Talking to People

People skills

How we get on with our close friends, our boss at work, our parents and other people is all dependent upon "people skills".

How do you develop and maintain people skills?

These skills generally fall into three areas:-

A. Understanding yourself and being prepared to trust others.
B. Getting your message across clearly and accurately.
C. Resolving conflicts and relationship problems in a constructive way.

A. Understanding yourself and being prepared to trust others

This first area of developing people skills involves:-

- Being aware of yourself - knowing who you are and what you're about. Being aware of your emotions and feelings at different times and being aware of the opinions you hold.
- Accepting yourself for what you are, strengths and weaknesses alike.
- Being prepared to talk about yourself (strengths and weaknesses) to others.
- Trusting others.
- Respecting others. We react to other people out of our values - what we would do or wouldn't do. But not everyone has the same values as we do. We should respect other people even though they may hold different values than we do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Being aware of myself, of who I am and of what I like</th>
<th>Being aware of you, who you are, and of what you are like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being accepting of myself</td>
<td>Being accepting of you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of my strengths and abilities</td>
<td>Aware of your strengths and abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting you to accept and support me, to cooperate with me, and to be open with me</td>
<td>Being trustworthy by accepting and supporting you, cooperating with you, and being open with you</td>
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RESULTS IN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Being open with you, sharing my ideas and feelings, and letting you know who I am as a person</th>
<th>Being open to you, being interested in your ideas and feelings and in who you are as a person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being open with you +</td>
<td>Being open to you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

= An open relationship

(Fig. 1 from 'Reaching Out'-David Johnson 1981, P16 B. GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS CLEARLY AND ACCURATELY)
Getting to know yourself is a skill to be developed overtime. You will need to be patient and listen to yourself as well as doing the same for others.

**B. Getting your message across clearly and accurately.**

The second area of developing people skills involves communicating your ideas and feelings accurately and clearly. Communication skills begin with sending messages (verbal and non-verbal) that are easily understood by the other person. They also involve listening and receiving messages in ways that ensure and acknowledge that you have understood what the other person is trying to say.

We can both give and receive messages in non-verbal ways. For example, the tone of your voice, your facial expression, your posture, eye contact with the other person, touching, gestures and the spatial distance between yourself and someone else- all these are non-verbal ways which can be used to give and receive messages.

**SENDING**

- ‘Own’ your statements by using first person singular pronouns ‘I’ and ‘my’, eg. I think. . . or I feel. . .
- Include clear statements of all the necessary information the receiver needs to comprehend the message.
- Make sure that your verbal and non-verbal messages convey the same meaning. eg. Confusion arises if someone says that they are feeling sad, yet are laughing.
- Repeat your message.
- Ask for feedback to ensure correct understanding of your message.
- Describe your feelings eg. I feel sad.
- Describe other people’s behaviour without evaluating or interpreting it. For example “You keep interrupting me” not “You’re a rotten self centred pig, give me a go”.

**RECEIVING**

| Paraphrasing | This means repeating back in your own words what you've just heard. This clarifies what you've heard. It is a check that you've got the message intended, and it can act as a summary, helping the other person take a fresh look at what they're saying. |
| Questioning | Closed questions: these are questions that direct the other person to a very narrow range of answers namely ‘yes’ or ‘no’. They can cut off the flow of conversation and limit the topics you can explore. Open-ended questions are questions that leave room to move. They are questions like "How do you feel?" |
| Non-verbal skills | People can tell if you're listening to them by your body language. eg. by your eye contact, by being in a receptive posture. This demonstrates that you are giving the person your attention. |

**SOME OBSTACLES TO LISTENING TO OTHERS**

- Background noises ·
- Finishing their sentences ·
- Hearing what you want to hear ·
- Blaming the other person ·
- Interrupting ·
- Leaping in with advice.
- Speaking for the other person - it is their thought, let them finish it!

**C. Resolving conflicts and relationship problems in a constructive way**

Conflicts will arise even if two people care a lot about each other. Important aspects of conflict management includes:-
• Being aware of your normal way of coping with conflict situations.
• Defining conflicts in ways that help bring about a constructive resolution.
• Being able to negotiate resolutions that are beneficial both to you and the other person.
• Being able to manage your feelings (such as anger) constructively.

EXAMPLES
Let’s work through some examples.

How do you tell your boss you’re not happy with your job?
A. Tell him where he can stick his/her job and resign.
B. Put up with it and don’t cause any waves.
C. Tell yourself it’s your problem and nobody else’s.
D. Talk it over with him/her, explaining what you dislike about the job

Some specific skills you need for option ‘D’ are:

• Making clear to yourself what you dislike about the job.
• Clearly and accurately conveying this to your boss.
• Being able to negotiate a solution to the problem, which takes into consideration your needs and your boss’s needs.

How do you react when your friend gets angry with you?
A. Get angry as well.
B. Say “Let’s talk about it later”
C. Accept the blame.
D. Acknowledge his/her anger and find out what they’re angry about.

Tell him where he can stick his/her job and resign.

Some specific skills you need for option ‘D’ are:

• Acknowledge their anger, seeking clarification as to what they are angry about.
• Depending on what they are angry about you may want to:
• Listen to their position on the matter.
• Clarify to them your position on the matter and negotiate a resolution that satisfies you both.
• Apologise if you were at fault.

Choosing to try to resolve conflicts constructively may mean you have to practice new skills, like those described above and cope with your anxieties as you try out new approaches. You will find that the rewards are well worth the effort you put in.

Assistance in this area and many others can be obtained from the RMIT Student Counselling Service. The RMIT Counselling Service offers free and confidential counselling to all RMIT students. Counsellors may help you to explore your concerns, both personal and academic.

The RMIT Counselling Service can be contacted at 9925-4365 between 9am and 5pm.