

How to Be Liked

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

We all want to be liked. But what do we need to do to make the right impression, quickly? When it comes to working, we may only have one chance to build a relationship, and so what we do early on really matters. So if you tend to grow on people gradually, you might be interested in learning a few tips to speed things up. Over the next few minutes, we'll go through a variety of things you can work on that are **proven** to make people like you in quick time.

The first thing to do is ask questions. According to Alison Wood-Brooks, assistant professor at Harvard Business School, "Compared to those who do not ask many questions, people who do are better liked and learn more information from their conversation partners". You need to come across as genuine, of course, and you must look out for social cues - if someone appears uncomfortable from a barrage of questions, sit back and let them breathe. But more often than not, people will enjoy it, as Wood-Brooks points out, "because they enjoy talking about themselves and their own perspectives."

Another Harvard study from 2013 discovered that *talking about yourself may be inherently rewarding, the same way that food, money, and sex are*. So the next time you're in a meeting, instead of jumping straight into a demo, keep a couple of minutes at the start to ask some simple questions: how are you? How are things going at work at the minute? Have you been following the [Insert a current cultural phenomenon - like Squid Game, Stranger Things, or Game of Thrones]? Or, if you know they have young children, ask about them! Are you managing to get any sleep at all? Have they started walking?

By letting somebody talk about themselves or things they enjoy, you're generating a pleasant memory of being with you. That will make them want to see or speak with you again!

We can take the findings of It doesn't hurt to ask: Question-asking increases liking a step further. The researchers found that detailed follow-up questions are even more effective. These questions suggest that you're taking more than a superficial interest, and you'll find that people will respond positively. If you've met the person before, asking a question that relates to something they said the last time you saw them is an excellent way to achieve this. So if you did discuss Stranger Things, ask them what they are making of the latest season. But you can still weave this into a first meeting. Maybe while they're talking about something

they're passionate about, look patiently for a good opportunity to probe so that you clearly display an interest in that person. For example, if they mention that out of work, they love getting out into nature when they aren't working, ask which hike has been the most challenging, or, if there was just one place they could go for the rest of their lives, where that would be. Showing a genuine interest will make them feel valued and result in them feeling positive about you.

The final tip we have related to questions might sound odd, but it is a great idea: don't be afraid to ask seemingly stupid questions. There are a couple of components that make this a good idea. The first, we covered already - people like being asked questions, because it gives them a chance to shine, or to talk about things they are passionate about. Asking clarifying questions can help uncover the real intent behind what is said. These help us understand each other better and lead us toward relevant follow-up questions, which, as mentioned, are the ones that make people like us more. But the second part is that - even if you feel silly - if you're confused by something, there's a good chance that others are, too. By asking for more clarity, you give the person speaking or presenting an opportunity to explain things more simply, which is in their interest. But also, by actually voicing your confusion, you may help others in the room or on that call who feel too shy to ask the same question, and they will be grateful to you for asking what they were thinking. The main exception, of course, is asking a question because you were late or simply weren't paying attention. Nobody will thank you for that!

The next tip is simple, but we don't do it enough. Smile! We prefer people when they're smiling. In one University of Wyoming study, nearly 100 undergraduate women looked at photos of another woman in one of four poses:

- Smiling in an open body position
- Smiling in a closed-body position
- Not smiling in an open body position
- Not smiling in a closed body position

Results showed that the woman in the photo was liked most when she was smiling, regardless of her body position. And again, it likely comes back to making the subject feel good.

Marco Iacoboni, a neuroscientist at UCLA, studied the mirror effect on neurons in the body and says that smiling is contagious. He writes

When I see you smiling, my mirror neurons for smiling fire up, too, initiating a cascade of neural activity that evokes the feeling we typically associate with a smile. I don't need to make any inference on what you're feeling, I experience immediately and effortlessly (in a milder form, of course) what you are experiencing.

Essentially, we like people who smile, as it makes us smile. So the next time you're speaking to a client or prospect, smile! It might sound basic, but if you have many meetings from home

and think it would help, put a reminder on your desk to smile - whether that's literally a post-it-note with the word smile or a photo of a friend or other memory that makes you smile.

Perhaps even more so than just smiling, you've got a great chance of being liked if you can share laughter with people. It may not come naturally for you to act as the comedian, but provided you're willing to see the humor in things, that's not a problem. A study from the University of North Carolina found that shared laughter may communicate to others that we have a similar worldview, which strengthens our relationships. According to Dr. Sara Algoe "...shared laughter is a really important, but overlooked behavior... It may have a lot of potential for helping people grease the wheels of their relationships in everyday life." So, find the opportunities to join in with someone's laughter. Knowing that you find the same things funny will likely have a positive effect, even if it wasn't your joke that prompted it.

Of course, if you can be the one responsible for making people laugh, that's a bonus. It's hard to hate a jokester or someone who has a carefree approach to life. Research at the University of Oxford found that laughter releases endorphins, the chemicals that give us that tremendous buzz. So if you can make people laugh, they'll link their memory of you with enjoyment and want to be around you more.

The final tip we have today is a challenging one, but the rewards can be huge. It's to show vulnerability. Anecdotally, many of us would probably say it's gradually becoming more acceptable to publicly show vulnerability than it was in previous generations, but it's certainly not easy. Our instinct is to be guarded. "I can't admit I messed up at work, because people will think I can't do my job properly, or that I'm not a capable person. I can't be the first to apologize after an argument, because it will make me look weak, and people will think they can beat me in the future." But to outside observers, it's quite different. "We love seeing raw truth and openness in other people," says University of Houston professor Brené Brown in her book *Daring Greatly*, "but we're afraid to let them see it in us." As reported in the Atlantic, Brown ran a study that underlined this theory. She split 100 subjects into two groups. Those in one group were asked to sing an improvised song in front of a jury, while those in the other were asked to serve as members of that jury. It was a bluff; in the end, no one sang or judged. But before the participants realized that they were being had, they answered some questions about vulnerability. Those in the singing group saw their anticipated vulnerability more negatively, endorsing statements such as "When I show my vulnerability, other people find it repellant" and "I should avoid showing my vulnerability." The judges were far more generous when they evaluated the vulnerability of the singers, saying that their singing would be a sign of "strength" and "courage." The point is, being vulnerable can be a great thing.

Obviously, you don't want to be too vulnerable at work. If you overshare, for instance, and excessively express self-doubt, colleagues may start to question your credibility. You also don't want to fake it. "When vulnerability veers away from authenticity, it can tend to feel scripted. And rather than deepen relationships, this dynamic can actually be polarizing and professionally harmful," reports Quartz. To ensure you're being authentic, ask yourself if what you're sharing is helpful not just to yourself, but also to others.

So, we got through a lot there. Let's recap - our tips to be liked are

1. To ask questions (particularly follow-up questions, and even dumb questions)

2. To smile
3. To laugh, and to make people laugh
4. To show vulnerability.

It's not an exhaustive list, but if you can work on these things, you'll make inroads in your relationships at work, and in your life.

Remember, though, **inauthenticity stinks**.

This week, make a conscious effort to share laughter. That doesn't mean fake-laughing at something you don't find funny. It means looking for more opportunities to legitimately laugh with others, smile, and ask some great questions. If you can master those simple things, people WILL like you more.

Reading List

- **[Study]** It doesn't hurt to ask: Question-asking increases liking, Karen Huang.
- **[Article]** The Neuroscience of Everybody's Favorite Topic, Adrian F. Ward.
- **[Article]** 15 Psychological Tricks To Make People Like You Immediately, Shana Lebowitz.
- **[Article]** 10 Simple Ways to Make People Like You, John Brandon.
- **[Article]** The Secret to Being Approachable Is Almost Too Obvious (You've Probably Already Done it Today), Lauren Hamer.
- **[Article]** Why Laughter May Be the Best Pain Medicine - Scientific American, Jennifer Welsh.
- **[Article]** 52 Ways to be the Most Liked Person at Work, Christina Desmarais.
- **[Article]** Relearning the Art of Asking Questions, Tom Pohlmann, Neethi Mary Thomas.
- **[Podcast]** Vulnerability and Laughter, Brené Brown, Judd Apatow.
- **[Article]** Vulnerability at Work Can Backfire, Melody Wilding.
- **[Article]** Being vulnerable can make you more successful at work—here's how, Yoni Blumberg
- **[Article]** Your Flaws Are Probably More Attractive Than You Think They Are, Emily Esfahani Smith.
- **[Video]** The power of vulnerability, Brené Brown.