



Developing Good Interpersonal Skills

Developing good interpersonal skills socially and at work begins with looking outwards: being very generous with praise and having a genuine desire to listen and encourage at every opportunity. Too many people are only interested in hearing their own voices, or putting their colleagues down. This could explain why many organizations are short on innovation but long on windbags who, having the authority and a captive audience to match, drone on relentlessly because they believe their utterances to be paramount.

Like a former colleague who used to boast that, as director, he was the only person who talked at his meetings because he tended to have the best ideas. He did not like suggestions and emphasized that he always had to tell his staff what to do, because "they never have anything to contribute". It was no surprise that he went bust a few months later, his business having become sorely short of new input, tolerance, and general goodwill.

If you have any doubts about your skills in dealing with others, you could improve the situation by following some simple suggestions.

1. Never be afraid to make the first move, but try to be positive, not negative. Try to compliment, where possible.
2. Aim to be clear, brief, and courteous on the telephone.
3. Try to address someone by his or her exact name. Remembering a person's name is a sincere sign of interest, is highly flattering, and never forgotten.
4. Try to LISTEN more than you speak. You are likely to notice certain unspoken elements that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. Not only that, the person will feel you are genuinely interested in what they are saying.
5. Keep meetings short and interesting. Try to involve everyone present. It is easy to notice the articulate ones while you miss the ones who could really make a difference through encouragement.
6. Praise first and criticize later, and only if you have to.
7. Make constructive criticisms, not destructive ones, bearing in mind that there are many routes to the same end. If you show colleagues how to build on what they already have, it will be far more productive than destroying the foundations they've laid mainly for your own ego.
8. Try to be more persuasive than divisive. People will go to the ends of the earth for you if they feel valued and appreciated. It means you get much more done that way.

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YOUR FUTURE TEAM.
TODAY.

9. Always acknowledge another person's point of view, even if you disagree with it. Their view is important to them, just as yours is important to you. If there is a deadlock, think about it for a while and agree to differ, if nothing changes.

10. Above all, it is your right to express yourself freely, to support what you believe in, as long as you remember that this right also applies to everyone else and carries much responsibility for both compromise and sensitivity.

These simple guidelines may not reduce all your anxieties, or solve all your interpersonal problems, but, with regular usage, your skills should dramatically improve and your personal approach positively enhanced. In time, the quality of your interactions should become far more enjoyable and infinitely more rewarding all round.

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