

25

**Success Strategies
to Supercharge Your
Communication
Skills**



ShirleyTaylor



INTRODUCTION

If you want to improve your communication skills, you're in the right place. In this ebook, I've put together 25 super successful strategies that will help you to become a better communicator.

Many people today actually start their working lives not knowing how to communicate effectively face-to-face with colleagues, let alone with clients and employers. They seem more comfortable looking at their smartphones rather than at other human beings. They often have no idea how to master small talk when meeting new people.

Luckily, successful communication skills can be learned, and help is right here in your hands. You'll find every strategy in this book very useful and practical - from improving your confidence to enhancing teamwork, from activating your listening skills to developing great relationships.

Excellent communication skills will help you build great relationships, and that, to me, is one of the most important building blocks of success today. I cannot overstate the power of great relationships and connections.

I know you will find the strategies in this book useful. I'm convinced that when you start putting them into practice, they will launch you along the road to a more successful, more fulfilling future.

Enjoy!



Shirley Taylor

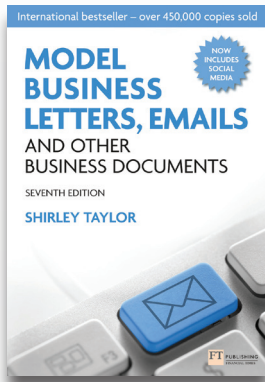
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Shirley Taylor CSP (Certified Speaking Professional)* has established herself as a leading authority in modern business writing and communication skills. She is the author of 12 successful books on communication skills, including the international bestseller, *Model Business Letters, Emails and Other Business Documents* seventh edition, which has sold over half a million copies worldwide and has been translated into several languages.

Widely-regarded as an expert in business writing and success skills, Shirley is a high-energy, high-content public speaker and trainer who educates, inspires, informs and motivates individuals to develop better relationships both orally and in writing. She puts a lot of passion and energy into her workshops and presentations to make sure they are entertaining, practical and informative, as well as a lot of fun.

With her friendly, down-to-earth style, she has a unique way of engaging with the audience, and is passionate about helping people commit to change. Audience members quickly see and share her passion and enthusiasm, and are motivated to use her strategies back at the workplace.

Originally from the UK, Shirley has lived and worked in Singapore, Bahrain and Canada. Based in Singapore now, Shirley is CEO of STTS Training Pte Ltd, a company highly-respected for its range of high-quality public and in-house communication training.

Shirley is proud to have been 2011-12 President of Asia Professional Speakers Singapore, a member of the Global Speakers Federation, and was awarded their Spirit of Service Award three years in a row. She now serves on the Executive Committee of the Global Speakers Federation.

* Shirley Taylor is one of fewer than 700 Certified Speaking Professionals (CSP) in the world. CSP is the speaking profession's international measure of professional platform skill. The designation is globally recognised and awarded to speakers who have met strict criteria. This designation is achieved by fewer than 11% of professional speakers worldwide.

FROM ORDINARY TO EXTRAORDINARY

Some people wake up feeling tired and they go through the motions at work with a frown on their faces, they just keep their head down, do the job and then go home. Is that a good way to exist?

I remember when friends used to visit my mum in the hospital, they were always amazed at her cheerfulness and her smile, even though she was very ill. My mum told me, "People wouldn't come to see me if I was miserable!"

What about you? We all wake up every day with a clean slate. You can make the day anything you want it to be. Anything you choose it to be.

Before I became a speaker, trainer and author, I was a secretary for nine years. What a great learning period that was. What I look back, I can see that even then I somehow knew about the importance of building relationships. For example:

- When my boss wanted a cheque urgently, I just had to call up the lady in Accounts and I got the cheque within minutes.
- When my boss wanted a cup of tea for guests and I was really busy, I just had to ask the tea lady and the boss got his tea, and a friendly smile, within minutes.
- When my boss wanted me to go out and buy him a birthday present to give to his wife. I was happy to do it – as long as he gave me the keys to his Mercedes! And he got his present within... a couple of hours!

In any job or business, relationship building has to be the most important objective. The quality of the relationship will determine the quality of the service.

For so many people today their interactions are purely transactional – they focus on the result, just getting the job done, often at the cost of relationships. More successful people choose relational interactions – they focus on how people are treated in the course of achieving results.

- Start focusing on RELATIONSHIPS, and you will really start making a positive difference.
- Start focusing on RELATIONSHIPS, and your job will become much more enjoyable.
- Start focusing on RELATIONSHIPS, and your colleagues and clients will become your friends.
- Start focusing on RELATIONSHIPS, and your work will become less of a toil and more of a pleasure.
- Start focusing on RELATIONSHIPS, and you'll start making a positive difference in the lives of everyone around you, and in your own life!

REMEMBER!



It takes less than a second to raise your standards, to put some passion into your job and your life, and to commit to turning the ordinary into extraordinary.

INCREASE YOUR VOCAL CLARITY

If you work in a multi-cultural environment, you've probably had experiences where you've wondered, "Did he say 'thought' or 'taught'? Was that word, 'pirate' or 'pilot'? Did she really say 'sheet' or was it something else?"

The way you pronounce your words and the tone of voice you use will have an impact on the effectiveness of any message. Just as using the right words is essential, it's also important to consider your voice and your tone if you are to be understood and get your message across effectively.

Here are four simple steps to help you increase your vocal clarity:

1. **Slow down**

So many people speak too quickly and almost in a monotone. Please slow down. It will give you more confidence, not less.

2. **Keep your language simple**

Don't use big words, thinking you'll impress people. You won't. Simple is better.

3. **Check for understanding**

Ask your listeners if they have understood your pronunciation, since they may hesitate to tell you.

4. **Take time to e-nun-ci-ate**

Really articulate every word. It may feel rather unnatural to you at first, but stick with it. Your comfort level will rise, and your clarity will improve. This also means your listener's comfort level will increase.

REMEMBER!



If you follow these great steps, you will not only make your conversations more productive. You'll enhance your reputation too.

LISTEN, REPEAT AND REFLECT

Thanks to email, instant messages, chat rooms, social media and other tools brought to life courtesy of technology, we all have a whole lot more to learn these days if we are to communicate effectively with others.

It used to be that people only needed to sharpen their communication skills for phone conversations and face-to-face appearances. For many, these scenarios were bad enough. Nowadays, even in small groups and one-to-one settings, effective communication is getting tougher. Fortunately, there are some very simple tips that anyone can use to help them on the road to clear, effective communication.

Whether addressing a large crowd, talking on the phone, or working one-on-one, mastering these three essential skills will put you well on your way to becoming a much better communicator:

1. Listen

Communication is a two-way street. Half the battle is learning how to really hear, process and respond to what others are saying. A good listener takes a keen interest in his audience, uses appropriate verbal and non-verbal door-openers, and asks questions to encourage conversation.

2. Repeat

When you paraphrase something in a different way to how it was delivered to you, you're clarifying your understanding and stimulating further discussion.

3. Reflect

Too many people open their mouths and speak without thinking. Before you let the words escape, think carefully. Slow down to make sure you have given appropriate consideration to what you are about to say.

REMEMBER!



"I remind myself every morning: Nothing I saw this day will teach me anything. If I'm going to learn, I must do it by listening."

Larry King

WORK WELL IN YOUR TEAM

As the saying goes. *“There is no ‘I’ in team.” There are, however, a number of people who must come together to create a cohesive unit working towards a common goal. If this isn’t the case, a team will likely find itself facing failure.*

When you are in a team situation, your contributions, actions and reactions will matter. The better you handle yourself, the stronger your team will become. Whether you’re a manager leading a team or one of its members, creating a successful team is as much your responsibility as it is everyone else’s.

Here are some tips that can help you become a productive, vital part of a team:

1. Play to your strengths

Your strengths, skills and abilities are the commodities you bring to your team. Identify them and share what you do best. Ideally, your team will include a number of people with different strengths. It will then become much easier to compensate for any weaknesses.

2. Be honest about your weaknesses

Identifying and understanding your weaknesses will help you become a stronger, more valuable team member. Other team members will ideally be poised to help on issues that are not best suited to your abilities. By understanding your weaknesses, you can learn to accept this help without feeling threatened. Essentially, it can make you a better team player.

3. Communicate clearly

Communication is critical for any successful team. If a team is going to work well together, it’s essential to have clear, concise lines of communication. To do your part, take steps to master some of the keys to successful communication.

4. Don’t be afraid to delegate or share work

It’s often the case in teams that one or two key members carry the load. But in highly functional teams, every member effectively shares work and contributes to overall success. Tasks must be delegated appropriately based on strengths and weaknesses.

5. Do not try to grab the limelight

Just like in sports, it takes every member performing well to bring home a win. Keep this in mind and try to focus on the task at hand and the role you play in making it happen. The limelight will shine on the entire team – you included – if you handle your tasks efficiently.

While the saying goes, there is no ‘I’ in team, this is not entirely true. When every individual learns how to work for the good of the team, everyone wins. The process starts with you.

CHOOSE YOUR WORDS WITH CARE

Always and never are two words that you should always try never to use! Hmm! It's true, though. Imagine you say to a colleague, "You never get to work on time." She might reply with, "Two Wednesdays ago, I was 5 minutes early!"

You could really undermine your relationships and generate negative reaction. It's really important to be sensitive to how different words will be received by our listeners.

Always

A word like 'always' can easily be perceived as an attack on the listener. When you are trying to improve a situation, it's much better to choose a softer approach, looking for a win-win solution.

Never

Saying to someone, "You are always late for work!" will not be as effective as telling your employee, "I've noticed you've not been getting to work on time a lot lately. Are you having any difficulties we can discuss?" They won't feel attacked, and you can take the conversation from there.

Should

This is another dangerous word. For example, "You should have brought an umbrella!" That's a bit ridiculous when you're soaking wet already. Even when people ask for advice on what they should do, it's more motivating to use empowering language like, "You might want to try..." or, "Perhaps you can..." rather than "you should."

But

The word but can be seen as a negative. It can erase everything positive that came before it, and the listener will focus on the negative.

Compare

This model is very popular, but it is only does 35 miles per gallon.

This model is very popular, and it does 35 miles per gallon.

You can immediately see how positive the second sentence sounds, and how there is no change in the information, only in the attitude.

Sometimes it will be essential to use 'but'; just be aware of its negative implications and consider if an alternative would be more appropriate.



Maybe

Always think carefully before using weak words like 'try', 'maybe', 'perhaps'. They don't give any sense of commitment, only uncertainty. "I'll try to get this finished today," gives you an excuse if you somehow can't work on it. ("Well, I tried, but it didn't work!") "Maybe I'll drop over to your place is evening." This will leave me wondering whether you will or not.

You must

Phrases like "You have to...", "You must...", "You'd better..." are very demanding. They make people feel like they have no choice.

Can't

Negative words like 'no', 'can't', and 'don't' shut down discussions and stir up negative feelings. It's best to avoid them where possible.

DON'T ASSUME!

Have you ever made an assumption? *Perhaps you didn't give someone a chance to finish what they wanted to say? Maybe you didn't listen carefully in the first place? Perhaps the speaker paused, so you jumped in too quickly and completed his sentence?*

Another reason we make an assumptions is that we think we know what the other person is going to say. Well, I don't know if you have psychic powers and can read minds, but I know I sure can't. That's why language developed – so we can communicate clearly. Guessing what another person will say just causes confusion.

Making assumptions not only causes confusion, but it also causes delays that most of us cannot afford. Time is money, and taking the time to explain where someone has made a wrong assumption is a waste of time could be used for more productive work.

Similarly, making assumptions can also cause ill feelings in the office. If you are constantly finishing other people's sentences and jumping to conclusions about their ideas, the office dynamic is strongly affected. Others will stop including you in their meetings and brainstorming sessions because they know you don't pay attention anyway.

The key to keep from assumptions in communication is to give full attention to the other person and understand exactly what he or she is saying first before adding your comments to the discussion.

Here are some more tips to ensure you won't be the one wasting time by making incorrect and often embarrassing assumptions when you communicate with others:

1. **Be patient**

Your ideas are important, but no more important than anyone else's.

2. **Listen carefully**

If you are busy thinking about what you want to say, you aren't going to hear what the other person is saying.

3. **Take notes if necessary**

If the discussion is a long one, notes can help you remember the points you want to make.

4. **Rephrase what was said in your own words**

This is the clearest way to ensure you haven't made an assumption about what a statement means.

5. **Don't interrupt**

The speaker may be going on to clarify exactly what you are questioning.

6. **Pause and reflect**

Allow some time to let the speaker's comments fully sink in by pausing and reflecting before you jump in to speak.

PLAY NICE WITH YOUR CELL PHONE

Cell phones are everywhere today, *but standards of behaviour for their use have lagged behind a bit. If you want to stay on good footing with everyone you meet, remember that good cell phone etiquette boils down to one basic rule: use good judgement!*

Today's cell phones allow us to do so much more than the word 'phone' implies – talk, text, search the Internet, watch movies, listen to music, review and respond to emails, play games and more. Each of these activities requires good judgement as to whether a certain time and place is appropriate for a particular activity or not.

Here are some questions to ask yourself when considering using your cell phone:

1. What are you doing?
2. What are the people around you doing?
3. Will you be interacting with the people around you in any way?
4. Will your activity disturb the people around you in any way?
5. What is the importance of the call compared to the first four issues?

One example where people tend not to use good judgement is when driving. You might not want to turn the phone off while driving, but certainly if you receive a call that needs to be handled right then, it would be good judgement to pull over to the side of the road to complete the conversation. Hands-free use is a great, but it's not your hands that are trying to concentrate on busy traffic and the big merger all at the same time. In this driving situation, the answers to the questions in the earlier point suggest that your safety and the safety of the people in other cars are more important than a phone call; it's certainly more important than a text or a game.

And what about the business lunch where you are expecting an important call regarding a huge sale? You have several options here. You could turn your phone off, but that's not particularly polite to the person who might be using their lunchtime to get this important information to you. You could answer the call and discuss the entire deal for the rest of the hour, but that's not going to be polite to your lunch companions.

Good manners would mean letting the others know at the start of lunch that you are expecting a very important call. Apologise to them beforehand and let them know that if you do get the call during lunch, you will keep it short. Thank them for their understanding. Put your phone on vibrate, and if the call does come through, excuse yourself and step away to keep disruptions to a minimum.

ACHIEVE SUCCESS THROUGH POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The world is filled with people, not products and consumers. These are real people desire a connection with other people - people they want to work with can trust for the long term.

The most successful people achieve their success largely because they treat those around them in a way that establishes and maintains positive business relationships.

Here are some reasons why you need to focus on establishing positive relationships for a growing business and increasing success:

Branding and reputation

Being kind, courteous and attentive to clients will instantly infuse your brand with personality. You can improve your brand every day by maintaining positive relationships.

Long-term profitability and regular clients

It takes loyal, repeat customers, to really fuel the fires of commercial success. Building great relationships can ensure your clients are with you for the long term.

Brand resilience

People are averse to risk by nature, and will cut back business when times are tough. Increase your stability during the low times by maintaining a strong network of relationships.

Customer satisfaction

It's impossible to get everything right all the time, but it is important to fix problems when they arise. Clients can easily move past issues if they are treated with respect and listened to.

Word-of-mouth advertisement

People will readily recommend your products and services if you establish a positive relationship with them. Hone your communication and business etiquette so you make a sparkling impression.

Improved working environment

A grumpy boss can immediately throw the whole work atmosphere into a gloom. Healthy relationships between co-workers are vital for an energetic workplace. When you treat your colleagues with respect and warmth, you will increase productivity and satisfaction.

Friendships

Business relationships can turn into friendships. It isn't fun to be alone all the time doing your work. Establish positive relationships with your co-workers and they could become life-long friends.



Personal well-being

Having positive relationships with those around you can infuse your day with joy and fulfillment. To develop happiness at the workplace, you need to be open, affirming, and feel good about the people you work with.

Networking and social media

Strong business relationships require nurturing. The more you positively interact with a person, the closer you will become over time. This influence can spread into an entire network of interconnected influence, where each person maintains a thread of connection between increasing numbers of others. In this noisy world, simply shouting into the crowd won't get you noticed. Maintain your network and you have a voice.

REMEMBER!



“Trust is the glue of life. It’s the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It’s the fundamental principle that holds all relationships together.”

Stephen Covey

LEARN TO BE LIKEABLE

Your success at work will partly depend on how much people are willing to interact with you. Let's face it, you can't get your work done if people avoid you!

When people meet you for the first time, they usually form an almost immediate opinion about you. Sometimes it will be the right opinion, sometimes it will not. If you want to be successful personally and professionally, it will be a lot easier if people like you.

Here are the three Cs of developing likeability:

Credibility: Your credibility is the extent to which others believe what you tell them. Do you do what you say you will do? Do you keep others informed? Are you trustworthy? If you want to gain respect, create trust, and build a great rapport with people, you must work on your credibility.

Consistency: People will trust you if you act in a consistent manner, and if you treat people similarly, you can only expect consistent results from people you communicate with if you are also consistent.

Confidence: If you think and act more confidently and positively, you will be able to communicate more confidently and effectively. You'll also get people to co-operate with you more easily. Confident people make wonderful team players.

If you find a spark is missing in your relationships, consider working on these three Cs. Improve your likeability by working on your credibility, your consistency, and your confidence.

REMEMBER!



"I've trained myself to illuminate the things in my personality that are likeable and to hide and protect the things that are less likeable."

Will Smith

SUPPORT YOUR MESSAGE WITH YOUR BODY

Do you twist your hair or play with your rings? *This could imply that you're nervous or not focused. Do you point a finger at the other person's chest? This implies aggression. Do you slouch? This implies a lack of confidence. Do you hop from foot to foot when talking to your manager? This shows a lack of confidence too.*

Even if you've structured your message well, you could blow it completely if your posture, gesture and facial expressions don't support your message.

In communication, your body language can be one of your best assets, as long as use it well. To start with, be aware of what your body is doing and saying. By making some minor adjustments in your posture, your gestures and your facial expressions, you will help yourself become a much better communicator. Your face and your body language can be two of your greatest tools in your communication toolbox. Use them well to help you come across as a confident, relaxed communicator.

Here are some behaviours you may want to fix.

Slouching

Some big, comfortable chairs are very easy to slouch in, but when you do this, you may look too relaxed and informal. People may not take you seriously. If you want to come across as an assertive, confident communicator, it's best to sit up, and stand up, straight.

Distracting habits

Please avoid annoying distractions like twisting your hair, playing with rings, or clicking your pen they will make the listener pay attention to your habits, and form judgements about them, rather than focus on your message.

Blank looks

A blank look is one that shows no expression or emotion. The only time blank looks will help you is when you are playing poker! When trying to convey an important message, blank looks will make you appear indifferent. Use your face to show expression both when receiving and giving messages.

Work face

When you're at your desk concentrating on your work, your brow may be furrowed and your lips pursed. If your assistant walks in at this point, and you look up still wearing this 'work face', he might think your face is saying, "What the heck do you want? How dare you interrupt me!" If you think you might be guilty of wearing your work face, just take a moment to relax and adopt an open expression when people knock on the door. This way, people will feel more comfortable coming in to talk to you.

TOUCH UP YOUR TELEPHONE HABITS

Have you ever been put on hold *and then couldn't remember who you called? Have you dialled someone and then had to stop and think about the reasons you made the call? Have you ever had a conversation with someone who was tapping away at the computer at the same time?*

We are often so busy and wrapped up in our own work that we sometimes forget that real human being is on the other end of a telephone call. Let's not forget how to use the telephone with courtesy!

Here are some common complaints about phone conversations and ways to correct them:

Do you interrupt or talk over another person without meaning to?

Some cell phones are designed to blank out the quieter side of a conversation, so it's easy to talk over someone else. To avoid this, be sure to await a second or so after you think someone has finished speaking before starting your own statement.

Do people ask you to repeat what you have said?

You are probably mumbling or speaking too quickly, so slow down and enunciate. You know that what you are going to say, but the person on the other end doesn't, and is relying on you to speak clearly enough to understand you.

Do you speak the other person's language with your own accent?

If you speak at your normal speed, your listener may struggle to understand you. Slow down and use good intonation. Non-native speakers of your language will appreciate you taking the time to pronounce the words carefully.

Do you ever answer the phone while chewing gum or eating?

This can be most annoying, so please don't do it. If you are eating lunch at your desk when the phone rings, either wait until you have completely cleared your mouth or let your voice mailer answer.

Have you ever multitasked while on the phone?

Yes, you are a business superman or superwoman! You can type an email and talk on the phone all at the same time! The problem with that is the person on the other end will hear pauses in your responses, computer sounds, and your keyboard clacking away. So stop what you are doing and give the caller your full attention. If you need to look something up on your computer during a call, let them know. Then the clackety-clack of your keyboard will be a welcome noise instead of a sign of disrespect.

TELEPHONE MANNERS

We all use the telephone, perhaps several times a day. *But does this mean you're good at it? These days, a lot of us are using the phone much less than before, but sometimes there's nothing better than a spoken conversation to resolve a problem and establish a bond.*

A great way to consider what works well on the telephone is to look at all the things that absolutely don't work. Here's a list of some of the many ways you can annoy the person on the other end of the line:

- Sound abrupt, especially when you pick up the call.
- Speak in a really formal, stilted manner.
- Don't include any pauses.
- Speak while eating or chewing the end of your pen.
- Tap away on your computer while speaking or listening.

REMEMBER!



If you want to gain a reputation as a thoughtful communicator – and if you want people to answer the phone when they can see it's you calling – then be sure to behave considerately: This means:

- Give them your full attention. Make a commitment to the caller.
- Speak in a friendly, informal tone, to help build the relationship.
- Remember that people need time to think on the telephone too, so don't feel obliged to fill every gap.
- Don't talk and type!

USE EMPATHY

The need to be understood is one of the highest human needs, but many people just don't make an effort to find out how others really feel. To show empathy is to identify with another person's feelings. It is to emotionally put yourself in the place of another. Empathy is very different to sympathy.

Sympathy is a feeling of care and understanding for suffering beings.

Empathy is the ability to mutually experience the thoughts, emotions and direct experience of others without them being communicated intentionally.

Many people have difficulty with empathy and with expressing with real feelings. This is such a shame. Get in touch with your feelings today, and use empathy. It really helps. Just imagine the difference you can make if you truly get to know people and understand how they feel. It could really set you part from the rest, and you'd start giving great value that many other don't give.

REMEMBER!



Most experts in communication, management and self-development mention the importance of empathy. Empathy is really understanding the other person's position and their feelings. Being able to 'step back' and detach ourselves from our own emotions is essential for effective, constructive relationships.

GAIN THE COMPETITIVE EDGE WITH GREAT RELATIONSHIPS

Have you noticed that many people seem unable to communicate face-to-face with colleagues, let alone with employers or clients? They are more comfortable sending text messages or posting a message on Facebook than they are speaking. Some people lack confidence to speak up when communicating, while others are so overconfident that they don't know how to listen.

Successful people don't hide behind their mobile phones or computers. Successful people develop great relationships and use them to build a foundation for success.

They understand that all outcomes are created by and through interactions with others. They know that if they are to build a foundation for success, both professionally and personally, they need to develop strong relationships. Personal interaction is at the very heart of developing truly effective relationships.

It doesn't matter how many qualifications or degrees you get. Unless you can develop great relationships, your success will be severely limited.

Your effectiveness at work will largely depend on how much people want to interact with you. The route to professional effectiveness is not only paved with knowledge and experience, but also with relationships. If people avoid you it will be very difficult to do your job. If you are to make successful connections – connections you can count on when you have new ideas and goals – you need to develop great working relationships.

As you develop your career, you will find various reasons why successful communication skills are important to you, such as:

- **To secure an interview:** Hone your communication skills to ensure that your application letter is read and acted upon.
- **To get a job:** Communicate well during your interview in order to sell yourself and get the job you want.
- **To do your job well:** Request information, discuss problems, give instructions, work in teams, interact with colleagues and clients.
- **To gain cooperation:** It is essential to have good human relations skills in order to work well with your team.
- **To persuade and influence others:** Work on your persuasion skills since much of our communication at work will involve persuading others or influencing them in some way.
- **To work well across cultures:** As most workplaces are becoming more global, you need to be prepared to consider multiple factors that can affect communication in order to successfully connect with people in such a diverse environment.

By building strong relationships, you will not only gain the competitive edge in today's workplace, you will also reap the rewards and the success that these changes can bring!

MAKE GREAT CONNECTIONS

The route to professional effectiveness is not only paved with knowledge and experience, but also with relationships. If people avoid you, it will be very difficult to do your job. If you are to make successful connections – connections that you can count on when you have new ideas and goals – you need to develop great working relationships.

You will probably agree that your satisfaction at work is largely derived from the way you your colleagues and your clients communicate. As with any other endeavour, the more you put into it, the more you'll get back.

You'll receive huge rewards by practicing these basic success tools for making great connections.

Be courteous

It's amazing how discourteous some people can be in the office. I see people walk through an office in the morning, eyes down, headphones in their ears, without even acknowledging anyone around them. We're all busy, with lots on our minds. But that's no excuse for rudeness. Everyone has a right to work in a cordial environment, and work flows more smoothly when the atmosphere and the people in it are pleasant. Put your smile on your dial, and be civil.

Find common interests

How many people in your office do you really know? Make an effort to get to know people so you can build on commonalities. For example, comment on a photo or an object on a colleague's desk. You may find you have a story to share, or you may learn something new that you can discuss. Making an effort to gain eye contact, spark up a conversation, smile, even just nod and say 'hello' is also a much more enjoyable and rewarding way to spend your day.

Make others feel important

Feeling unimportant or unappreciated is extremely demotivating. Make an effort to talk to your staff about something other than business from time to time. Ask them about their families, their holiday, and their weekend. Listen to them. By doing this you will win their respect, and you will also learn more about them and you may pick up useful information that will help you guide and motivate them. If you want to make friends and enhance your reputation as a great communicator, learn how to make others feel important.

Show humility

Humility involves maintaining our pride about who we are and about our achievement, but without arrogance. It means having a quiet confidence and being content to let others discover your talents without having to brag about them. Interestingly, very often the higher people rise and the more accomplishments they have, the higher their humility index. If you want to improve your relationships, practice humility. It's strength, not a weakness.

DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL OFFICE RELATIONSHIPS

Have you ever been afraid to ask a question or afraid to make a suggestion at work? Even if you are fairly confident, perhaps you had a feeling more of hesitation or concern? At some time, most of us have fearful or hesitation or concern? At some time, most of us have felt this way. It can also be difficult to ask for guidance, help, or even time off.

Now consider this: Have you ever been afraid to ask a question or make a suggestion with family or friends? Probably not as often, right?

The main reason for this is that you almost certainly have better communication skills and patterns with your family and friends that you do with people at the office. You've been around your friends and family longer, and you know their speech patterns, tones, style of joking, and so on. As a result, you are more comfortable with them and enjoy better relationships with them.

If better communication equals better relationships at home, wouldn't the same hold true for work? Once you start developing better through better communication you will benefit in several ways.

- You'll feel more comfortable and accepted at work. Most of us want to feel like a valued and valuable member of a team.
- With good communications skills, you'll feel like you are a part of the office community.
- You won't have that fear of stepping forward as much, because as your comfort level increases, your professional relationships will strengthen.
- Feeling more comfortable at work will make you feel better about your contributions to the office workload in general. There's nothing like the feeling you get from being a trusted and effective team member.
- You will find you can make suggestions for changing procedures, or even changing a product, without worrying about what others might think.
- Better yet, since you'll feel better about being at work and being around your co-workers and bosses, your morale will improve.
- Improved morale, in turn, will help you be more productive.
- You won't have that fear of stepping forward as much because your co-workers understand you better.

SPEAK TO PEOPLE, NOT MACHINES

In this era of Facebook, Twitter and email, crucial face-to-face communication skills have been lost or put aside indefinitely. There has been a sharp decline in fact-to-face communication in favour of instant contact overload. Because of this, people are losing vital opportunities to connect.

Face-to-face communication can give some of the most enriching experiences. Human interaction allows you to relay the most information, keeps you alert and allows you to truly connect with another person. This is an asset that is completely lost in instant communication.

Face-to-face communication is the most complete, most powerful form of conversation. Do not avoid it, but embrace it and make it work for you. Do not pass up the opportunities that come from connecting with another person.

Here are some tips to help you with your face-to-face interactions:

1. Meet in person to establish real connections

Email is fast, but it can be easily misinterpreted, leading to sticky situations. More information is relayed with face-to-face communication. Especially if there is a chance of conflict, meet in person to diffuse negative feelings and enforce the understanding that we all have emotions and can be sensitive to issues.

2. Be aware of body language, facial expressions, and eye contact

Use these tools to your benefit. Visually convey interest, openness and attention. Watch the other person for visual subtleties, but be careful not to misinterpret.

3. Keep your eye on the goal

Social chit-chat is a good, but don't forget why you wanted to initiate communication in the first place. Use face-to-face contact to help you clarify your message. It allows you to make sure that the message is understood and well received.

4. Make every conversation count

Pay attention to the conversation and the people involved. You want to be able to walk away remembering what was discussed and feeling like the interaction was successful.

5. Be real and sincere

Be there in the present, not in your own head or, even worse, on your phone. Give the other speaker your full attention. Stay alert to speak with confidence and interest.

6. Be sensitive to the other person's time

Do not spend 20 minutes when you asked for 10, and don't sidestep around issues. Staying present will allow you to communicate clearly and contribute to a successful conversation.



7. **Be prepared**

Know what the issue is before you start. Know what you want the outcome of the conversation to be.

8. **Face-to-face communication is collaboration**

Every communication involves give and take. Take the initiative to start face-to-face communication and give the other person your full attention.

REMEMBER!



“Electric communication will never be a substitute for the face of someone who, with their soul, encourages another person to be brave and true.”

Charles Dickens

POLISH UP YOUR PHONE SKILLS

When we speak on the telephone, we cannot use hand gestures or facial expressions to get our meaning across. We only have our voice. Have you ever considered how your voice sounds to others?

Have you told someone, “Hey, you should be on the radio!”? There’s often a special voice type that works well on the radio, isn’t there? They tend to speak with positive energy, with warmth, and with clarity. They know that if they don’t, you might switch to another station.

To a certain extent, the same goes for you in your business. You will benefit from being very clear and pleasant to listen to over the phone. People will pick up the phone more willingly, and stay on the phone longer, when they like how you speak to them.

Hear are some key things to focus on when improving your telephone voice:

Pitch

It’s very uncomfortable to listen to someone who speaks in a very high pitch. Speaking in a lower pitch can be more comfortable, and can give you more authority.

Rate

Slow down your normal rate of speaking on the telephone to give your listener a chance to take in what you say.

Inflection

Use correct emphasis to make your meaning clear, with a rise and fall in your voice.

Enunciate

Don’t mumble or slur your words. Make an effort to pronounce each word carefully.

Energy

A lot of your energy is lost over the telephone lines. This means you need to express more energy on the phone than when you are face to face.

Smile

Say this sentence without smiling,

“This is Martha from Sales. How can I help you?”

Now say it again with a real smile on your face. I’m sure you had more energy and even more intonation in your voice that second time around. Even if people can’t see you smiling, they can hear it.

WORK ON RELATIONSHIPS, NOT JUST TRANSACTIONS

Our ancestors used to get the job done and get the results they needed by using long-winded sentences, pompous expressions, big words and passive voice. That was how business was conducted in those days. Life was also slower and business was much more formal. Transactional interactions (which focus on results) worked back then, but they will not work today. Today, it's essential to focus on relational interactions, where the focus is on how people are treated.

Business today is conducted in a very informal way. In meetings and conferences we use a natural, more relaxed, friendly language rather than unnatural, formal language that was used several decades ago. We use active voice to get to the point quicker, and we still take care to be tactful. In general, the aim in business is to develop relationships first, or at least it should be.

Despite this, I'm surprised that so many people today are using a completely different style for their writing. They are using language in their writing that they would never use in speaking, language that is more suited to our great-grandfathers than to 21st Century businessmen and women.

Using old-fashioned language will not help you stand out from the rest, and it will not help you to build relationships.

The language used in our writing today should be simple, courteous, relaxed, straightforward and quite conversational. Here are some of the key reasons why and how you need to relax your language in all your written communications:

1. To establish relationships

People get an impression of you from the first email they receive, so it's important to make a connection by using appropriate words and phrases. For example, 'We spoke' or 'As spoken' will not have the same effect on your reader as 'Thanks for your call' or 'It was great to speak to you'.

2. To communicate your ideas precisely

Avoid using unsuitable or incorrect expressions, or a long-winded writing style, as these will not give the reader the right meaning or the right impression. It will only lead to misunderstandings, confusion and lengthy correspondence to clarify.

3. To convey a good impression

Use clear, concise, accurate language to give an impression of efficiency and to fill the reader with confidence. Careless or inaccurate expressions will do the opposite. Readers may question if such carelessness will extend to other business dealings too.

THINK POSITIVELY ABOUT NEGATIVITY

In most teams there is usually someone who regularly takes a negative stance. *They can be hard to work with as it feels like they are highly critical, or that they constantly need to criticise the ideas of others. While developing positive thinking can help you be more solution-oriented, However, negative thinking can play an important role in team communication.*

Critics play an important role in any process, and criticism in itself is not bad. Ideas must be criticised in order to test their strength. However, if criticism is to be useful, it must be voiced at the right time.

- The key to making sure that the team doesn't interpret criticism as negativity is to make sure that positive thinking and negative thinking are used at the right moment in the right way.
- Most interruptions begin with the word 'But'. So limit interruptions and give people the chance to get to the end of their idea or their message. Then ask critics of the idea to respond with encouragement before pointing out weakness.
- Another effective technique is to delay criticism until as many thoughts as possible have been put on the table. People are more likely to feel safe offering their ideas if only ideas are allowed for a while. If critics jump in too quickly, people won't be so willing to give ideas.

REMEMBER!



Be careful not to judge someone's idea too soon. Someone else on the team may be able to see its importance in a way that isn't immediately obvious to you.

COPE WELL WITH CONFLICT

If conflict is not handled well, the results could be very damaging. *A minor dispute can easily turn into a major argument or confrontation. Teamwork breaks down, and a downward spiral of negativity and blame result.*

A certain amount of friction is inevitable where more than one person is working on the same project even more so if guidelines for behaviour are not in place or are not being respected.

Understanding what not to do in conflict situations should certainly help you to figure out a productive course of action.

Here are some tips:

- **Shouting:** Few people respond well to raised voices. Shouting often produces shouting in return.
- **Sarcasm:** Very often disguised as snide humour, sarcastic comments and subtle digs will only amplify the existing tension.
- **Blaming:** Using a finger-pointing, fault-finding approach will turn everything personal. Emphasising what is wrong takes the focus away from the issue that needs resolving.
- **Defensiveness:** When we react defensively, we often interrupt and raise our voice. So we're not listening. This is sure to create walls rather than reach understanding.
- **Insults:** Name-calling and personal insults make it much less likely that the situation will be resolved at all, since people will withdraw from communicating with you.
- **Threats:** Ultimatums generally backfire. They might get things done in the short term, but often create lasting resentment and defiance.
- **Complaining:** Some people don't want to approach the source of conflict directly, preferring to tell everyone else about it. Complaining can stimulate gossip and rumours.

REMEMBER!



“Peace is not absence of conflict. It’s the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.”

Ronald Reagan

PRACTICE GREAT PEOPLE SKILLS EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK

Are you a people person? *It may surprise you, but there is only one answer: Yes you are! You need people skills in every aspect of your life, from personal or professional relationships and networking, to getting along with your in-laws during the holidays. How you use these skills is what sets you apart, or not!*

If you want to let the light shine on you in the office, at meetings, or during the annual dinner, you need to develop great people skills now.

Here are five techniques for improving your people skills, one for each day of the week:

Monday: Smile and be positive. It's so simple yet, for some, so difficult. Remember Peter Pan's 'happy thought'? Why not come up with your own. It may be an upcoming holiday, goals you are working for, maybe your kids or your cat. Think your 'happy thought' when ever you need a pick-me-up to keep you smiling, energetic and in a positive mindset.

Tuesday: Use people's names. Whether you are speaking with a long-standing colleague or potential client, use their first name in a casual way. For example, instead of saying "that's a great idea," try "that's a great idea, Bob." It acknowledges what the person said and makes the conversation more personal.

Wednesday: Use eye contact. This is one of the most basic and important social interactions. For starters, I suggest picking one eye and focus on it for a few seconds. Then the other one. Do this in a comfortable, casual manner. It may feel strange at first, but it will have a positive impact on the other person.

Thursday: Listen! Try to go through an entire conversation without talking about yourself. It is odd how challenging this can be. Instead, ask the speaker questions and show a keen interest. You will walk away from the conversation richer for getting to know someone better. You'll also make their day because they will feel you truly listened to them.

Friday: Practice. The saying is that practice makes perfect, but perfection is rare. Practice does make a difference though. Get out there and interact. Meeting new people can be enlightening and invigorating. Conversations can be memorable and life-changing. Start a conversation with the taxi driver or even with someone in the lift. With people come opportunities, so just get out there and enjoy connecting with your fellow humans.

So there you have it – people skills for every day of the week. I've skipped Saturday and Sunday, so this is time for you to consolidate what you've learned! And the days are only a guide, so feel free to practice them all on any day!

MAKE OTHER PEOPLE FEEL IMPORTANT

One of the most fundamental rules of developing relationships is to respect other people's feelings. We all like to be recognised and appreciated. If you want to make friends and enhance your reputation as a great communicator, learn how to make others feel important.

Successful leaders develop a good relationship with their people, and their people are then inspired to follow and support them.

Here are six ways you can make people feel important. Practice each of them and you will find you will receive a huge payback on your own objectives of building great relationships and being successful:

1. Be appreciative

Feeling unimportant or unappreciated is so demotivating. Say "Thank you" at any opportunity. Make someone smile, and it will make you feel better too.

2. Be agreeable

Too many people like to be argumentative, or find fault, or play "devil's advocate" way too often. People who are agreeable and positive are much easier and nicer to work with.

3. Be attentive

A really powerful way to make someone feel important is to listen to them. Before you launch into asking questions or making comments, listen first. This will help you become a more interesting and important person in their eyes.

4. Be approachable

If you are a manager, make an effort to talk to your staff about something other than business from time to time. Ask them about their families, their upcoming holiday, their weekend. Listen to them. Smile. By doing this you will win their respect, and at the same time you'll learn more about your staff and you'll pick up useful information that will help you guide and motivate them.

5. Be considerate

Consideration is the discipline to do and say things to people that are important to them. If you treat a person with courtesy and respect, they will value and respect you more.

6. Show admiration

When you admire something belonging to another person, it makes them feel good. Find some positives about your colleagues, your clients, your friends. They will be reflected back on you.

TURN AROUND DIFFICULT SITUATIONS AT WORK

In business, things will not always go smoothly, and there are a multitude of obstacles and challenges to overcome. However, no matter what the situation, handling any difficulties head on is a far better solution than to let a situation escalate out of control.

In your career, you will encounter many difficult situations that will test your resolve. Perhaps there will be conflict with colleagues, a less than supportive boss, customer complaints, promotion rejection, or maybe a simple error of judgment.

Here are 5 important steps to help change the outcome of a difficult situation.

1. Embrace acceptance

Moaning about a situation will not make it better. Learning to accept a situation is the first step to moving on. Acceptance can bring you to a calm point where you can consider future options, and focus more positively on the situation.

2. Improve communication

Approach every situation with a sense of control. Be prepared to clear the air, especially when there is tension. Consider your viewpoint carefully, and do not let yourself become emotional. Speak clearly, clarify your point, and watch your body language.

3. Play fair

There will be times when you feel as if a situation is just not fair. It's difficult, but it's life. Let go of the 'it's not fair' frame of mind, and consider whether you could have improved the situation in any way.

4. View huge problems with clarity

It's easy to blow up a problem out of all proportion. You may feel responsible for a particular situation; you may be struggling to resolve an issue; perhaps you upset a colleague. Whatever the situation, it's important that you approach the situation with renewed focus and clarity. Forget right or wrong, blame, or pressure. Focus all your energy on resolving the issue, and it may not be as insurmountable as it first appeared to be.

5. Improve listening skills

A great way to cope with a difficult situation is to really listen. Say very little and let the other person have their say. Make notes throughout if the situation is complex, stay focused, and be professional. By listening to people and showing understanding, it may be possible to resolve a problem before it even starts.

MAKE A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION

We've all seen those people coming in for an interview *with a stain on his shirt or a run in her pantyhose. We certainly know of the major factors that can help make a good first impression. They include those issues we are all taught, like dressing appropriately, having good hygiene, and being on time.*

Here are my tips on how you can make a great impression and really stand out from the crowd.

- 1. Do research.** Find out names and functions. Find out titles. If you can, find out what the company does and the way people function within it. You'll be several steps ahead in the 'getting to know you' game.
- 2. Be positive.** Being upbeat and positive leaves others with a great feeling because it's truly contagious.
- 3. Take notes.** Don't be afraid to carry a notepad and take notes. Not only will it help you remember things if the meeting is very long at all, but you will also appear conscientious and detailed.
- 4. Learn names quickly.** Both your research and your notes should help you learn names, but try to at least save them in your short-term memory right away. You will impress the people you are meeting with your memory of course, and you will also be able to keep notes and ideas associated with the right people. This comes in really handy when you meet more people than you were expecting.
- 5. Listen.** One of the best ways to impress people is to listen to them. You not only gain insights into their opinions and ideas, but it also makes them feel important!
- 6. Be organised.** Practice, practice, practice! Whether you are giving a presentation, or you are just discussing some new ideas, have all your ducks in a row. Have documents in order and make sure you have enough copies before you get there. Know in what order you want to discuss your points. Let them see that you plan ahead and know how to organise your thoughts.
- 7. Be polite.** This is actually one of the basics ways to make a good impression, but it bears repeating regularly. Nothing impresses as well as good manners and kindness.

As you can see from these ways to improve the first impression you make, they all have to do with your behaviour. What you are doing is showing people how they can expect you to behave in the future. It can make the difference not only in whether they remember you, but how they remember you as well!

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