

Your Relationships Are Only as Strong as Your Skills

PEOPLE



SKILLS

DEBRA FILETA M.A., LPC

“If we want to thrive and flourish in life, we need to be able to interact and communicate effectively with one other. In *People Skills*, Debra shows us how. This book is practical, relatable, helpful, and needed in these times.”

—**Christine Caine**, founder A21 and Propel Women

“In *People Skills*, Debra Fileta equips believers to build better relationships—not just through insight, but through humility, self-awareness, and biblical wisdom. This book offers practical steps for anyone wanting to love others like Jesus does.”

—**Jonathan Pokluda**, lead pastor of Harris Creek Baptist Church, best-selling author, and host of the podcast *Becoming Something*

“It doesn’t matter how talented, brilliant, or experienced you are if you lack emotional intelligence. Few things will set you up for success as much as strong people skills—or hold you back as much as the lack of them. From her vast experience helping people navigate their hangups as a counselor, Debra Fileta has written a modern take on the ever-important subject of winning friends and influencing people. *People Skills* will help you take ownership of the way you connect and communicate. This is a book you’ll want to revisit again and again.”

—**Levi Lusko**, author of *Blessed Are the Spiraling*

“In *People Skills*, Debra Fileta reminds us that one of the most empowering choices we can make is to take ownership of our relationships. With clarity, courage, and grace, she equips us with the tools to love well, communicate clearly, and cultivate connections that truly reflect God’s design. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to grow in wisdom and strength in every relationship.”

—**Todd and Julie Mullins**, senior pastors, Christ Fellowship Church

“In our world today, we are letting technology prevent us from developing the skills we desperately need to interact with others in our lives. What a tragedy! The book you hold in your hands is a response to this modern-day phenomenon. We must learn people skills to be fully human and to understand how to live with true empathy, wisdom, and kindness—virtues that our technology will never be able to teach us.”

—**Katherine Wolf**, author of *Treasures in the Dark*, *Suffer Strong*, and *Hope Heals*

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To my Buddy, Eli.

*We've been practicing our people skills on each
other practically every single day of your life.*

*Through the joys and through the challenges, I consider
it a high privilege and an honor to be your mom.*

*When you were born, God told me that He would
use your voice to share His love with the world.*

*My prayer is that your people skills would take you
farther than you ever imagined, and that you would
always convey God's love no matter where you go.*

I love you, Buddy!

P.S. What time's the party?

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PEOPLE SKILLS

*Why You Need Them (Not Just
the Person You're Thinking Of)*



Something surprising happened while I was writing this book, which I think is very telling. In fact, it's something that's never happened during the writing process of any of my eight other books. Because writing is a consistent part of my life, it's not uncommon for people to ask me a question such as "What are you writing about these days?" In response I usually go into a quick summary of the book, what it's about, and why I'm writing on this particular topic. Depending on what the book is about, I typically get a myriad of different responses (if you know anything about my previous books, I'm sure you can guess which title gets the biggest reaction!).¹

But of all the different reactions I've gotten over the years, the most surprising ones came when I talked about the topic of this book. Whenever I told someone I was writing a book about people skills, they would all start by saying how interesting, much-needed, and timely the topic was for our specific culture. That wasn't the surprising part though. I mean, truth be told, we live in a culture where technology has replaced so many of our one-on-one relationships. For

most of us, the little device in our pocket has surpassed our need to interact with real-life people in real-life ways.

Where you used to have to stop someone to ask what time it was, now you can glance at your phone and see the time any second of any day.

Where you used to have to go into a restaurant and talk to a waiter to order your food, you can now get it delivered to your doorstep without having to talk to anyone.

Where you used to have to go to the library and talk to the librarian to get help finding the book you needed for a topic you were researching, you can now find unlimited information within seconds from the comfort of your own home.

Where you used to have to leave your house to go grocery shopping, head to the mall, or run to the pharmacy, you can now order everything online with a click of a button, and choose the option, “leave it at my door,” so you don’t even have to see a human being if you don’t want to.

We’ve outsourced people for devices.

In fact, it’s gotten so bad that one survey found that over 40 percent of adults say they go days without seeing anyone face-to-face.² You can’t develop people skills when you’re not interacting with people. Our devices have replaced our need for people skills, and to be honest, that only scratches the surface of why we struggle so much in our relationships. This is such a complex and layered conversation.

So no, I’m not surprised that people see a need for a book like this. I think we’d all agree that our culture is desperately lacking in people skills. But what *did* surprise me is what they would say after they affirmed the need for this book. Almost 98 percent of the people I shared with would add a comment like this: “Oh, I definitely know someone who could use this book.” Whether it was a husband, a friend, a coworker, a neighbor, or even our culture at large, everyone was quick to think of someone they knew who

could use a book about people skills. But it was rare for someone to have the insight, awareness, and foresight to say: “I could really use that book myself.”

To be honest, I find that reaction rather concerning, and I’ll tell you why in a moment. But first, let me affirm that those of you who are reading this book right now are incredibly ahead of the game because you have enough self-awareness to acknowledge that, when it comes to interpersonal relationships, social connections, and everyday interactions, there will always be room to grow, learn, and transform. One of the most important parts of our lives is our social connections, and our people skills or lack thereof can literally make or break our relationships, which in turn can make or break our entire lives.

Not only do I believe that all of us need to take ownership of our people skills, but I’m also concerned with the common others-focused reaction. It’s a reflection that, oftentimes, the people who need people skills the most aren’t skilled enough to recognize their own deficit. We tend to want to look at the deficits of others long before looking at our own.

I AM THE RUDE ONE, THE INGRATE, THE THIEF

There’s a story I read years ago called *The Cookie Thief* about a woman who was killing time at the airport, waiting for her flight. She went and bought herself a bag of cookies, and then sat down on a bench to read her book while she waited. Within a few moments, a gentleman came by and sat next to her. She tried to ignore him and kept her nose in her book, until the man reached his hand into her bag of cookies and started munching on them! The story, creatively written in poetic form, goes on to describe her shock and fury as she watched the man diminish her stash of cookies one, by one, by one: “She thought to herself as the minutes ticked by, ‘If I wasn’t so nice,

I would blacken his eye.’ With each cookie she took, he took one too, when only one was left, she wondered what he would do. With a smile on his face, and a nervous laugh, he took the last cookie and broke it in half. He offered her half, as he ate the other, she snatched it from him and thought...oooh, brother. This guy has some nerve and he’s also rude, why he didn’t even show any gratitude!” The story continues as the woman abruptly gathers her belongings and heads to her gate. She sits down in her seat on the plane and reaches into her bag to find...her very own unopened bag of cookies. “If mine are here, she moaned in despair, the others were his, and he tried to share. Too late to apologize, she realized with grief, that she was the rude one, the ingrate, the thief.”

Talk about a moment of humility. She just got told, as the young people say. She had spent so much time focusing on the man’s deficits, she completely missed her own. Human beings tend to see the flaws around them before they see the flaws within them. And I can’t say it’s surprising. In fact, I often see this tendency in my work as a counselor, especially when dealing with interpersonal issues in counseling. It’s so much easier to see the shortcomings of others than it is to recognize our own.

Whether it’s a couple’s therapy session, or we’re dealing with a family conflict issue, a friendship situation, or some other problem at work, church, or elsewhere, it’s common for the person presenting the problem to start their story by painting me a detailed picture of everyone else’s deficits: “Here’s what everyone else is doing wrong.” I listen patiently (at least for a little while), but I’ve been a counselor long enough to know that the first story is never the full story. Eventually, in order to make any progress in any situation, there has to be a level of ownership. For true change and healing to happen, the story eventually has to turn from the narrative of what *they* are doing wrong to the narrative of what *you* can do differently. Because we can’t really see the story clearly until we start with ourselves.

FOR TRUE CHANGE AND HEALING TO HAPPEN,
THE STORY EVENTUALLY HAS TO TURN FROM THE
NARRATIVE OF WHAT *THEY* ARE DOING WRONG TO
THE NARRATIVE OF WHAT *YOU* CAN DO DIFFERENTLY.

This isn't merely a good counseling strategy. The Bible affirms this approach in Matthew 7 saying,

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye (verses 3-5).

The healthiest people lead the way in ownership by always asking, *What's my role?* Because if you have no role, you also have no control. If you have no role, you can't change the outcome. Having a role means having influence and the ability to change your situation because you can choose to do things differently. And this is especially true when it comes to your interpersonal relationships.

HOW TO CHANGE THE RECIPE

If you're ever in a counseling session with me, at some point you will likely hear me explain that relationships are kind of like a recipe. You hold a portion of the ingredients, and the people around you hold a portion of the ingredients too. You can't change someone else's ingredients, but you *can* change your own, and that change is enough to influence the outcome of the entire recipe! When it comes

to relationships and interacting with people, we have to be acutely aware that we can't force the people around us to change, heal, adjust, mature, or grow. While we can't change the people around us, we can change what we bring to the recipe of the relationship. We can change ourselves. We can set better boundaries, learn to communicate more effectively, take inventory of our body language, respond instead of react, overcome our insecurities, deal with our personal triggers, and use so many other relationship-changing skills we'll learn throughout the pages of this book. You can't change someone else, but you can change yourself, which can influence the entire relationship.

YOU CAN'T CHANGE SOMEONE ELSE'S
INGREDIENTS, BUT YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR OWN,
AND THAT CHANGE IS ENOUGH TO INFLUENCE
THE OUTCOME OF THE ENTIRE RECIPE!

I have a feeling you are the type of person who believes this to be true, because here you are reading this book. And the fact that you are here gives me hope. It tells me that you are insightful enough to believe that maybe there's something you can learn, change, or adjust in how you come across to others, how you relate to people, as well as how you interact in relationships. It assures me that you know the only way to make significant changes in our world, our community, our churches, and our families is by taking ownership of our own changes. Because we know that instead of blaming culture, we have to influence culture. And so instead of just giving this book to that person you thought of, you're reading it for yourself. And for that, I can confidently say: You're my kind of people.

With that said, let me give you some insider information. The most difficult thing about the topic of people skills is that, just like

any skill set, there's a learning curve to getting them right. It takes practice, trial-and-error, insight, self-awareness, and a commitment to doing relationships well. So get yourself ready, grab a friend to join you if you'd like (or maybe that person you were thinking of in the beginning of this book), and let's spend some time looking at the skills we bring to the table, taking ownership of how we come across in our interactions, and committing to doing relationships to the best of our ability. It's time to take ownership of our people skills. Because your relationships are only as strong as your skills.

TAKE OWNERSHIP

1. When it comes to the topic of people skills, was there someone who came to mind (other than yourself) who could use this topic? How can you shift your perspective to focus on your personal growth in this area?

2. Do you tend to take ownership and acknowledge your personal role in any interpersonal conflict, misunderstanding, or dilemma, or do you have a tendency to deflect ownership and responsibility?

3. What is one area in which you have seen a deficit in your people skills, and how has it affected your personal life and relationships? (For example: difficulty handling conflict, struggles expressing emotions, poor listening skills, a lack of communication skills, difficulty taking ownership and apologizing, or struggling with shyness or insecurity.)

4. “We’ve outsourced people for devices” (page 10). Reflect on this statement and whether or not it’s true in your life. If

true, consider how you can set yourself up to begin practicing your people skills by being intentional about increasing your interactions with real-life people over the course of reading this book.