

INTROSPECTIVE



# EIGHT GREAT WAYS TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE

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You have a good idea but can't convince your peers of its merit. You crafted a groundbreaking strategy, but the team trudges on in the same old way. Certain people move forward in their career while you seem to be stuck. Consider that the problem might not be in the quality of what you have to offer, but instead, lies in how you connect with people to create the results you desire.

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## "WE REALLY CONNECTED."

You've said that before, and chances are, you smiled as you said it. You know good things happened in that encounter.

Did the two of you 'see eye to eye'? Did you feel like he 'just gets it'? Was it easy to agree, to understand each other, to find common ground?

If you enjoyed the fluidity of your last connection, you already have some skills. Now ask yourself: what did you do to create that 'click'?

Psychologists have identified a host of behaviors that create smooth social interactions. The good news is that you can introduce new behaviors and take your success rate to a higher level.

As you think about the following Lucky Eight, pause and reflect on your own habits. In some categories, you may be connecting well already. But no one of us is at the top of our game in all eight. Think about small adjustments you could make to raise your awareness in the interaction and create better connections.

## 1 GREETING

Your hello is your first opportunity. Studies show people make decisions about you in the first 90 seconds. Are you maximizing that moment? Before every hello, pause and center yourself. Choose your style: serious or upbeat? Square your shoulders to the other person, make eye contact and speak to him. Hold that moment. Ask a sincere question. Something as simple as "Did you have any trouble finding our office?" can be enough to put him at ease. Your attention will make him feel noticed, and the connection cycle will begin.

## 2 PACING

Pay attention to the other person's style. Adjust yours to his. If he speaks more deliberately than you, slow down. If his voice is much quieter, soften yours. If he's a big-gesture, effusive type, up your energy and express more. As you pace him, the two of you will come into sync.

## 3 LISTENING

Research has shown our brains are able to process 400 words per minute, yet our ears only take in 125 words. That's why you can listen to your boss yet think about your lunch plans. But... you need to listen more attentively to your boss. So how do you do it? Analyze. Put your brain to work by analyzing what he is saying and how he's saying it. Challenge yourself to remember the exact words. Every time you feel your thoughts wandering off, pull them back and analyze what you're hearing. Take thoughtful notes. Spend an extra minute reviewing those notes immediately afterward.

## 4 ACKNOWLEDGING LANGUAGE

Here's a simple but effective way to connect. Say something to confirm that you are listening. Acknowledge his statement. This can be as small as "I see", "Yes", "I understand" or "You're right". Of course you need to use acknowledgements judiciously. Nobody feels good if the other person says "Good question" to every single query. Say "Good point" when you genuinely think he made a good point, and vary your phrases.

## 5 REFLECTIVE LANGUAGE

Because you're listening more attentively, you are noticing the other person's language. Now incorporate some of that vocabulary into your own. Why? Because when he hears you using the same words he himself chose, he feels you 'get it'. So if he speaks of his employer as "the firm", use the word firm rather than company. He will feel more connected to you because your language feels familiar.

## 6 COMMON GROUND

It's a simple connector: find a common interest and the two of you will be deep in conversation instantly. Take a few extra minutes before your next meeting to research commonalities with this person. Your research could mean just thinking about all you know of him. A quick look at his LinkedIn profile may reveal you both have the same degree. A quick call to a mutual colleague could give you a gold mine of insights. Ask about his outside interests, favorite sports, charitable commitments. That preparation could give you an instant connection during the small talk in your first 90 seconds.

## 7 ASKING QUESTIONS

This connection is so simple, yet it is terribly under-used. As the other person is speaking and you're analyzing his words, ask him questions about the content. Use open-ended questions (to generate more than a one-word answer) to enhance the exchange.



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## 8 STEPPING BACK

Finally, take a mental step back from the encounter. Observe how you two are connecting. Are the first seven techniques working? Is he warming up to you? Is there a natural flow to your exchange? If you aren't there yet, adjust your style. Just make a mid-conversation 'course correction'.

The simplest way to do all of this is to heighten your awareness. As you're about to walk into a meeting, stop and ask yourself: What will I do to make the connection? How will I make the best of my first 90 seconds? What do I need to do to connect with this person?

The answers will come to you naturally as you practise. You'll reap the benefits when you feel that natural 'click!' and soon, the whole process will become second nature. **C**

By Kathy O'Brien | Red Shoe Communications

With more than 25 years' experience spanning Asia, Europe and the US, Kathy O'Brien is a certified communications coach, having trained corporate leaders in their delivery of significant moments such as key presentations and media interviews.

Kathy chose the name "Red Shoe" for her company because the red shoe stands out the most in a crowd, and that is what she helps her clients do.

An American who has lived in London and New York, Kathy has made Singapore her home for the last 16 years. In 2012, Kathy was awarded Outstanding PR Mentor by the Institute of Public Relations of Singapore.

