Building Social Skills

People want to do business with those who show likability, respect, and accountability. This builds trust, which in turn helps your business. It takes a little effort to build the skills that make you more likable, but it pays off in every environment, work or not.

Here are a few tips to help you along the way.

Make eye contact. Focusing on the person speaking lets them know they've been heard, and that you aren't worrying about what to make for dinner or about rush hour traffic. This holds true even if the conversation isn't comfortable or going to bear fruit. So make eye contact and hold it.

Smile. Smiling shows enthusiasm and energy—what many people call *charisma*. It's an easy way to convey warmth and likeability. Smiling is also contagious. People will walk away thinking you're a friendly, relatable person, which is exactly what you want to build trust.

Stash the smartphone. And keep it hidden! Remember that paying attention part? Interrupting your conversation to peek at your email and texts is a sure likeability killer. So, don't do it!

Give a firm handshake. Like Goldilocks and the Three Bears, you want a handshake that's not too hard, not too soft. Research shows that people decide whether or not they like you within seconds of meeting you. A firm handshake contributes enormously to a positive first impression.

Call people by their names. I know this is hard for those of us who forget someone's name the minute we hear it, but practicing using someone's name in conversation helps us cement it in our mind. It signals that you're interested in making a connection with the other person. People appreciate when you remember their name. Practice different strategies to remember names if you have trouble.

Listen more than you speak. Remember the old saying "you have two ears and only one mouth, and you should use them in that proportion"? Still as true as when your grandmother scolded you with it. Try not just responding to what someone is saying, but recapping what you've heard to ensure understanding. Say, "If I'm understanding you correctly, you said…." Try it, it works!

Flatter, but genuinely. Everyone likes to hear something positive about themselves. Tell people they look great today, or that you appreciate their efforts. Again, it shows that you're interested in them. Be careful not to flatter too much; that can be creepy.

Say you're sorry. Taking accountability for your/your company's mistakes is the first step in banishing ill feelings. "I'm sorry" is not something we hear that often, especially from businesses. It works even when you're not to blame! Rather, it's an effective way to show that you're putting yourself in their shoes and are trying to relate. Expressing that you understand someone's experience increases trust.

Stand and sit up straight. Bad posture sends a message that you're bored, don't care, or grumpy. If you convey negative body language, no one will want to get to know you. In fact, according to psychologists, standing or sitting in an expansive way (legs apart, arms spread wide, leaning forward) conveys confidence. It also makes you feel more powerful, a step toward projecting likeability.

Keep your word. Remember that trust thing? Keeping your word, meeting a deadline, or delivering on time as you said you would engenders tremendous trust. If, in the rare event you can't, remember to apologize.

Don't complain or gossip. Complainers and gossipers, aka energy vampires, suck all the energy out of the room. No one wants to be around a whiner. It's an instant turnoff. If this is you, stop! If you're surrounded by these negative Nellies, change your situation.

Be inclusive. No one likes feeling left out, so don't leave people out in a conversation or group setting. If you find that someone is being left out, try to include them. This shows that you're paying attention and that you genuinely care about others' feelings.

Don't judge a book by its cover. First impressions, as much as we don't like to admit it, can cause us to close people out. We're all busy, but the more we make an effort to reach out to people to get to know them, the more likeable we become in their eyes.

Many of these tips come down to showing respect for other people. When we show respect, most of the time we get respect and trust in return. Now, try these easy social skills out today. We guarantee you'll see results. Just sayin'.

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