy, and plateaus are times when you can restore your energy. Instead of thinking of plateaus as dead ends, take advantage of them to gather your strength. Then, when it comes time to move uphill and make a new push to improve your relationships, career, or education, you’ll have the necessary strength to succeed.

Be Patient

When you face a plateau period, avoid being frustrated. Sometimes you might not even know what has come between you and your goal. Luckily, the obstacle in a plateau is almost always temporary. One strategy, then, for dealing with plateau periods is patience. Marsha’s situation we discussed earlier shows how important patience is.

Instead of looking for a new job, Marsha decided to talk it over with her supervisor. He told her that he hoped she would stick it out. She was a good worker, and although he couldn’t make promises, he felt Marsha had a good chance for advancement soon.

The supervisor added that Marsha should focus on learning all she could in her present job. She should also build good relationships with her coworkers. When she got her promotion, she would be supervising them. It would be easier for her to supervise coworkers who respected her as a hard worker.

Build Other Interests

To keep a relationship healthy, take time to do something new: try a new sport, plan a short trip, or find a new hobby to work on together.

A second strategy for dealing with plateaus is to build other interests. This would probably help Paul and Nicole, whose relationship we saw earlier. When their relationship was new, they shared many exciting experiences. Now that they’ve gotten to know each other well, there’s less excitement in their lives. They don’t want to give up on their relationship, but they need something new. The most obvious answer is to find new interests that they can both enjoy. What kinds of new interests should they look for? This depends on the kind of people they are. If they’re athletic, they might try a new sport or getting better at a sport they already play. If they enjoy travel, they might plan a trip and then take it. Becoming part of a volunteer organization is another new interest they might consider. There are countless ways Paul and Nicole can bring excitement back into their relationship and continue to enjoy the comfort they have.
Change Your Approach

Changing the way you do things is another strategy for dealing with plateaus. Harriet feels burned out near the end of her course. She has worked hard and given up a great deal because she knows how important it is for her to continue her education. Yet she’s having a hard time getting motivated to study and really wants to spend more time with her friends.

Harriet should look closely at what remains in her course. Then she should divide her study into brief sessions and develop short-term study goals. This way, she’ll feel a sense of accomplishment each time she reaches a goal. She can then rearrange her daily schedule. For example, she can get up half an hour earlier and study in the morning before she goes to work. She might even take her book to work with her and study for a few minutes during her break or at lunch. After she eats dinner, she can study again for about an hour. These brief study times won’t disrupt her day very much and will still allow her to complete her assignments. She won’t feel so worn out because she’s studying for shorter, rather than longer, time periods.

Because she has studied so hard, Harriet should reward herself by spending time with her friends. She might set up her schedule so she has Wednesday night and all day Saturday to spend with her friends, but only if she completes her studies. These rewards will motivate her to stick to her study schedule.

Use Positive Self-Talk

Another strategy is positive self-talk. You know that plateau periods are a part of important processes in your life. You also know that they’ll end after a period of time. Knowing these facts, it should be easy to think of positive self-talk you can use. The following are some ideas based on the examples we’ve discussed.

- (Marsha) “I enjoy this job and have had several promotions. I should use this plateau to learn as much as I can about my job and other jobs in the company. The more I learn about the company, the better my chances for advancement.”
- (Paul and Nicole) “We enjoy being with one another. Instead of giving up on each other, let’s talk it over and see if we can find some ideas to put excitement back into our relationship.”
- (Harriet) “I have just a few more chapters to finish and then the final examination. I’m so close to my goal that it would be silly to give up now. This is the perfect time to identify short-term goals, fit them into my schedule, and finish this course. Then I can relax, enjoy my friends, and think about other courses I want to take.”

The strategies we’ve discussed will work in many different situations. Even though we used specific examples of work, a personal relationship, and education, the strategies will be effective no matter where the plateau period appears. When you face a plateau, you should consider these strategies and decide which one will work best for you.
Respond to the following.

1. Define plateau period.
2. Name three life processes that may have plateau periods.
3. Name the four strategies for dealing with plateau periods.

Enter your response here.
Key Points

- A plateau period is a time when there's little growth or development in certain life processes.
- Strategies for dealing with a plateau period include patience, building other interests, changing your approach, and using positive self-talk.
You’ve learned the importance of a positive attitude. Attitudes affect everything from relationships with family members to career success. A positive attitude, therefore, is one of the keys to a successful life.

You might be asking yourself, “Can you run out of good attitude?” In other words, is a positive attitude like fuel that can be used up? This is an important question, and the answer is “Yes.” If you aren’t careful, you can use up your good attitude and find yourself feeling down.

This doesn’t mean that you should ration your good attitudes and use them only in special situations. Attitudes are renewable resources that can be restored. The remainder of this section suggests ways to maintain a positive attitude.

Everyday Activities

Positive attitudes are like emotional energy. When you get up in the morning, your attitude should be very positive—you have lots of emotional energy. As you go through the day, some situations add to your energy and some use it up. By day's end, the amount of energy you have left depends on what happened throughout the day.

At the end of a good day, you should have a very positive attitude. If the day didn’t go so well, then your emotional energy will be low and your attitude might be less than positive. It makes sense, then, to do everything you can to keep your emotional energy high so your attitude remains positive.

The following suggestions can help keep your emotional energy high during the day.

- Plan a realistic schedule. Many people either try to cram too much into a day or don't have any plans at all. If your day is too busy, especially if you must deal with the needs of many different people, then your emotional energy will be drained. If your day is too empty, you'll be bored and your emotional energy will also be low. Try to balance your day so you aren't rushing from this to that but are busy enough to feel you've accomplished something.
- Start your schedule with things you have to do, such as, “Read pages 45 to 60,” or “Get this report typed for work.” Then move on to things you would like to do, such as, “Play tennis,” or “Write a letter to Melissa.” Write the schedule down and check off what you've accomplished at the end of the day. You don't have to include everything you do in a day, but your list should contain the most important activities.
- Try to do the most important things when you're at your best. If you're a “morning person” and have a homework assignment, do it in the morning when your mind is fresh. Are there times during the day when your energy is low, such as the late afternoon? Use these times to do things that must be done but aren't very important. The point is to match the task you must do with your energy level.
- Set goals for each day. It's not necessary that you win an Oscar or write a bestseller each day, but you should have goals that you hope to accomplish. These goals should be clearly stated (complete one chapter in a book, finish a homework assignment, pick up the dry cleaning, get the mail, try a new recipe) and achievable. You shouldn't set too many goals, nor should they be so high that you can't reach them. Reaching your goals—or even a few of them—will give you a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day.
- Save some private time to spend quality time with friends and family. Even the busiest people can find a few minutes here and there during the day to escape the grind. It might be serious recreation, such as running or working out, or something as simple as walking the dog or watching...
your favorite drama. This quality time you spend by yourself or with others can relieve stress and pump up your attitude.

- Deal with frustrations positively. At the beginning of this text, we discussed how to deal with everyday frustrations. If you can handle frustrations as they come along, it’s less likely that they’ll build up inside and cause you to become angry or aggressive.
- If you experience a problem in a family, social, or working relationship, try to handle the situation as soon as possible. You might not be able to solve the problem completely, but you’ll at least be able to gain some control of the situation. This will prevent the problem from staying on your mind and draining your emotional energy.
- Learn to “pigeonhole” problems. Pigeonholes are small compartments in which pet pigeons can make nests. When you pigeonhole your problems, you keep them confined in the situation in which they occurred. For example, suppose you had a dreadful day at work. Your computer wasn’t working properly and you didn’t accomplish your goals for the day. You should do your best to keep this problem at work so it doesn’t interfere with your friendships, home life, studies, and other activities.

Periodic Renewal

The previous suggestions focus on how to keep your attitude positive on a daily basis. Even if you follow the suggestions and they work well for you, at times you’ll need an extra dose of attitude renewal. Perhaps you’ve studied hard and completed a course. You might need an attitude renewal before going on to the next one. Another situation that may require attitude renewal is when you’ve finished a project at work that was long and hard.

You’ll know when you need this big-time renewal. Your body and your mind will tell you it’s time to unwind. The renewal comes from inside yourself, of course, but there are a number of things you can do to get the renewal process started.

The Vacation

The most popular way to get a big dose of attitude adjustment is through the “classic” vacation—a week or two of relaxing at the beach, skiing in the Rockies, or just hanging around the house taking it easy.

There’s one caution about taking this kind of vacation. If you aren’t careful, you return from the trip in worse shape than you left. Some people try to cram too much into a vacation. They discover that the vacation they planned is harder than work, and they need a few days of relaxation when they come home. This kind of vacation isn’t renewing.

The same suggestions that help you renew your attitude during a regular day also work for a vacation. Don’t plan to do too much, set clear goals concerning what you want to accomplish, and try to get as much quality time into your vacation as possible.

Finally, adopt a “vacation attitude.” The minute you finish work, get into the vacation mode. Relax, and just let yourself be carried along with events. If little things go wrong, try to handle them without getting yourself worked up. After all, this is a vacation, and your goal is to increase your emotional energy, not drain it.

The Mini-Vacation
For many people, vacations come just once a year. What happens if you need a jolt of positive energy between vacations? Well, how about a mini-vacation? This can be a weekend or just a day off. The important thing is that the mini-vacation should be used wisely to renew your attitude.

Use a mini-vacation to accomplish something. You shouldn’t spend it sleeping late or watching TV, even if you like these two activities very much.

Here are some ideas that you can use to get started thinking about a mini-vacation.

- Dedicate a day to a hobby or pastime you enjoy. Spend your mini-vacation gardening, woodworking, fishing, sewing, decorating the house, golfing, playing tennis—the list can go on and on. By devoting yourself to the hobby or pastime, you’ll renew your energy and improve your attitude toward everyday life. You’ll also feel a true sense of enjoyment and satisfaction.
- Dedicate a day to something you would like to learn. How many people have said, “I’d love to try ____”? They fill in the blank with an activity such as board sailing, skiing, hiking, needlepoint, knitting, working with computers, or one of many other activities. Use your mini-vacation to get started in one of the activities you would like to try.
- Be an observer. Spend a day walking in the country, taking a train ride, walking on the beach, hiking in the woods, biking around town, or visiting a museum. Make a day of it by taking lunch, having a picnic, or eating out at a special restaurant. Your purpose for the day is to relax, enjoy the world around you, and absorb emotional energy from what you observe. There are countless situations in which you can simply be an observer and let the world pass you by. Find one you enjoy and just let your attitude renew itself.

Volunteer Service

An amazing thing happens when you spend a day as a volunteer for a community organization, environmental group, church, or another organization that’s providing a public service. You might put out a huge amount of energy and work from dawn until dusk, but at the end of the day, and for many days to come, you’ll feel an emotional “high.” The effort you put into volunteer service will be returned to you many times over.

You might ask yourself why a mini-vacation or personal time should be spent helping others. Well, the answer is simple: it’s the right thing to do. All of us depend on our planet for life, have enjoyed the support of our community, and have benefited from the generosity of people we never even knew. We are responsible to put something back by helping others, contributing to the common good, or doing our part to keep Mother Nature as healthy as possible. Few things you’ll ever do for yourself will be as fulfilling as those things you do for others. Find an organization or group whose goals appeal to you, get involved, and get renewed!

Health and Conditioning

A great deal of scientific evidence shows that physical health and mental health are related. Taking care of your body is important to renewing your attitude.

Should everyone be a marathon runner or weight lifter? Of course not, but everyone should do what they can to keep their good health. The following are some suggestions that will keep your body healthy and prevent your positive attitude from getting tired.
- **Get enough sleep.** Plan your day so you can get to sleep and wake up at reasonable times. If you’re exhausted, your emotional energy will be low and everything you do will make you feel even more tired.

- **Eat right.** A balanced diet doesn’t sound like it can improve your attitude, but it can. When you eat too much, eat too little, or eat the wrong foods, your body chemistry is affected. You might feel tired, moody, nervous, or just out of sorts. These feelings will make it difficult for you to keep your attitude up.

- **Get some exercise.** Try to squeeze some exercise into each day, even if it’s for just a few minutes. A walk before or after meals is a good idea, for example. If you can find more time to exercise, it’s even better. Getting 30 to 40 minutes of vigorous exercise three times a week is ideal.

*Note:* If you haven’t exercised for some time, check with a doctor before beginning an exercise program.

**Controlling Your Future**

This lesson has introduced and discussed human relations skills that will help you in your personal life and your career. By completing this course, you show a willingness to put forth the extra effort necessary to achieve a goal. You’re controlling your future. With each course you complete, your future will look even brighter for you and your family. Also, practicing good human relations will make you a more productive worker, no matter what you do. Because of your productivity and the positive attitude you take to your job, you’ll be contributing to the common good. Your career success will be making your life and everyone else’s just a little better. Your self-confidence will increase because of your “I can” attitude. You’ll be in a better position to control your future, and if you’re willing to continue working hard, things you’ve always wanted will be within your reach.
Take time to complete the Personal Satisfaction Scale. This scale isn’t a test. It’s simply a way for you to take a look at yourself and decide how satisfied you are with different aspects of your life. You should answer the questions honestly about your satisfaction now, not how satisfied you would like to be in the future. Just read each question and think about what it means. Then check the block that shows how satisfied you are with that aspect of your life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not Satisfied</th>
<th>Basically Satisfied</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your ability to use human relations skills?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your attitude in general?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your attitude toward work?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your family relationships?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your relationships with friends?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your relationships with coworkers?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your relationships with supervisor?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with the way you are handling frustration?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with the private time you spend with yourself?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with the private time you spend with others?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with the daily schedule you have planned for yourself?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with the goals you have set?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with the way you are reaching these goals?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your personal life?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your career?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your education?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your exercise program?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your diet?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enter your response here.
Key Points

- Strategies for maintaining a positive attitude include planning a realistic schedule, setting goals, saving private time for yourself, and handling problems quickly.
- Periodic attitude renewal through a vacation or other break is important to maintaining positivity.
- Physical health contributes to mental health, so you should eat right, get enough sleep, and exercise to renew your attitude.