



SEVEN STEPS TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE

Richard walked out of the meeting with a spring in his step. He knew the meeting had gone well. He had really connected with the new client – they just clicked.

Richard was feeling something we all know, really: we are social beings. We like having good conversations because they connect us to other social beings. You might remember times when you were talking to someone and you both just ‘hit it off’.

If you do remember such a conversation, chances are you already have some conversational skill. Think back. What did you do to create that ‘click’? Would you like to be able to do it more often, or more skillfully?

THE RIGHT START

A minute and a half. That is all you have got. Studies have shown that people make decisions about you in the first 90 seconds. So now you know it: your greeting is your first opportunity. Make sure you maximize the value you get from those first 90 seconds. Before you greet someone, pause and centre yourself. Choose your style: serious or upbeat? Match the occasion. Square your shoulders to the other person, make eye contact and speak to him. Greet warmly and follow up with a simple question. It could be as simple as 'Is this your first time visiting our office?' You put people at ease early in the conversation by showing you're interested in them. Then the connection cycle will begin.

'ACE' THE PACE

People love conversations that are 'in sync'. Pay attention to the other person's style. Adjust your style to hers. If she is taking her time to think and speaking more deliberately and quietly, slow down and soften your voice. If she is more energetic and gestures a lot, express more. This means that sometimes you might have to move out of your comfort zone, but it's a small price to pay for such a great conversation. As you pace her, the two of you will come into sync.

LISTEN AND ANALYZE

Research has shown that the human brain can process 400 words per minute, but the ears can only take in about 125 words in a minute. That is why you can listen to others speaking yet allow your mind to drift to other things, like your weekend plans. Still, you know it is important to pay attention in a conversation. So how do you do it? Analyze. Stop your brain from drifting away by analyzing what the other person is saying and how he's saying it. Challenge yourself to remember his exact words. Take thoughtful notes. Spend an extra moment to review your notes afterward.

7 STEPS TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE

The Right Start

'Ace' the Pace

Listen and Analyze

Language: Saying It & Playing It

Common Ground

Ask Questions

Step Back & Reflect

LANGUAGE: SAYING IT AND PLAYING IT

People want to know you are listening. Give them evidence by acknowledging their statements. This could be as simple as 'I see' or 'I understand'. Of course you must use these acknowledgments judiciously. Imagine someone saying 'you're right' to everything you say! Be authentic: say 'good point' only when you truly believe a good point has been made.

As you listen to the other person, notice her language. Then incorporate some of that vocabulary into your own. This is reflective language. When she hears you use the same language she has been using, she feels you 'get it'. So if your customer refers to her employer as 'the firm', use the word firm rather than company. She will feel more connected to you because your language sounds natural to her.

COMMON GROUND

One of the greatest determinants of connectedness among people is a common interest. If you manage to find a common interest, you will be deep in conversation instantly. Before your next meeting, spend a few minutes to research commonalities with this person. Think about all that you know about her: her education, past jobs, current priorities, outside interests. Do the two of you have school-age children, or is he as keen on water sports as you are? A quick reference to a common interest can give you an instant connection during those crucial first 90 seconds.

ASKING QUESTIONS

This incredibly powerful connector is terribly under-used. Too often we wait for them to finish making statements so we can jump in with our statements. Ask open-ended questions to generate more than a one-word reply and continue the conversation. Such questions normally begin with 'How', 'What' or 'In what way'.

STEP BACK AND REFLECT

Finally, step back mentally from the conversation and observe how well you are connecting with the other person. Are the first 6 techniques working? Is she warming up to you? Is there a natural flow to your exchange? If you are not there yet, adjust your style. Just make a mid-conversation 'course correction.'

The simplest way of doing all this is to heighten your awareness. As you are about to walk into a meeting, 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 practice. You will reap benefits when you feel the natural 'click'. Soon, the whole process will become second nature. ■

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