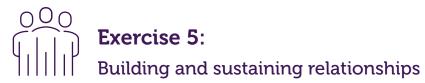# CIPD

Exercise 5:
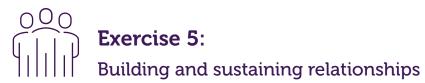## Building and sustaining relationships

This exercise forms part of the support materials designed to help you explore and develop your management capability. It aims to provide ideas and inspiration relevant to building and sustaining relationships.

Building and sustaining relationships is about interacting with employees at a human level, showing concern for their wellbeing, being interested in them as individuals and providing regular opportunities to speak one-to-one.

If you haven't already done so, use the step-by-step guidance to help you get feedback, identify strengths and areas to develop and plan the action you will take. There is also an action plan sheet, which can be used to note down and track your actions.
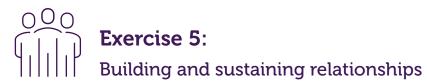
Exercise 5:

Building and sustaining relationships

Activity	What have I learnt from reflecting on this?	What will I do differently as a result?
Check your authenticity: do you show genuine care, compassion and kindness? Without good relationships with those you manage, it is hard to do any of the other things covered by the various exercises and behavioural frameworks. However, good relationships are not always easy. Good relationships depend on an underlying attitude of care, compassion and kindness: they can't be 'faked' or created by a purely behavioural 'if I do this, I will achieve that' approach. The compassionate leadership framework can be helpful here. Consider how you are doing on each of the following four areas of compassionate leadership: • Attending: being present with and giving attention to those you manage, listening to them with fascination; getting curious about what they have to say. (See exercise 1 for more on listening.) • Empathising: feeling the strains, pains and anxieties of those you manage without being overwhelmed by those feelings; allowing them to share their emotions, recognising that we are all vulnerable human beings and, at the same time, taking care of yourself. (See exercise 2 for more on self-compassion.) *Continued on next page*		

Exercise 5:
Building and sustaining relationships

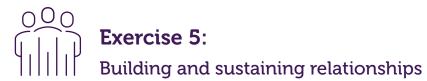| Activity	What have I learnt from reflecting on this?	What will I do differently as a result?
• **Understanding**: listening to those you manage in order to understand their challenges and being open to them having a different perspective on their work, particular situations and the world. Knowing that everyone is different and will see things differently and valuing that range of perspectives and approaches. • **Helping**: having the motivation to help or serve those you manage, removing obstacles and providing resources to the extent that it is possible for you to do so. Not racing too quickly to solutions, but not becoming paralysed or stuck either. Do you struggle with any of these areas? How might you open yourself to this approach?		
Reflect on communication: do you express your care and concern? If you are to support your team's health and wellbeing, it is important that you have an open channel of communication with them about how they are. Consider to what extent that channel is there in your team: • Do you regularly ask people about how they are? • Do you check that they are OK? • Are you willing to listen to how people respond to these kinds of questions? • Do you understand the pressure that people are under – at work and outside work? What more do you need to do to open up this channel of communication with your team?		

Exercise 5:

Building and sustaining relationships

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Activity	What have I learnt from reflecting on this?	What will I do differently as a result?
• ...build trust in your team, for example, by keeping confidences, acting with integrity, showing kindness? • ...seek out contact with them (even if you don't work in the same location as them) rather than wait for them to come to you? • ...respond within a reasonable timescale when they contact you? • ...let people know when you are and are not available? What else could you do to support people to turn to you when they are struggling? Of course, being accessible and available needs to be balanced with taking care of yourself. Setting clear boundaries is important for this, including letting people know when you are not available, being clear how much time you can give to team members, and communicating clearly about your own workload, deadlines etc. (See exercise 2 for more on self-care.)		
Reflect on your sociability: are you interacting at a human level? Taking a friendly and sociable approach, interacting with your team at a human level, is a powerful way to build relationships. However, the degree to which taking a sociable approach is appropriate will vary from organisation to organisation, team to team, and manager to manager, so it is about finding the best approach for your particular situation; authenticity, genuineness and consistency are vital. Some ways of taking a friendly and sociable approach are: • Saying hello and having a social chat when you see people for the first time in the day/week (even if that is on a videoconference). • Bringing in or sending treats, gifts or cards on birthdays, special occasions, at the end of projects or when the team is under particular pressure. *Continued on next page*		

Exercise 5:

Building and sustaining relationships

Activity	What have I learnt from reflecting on this?	What will I do differently as a result?
Using humour and informality when appropriate (though this can take careful judgement as people may have very different senses of humour) and encouraging this in the team. • Organising or participating in social events when appropriate and encouraging this in the team. Different people will have different needs and wants around social events, so it is important to take these into account. Socialising can be meeting for coffee or lunch; it doesn't have to involve going for a drink after work. Reflect on how you interact with your team. Could you and your team benefit from you taking a more sociable approach?		
Reflect on your boundaries: are you bringing both wisdom and compassion? At the same time as ensuring that you build good, friendly, caring relationships with your employees, it is also important to maintain appropriate boundaries. You are your team's manager, not their best friend or confidant. You need to be in a position to deal with tricky people management issues if they arise, such as poor performance, promotion decisions, selection for redundancy and managing conflict. Consider the following: • Are you keeping enough emotional distance from your team members that you would be able to be firm about poor performance (or other similar issue) if it arose? • Are you maintaining a balanced perspective across all the members of your team so that you could remain impartial and unbiased if a conflict arose within the team? (See exercise 3 for more on handling conflict and people management issues.) *Continued on next page*		

Exercise 5:
Building and sustaining relationships

Activity	What have I learnt from reflecting on this?	What will I do differently as a result?
• If you used to work alongside members of your team and subsequently became their manager, have you found ways to create space in the relationship to be their manager (for example, by agreeing boundaries about what you do and don't discuss and exploring how to negotiate your changed working relationship)? Reflecting on how you combine compassion with wisdom is a helpful way to reflect on this. In this context, wisdom is about being able to: • See the broader picture, recognise that your own view is just one of many ways of seeing things and put yourself in other people's shoes • Recognise how interdependent and connected everything is (people, teams, organisations, the environment etc) • Balance the demands of the job, organisation, shareholders and other stakeholders with the need to take care of and engage your employees • Know how to take difficult decisions and be firm in order to get tough things done while at the same time showing respect and kindness to individuals. To what extent do you do these things? How could you develop your capacity in these areas further? Sometimes, developing wisdom is called 'vertical development' – it is about expanding your mindset, awareness, self-awareness and thinking capacity, rather than gaining greater knowledge or information.		