

**TITLE: "10 TIPS FOR IMPROVING
SOCIAL INTERCOURSE"**

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Since 1971: *"Software for the finest computer - the Mind"*

*"Social intercourse is a two way street.
Make sure you are driving on the right side."
- Bryce's Law*

In past articles I have described the problems our younger workers are having with interpersonal relations/communications. Many find it easier to plug into an iPod as opposed to working with others. This is resulting in a socially dysfunctional workplace where people work at odds with each other. To overcome this problem, I offer the following suggestions for improving a person's social intercourse. There is nothing magical here, just ten commonsense tips to help you develop better relationships with your coworkers, your vendors, and your customers.

1. GREET SOMEONE

Nobody wants to feel unwelcome or unappreciated. If they do, they will feel like outcasts and less likely to help you with something. The objective is to make people feel at home. This can be accomplished with a simple greeting or a firm handshake while looking at the person directly in the eyes.

It is easy to detect when a greeting is sincere or routine. Your goal is to appear genuinely concerned about the person. This can be achieved by:

- Complimenting on some personal attribute of the person (e.g., clothes, hair, car).
- Inquiring about a person's family (e.g., birthday observed, anniversary, graduation, pets, health, etc.)
- Asking about an event the person recently experienced (e.g., attendance at an event, participation in a volunteer organization/charity, a new job or project assignment, etc.),

- Commenting on something newsworthy - community, sports, weather (*"What did you think about...?"*)

Such greetings are an expression of your interest in the person. Too often greetings become routine and, as such, less credible. Try to break it up.

A good, basic greeting can work wonders in building cooperation between people.

2. ENGAGE IN A CONVERSATION

People have a natural curiosity as to what you are all about. The best way to communicate this is to engage in simple conversation. Some people are naturally shy and tend to withdraw from such discourse. If one person is not willing to start a conversation, another should take the initiative simply by asking the other, *"How are you?"* or *"What do you think?"*

A good icebreaker is to tell a joke. But in this day and age of "political correctness," exercise good judgment and taste in your humor. Avoid slang and offensive remarks unless the occasion calls for it. Goodhearted kidding and teasing is fine, as long as it doesn't turn malicious.

Some people do not have the gift of gab for telling jokes. As such, tell a story about some recent event that happened to you. But don't ramble. Stay focused and be sure your story has a point to it.

A conversation is a two-way street, regardless if it is humorous or serious in tone. Look interested, stay focused, and ask questions. Also be careful not to dominate a conversation unless that is your intention. If you have a tendency to monopolize a conversation, people will be less likely to engage in conversation with you.

For additional information on discourse, see:

No. 60 - *"The Art of Persuasion"* - Feb 20, 2006
<http://www.phmainstreet.com/mba/ss060220.pdf>

3. VOLUNTEER

Many people prefer to sit back and watch as others perform the work. Volunteering your time or skills may add an additional burden but it tells others you believe in them and are willing to help out. Such an expression also makes it easy for you to solicit support when you are in need of help.

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4. ASK FOR ADVICE

Too often people are too proud (or too stubborn) to ask for directions in our journey through life. But asking for advice from a colleague accomplishes two things: first, you might get the answer you seek, and; second, it says to the person you trust and respect their opinion. By confiding in an individual, the advisor becomes concerned with your best interests. This leads to mutual trust and respect between people.

When you are asked to offer advice to another, be as articulate and rational as possible. If you do not know the correct answer, do not fabricate advice or mislead the person. This will only shatter the person's trust in you. Instead, point him in another direction where he might find the answer he is seeking.

5. NETWORK

It seems participation in trade groups and volunteer organizations today are dwindling. This is surprising since such groups provide a convenient vehicle to meet and exchange ideas with your peers. Such forums are useful:

- To exercise our basic social skills.
- To stay abreast of current developments in our field of interest.
- To establish relationships with people who possess different skills and knowledge that can help us.

Instead of resisting networking with others, the younger generation should embrace it. I heartily recommend joining trade groups and volunteer/charity/fraternal organizations. Regardless of the group dynamics involved, such forums help to improve ourselves personally and professionally.

6. TURN OPPONENTS INTO PROPONENTS

Today we live in a competitive society (some prefer the expression "*a dog-eat-dog world*"). I guess this is somewhat natural. There is nothing wrong with some friendly competition; it is when it turns vicious, thereby turning competitors into enemies, that you have to be careful. To overcome this problem, be gracious in defeat and magnanimous in victory. This was the secret to Abraham Lincoln's success. After losing earlier political campaigns, Lincoln would stun his opponents by appearing at their victory celebrations and offering a sincere hand of congratulations and support. Because of this, his early opponents became his proponents later on. After winning

the presidential campaign of 1860 he again stunned his opponents by offering them seats in his cabinet. These former opponents became his closest confidants during the dark days of the American Civil War.

It is one thing to go into a contest confidently; it is quite another to go in with a chip on your shoulder, thereby inviting trouble. Take disagreements in stride and pick your fights carefully. Ask yourself if it is really necessary to create an enemy at this point in your career.

7. BE COURTEOUS

Your manners and how you interact with others says a lot about a person's character. Basic courtesy means you are socially well adjusted. No, I am not suggesting everyone turns into a "Miss Manners," but attention to basic courtesy can improve your image with others. Small details can have a dramatic effect. For example:

- A simple Thank You note will be remembered for a service rendered. I have been a program chairman for various organizations over the years. After a speaker conducted a presentation for me, I would be sure to send a thank you note to him/her for their presentation (regardless if there was an honorarium or not). This is a nice personal touch that is remembered. Consequently, I never have a problem securing a speaker.
- Invite others to participate in events. Again, a personal note can work wonders and makes people feel wanted. If you stumble over an omission on your invitation list (which inevitably happens), move swiftly to correct the omission. Include people, don't exclude them, let them know their presence has meaning to you.

Above all else, watch your temper. As the old adage admonishes us, "*You catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar.*" A little courtesy can go a long way towards building fruitful relationships.

8. BE POSITIVE

People naturally gravitate to others with a positive or upbeat personality. This doesn't mean we always have to wear a smiling face, but we should concede that people like optimists as opposed to pessimists. As such, we should always be looking for reasons why something should be done, as opposed to reasons why it shouldn't.

This leads us into the area of effective criticism. Avoid

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the temptation to maliciously criticize someone or something. First, it makes the person look like a whining and jealous naysayer; second, it tends to be more destructive as opposed to constructive. It is simply good practice, when identifying problems, to suggest alternatives as opposed to simply criticism. As Winston Churchill astutely observed, "*Any idiot can see what is wrong with something. But can you see what is right?*"

So, is the glass half empty or half full? Your answer says a lot about how people perceive you.

9. BE OBSERVANT

As I have frequently written in the past, if there is anything constant in life, it is change. Change is always around us, but it takes a perceptive person to be able to spot the smallest of changes, whether it be a new hair style, someone losing weight, a small job well done, or whatever. When a change is observed, ask yourself why it has happened. Be inquisitive and understand the rationale for the change. This will help you adapt to the change as well as improve your interpersonal relations. For example, people are easily flattered when someone compliments them on a change. It means you are perceptive and interested in the person, both of which puts you in good standing with the other person.

Included in this area is the observance of the names of people. It is embarrassing to both parties when a name is forgotten. In particular, it sends a signal to the other person that he/she is irrelevant in your eyes. This certainly does not help build relationships. Asking for business cards is one thing, remembering names is something else. This may require a little effort but it is time well spent.

It is these little observations that go a long way. As an example, perhaps the best secretary I ever saw was a lady named Myrna who worked for an MIS Director in Chicago. The first time I visited the office, Myrna warmly greeted me and asked if I wanted a cup of coffee. Saying Yes, she then asked me what I wanted in it. I said cream and sugar, which she then made for me. Months later when I returned to visit the MIS Director, Myrna greeted me by name and presented me with a cup of coffee with cream and sugar. Frankly, I was startled that she not only remembered my name but how I also liked my coffee. Later I found out that Myrna maintained a simple card file; whenever someone visited the office, Myrna would record their name and the type of coffee they liked. Sharp. Very sharp.

10. BE HONEST

The linchpin to good interpersonal relations is trust. Regardless of our form of discourse, nothing builds trust better than honesty, the basic building block of confidence. Having an honest character conveys an image that you are dependable, that your word is your bond, and you can be trusted to do the right thing. But your reputation can be shattered overnight if you are caught in a lie. Therefore, don't falsify or mislead. If you do not know an answer, do not fabricate one, but make every attempt to find the answer elsewhere.

We now live in an age where it is more commonplace to cover-up a mistake as opposed to admit to it. Inevitably, all hell will break loose when the cover-up is discovered. Instead, admit a mistake early on, correct it, and earn the respect of your coworkers.

Give credit where credit is due. Remember this, nobody wants to work with someone they fear will wrong, cheat or defraud them.

CONCLUSION

There are other areas I could have gone into with this article, such as "persistence" and "leadership," but they would fall outside of the scope of improving social intercourse. I could have also covered such things as "gossip" and "finger pointing" but, instead, I was looking for those basic elements for people to improve themselves, not others.

Early in my college career I learned, "*We enjoy life through the help and society of others.*" True words. Like it or not, we must interact with other people on a daily basis. The tips I have described, while admittedly are simple, can greatly facilitate how we interact with each other, thereby making our companies a better place to work and live.

Look, its really not that complicated; just use your head, loosen up a bit, treat others as you would have them treat you, and try not to stick your foot in your mouth.

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About the Author

Tim Bryce is the Managing Director of M. Bryce & Associates (MBA) of Palm Harbor, Florida and has 30 years of experience in the field of Information Resource Management (IRM). He is available for training and consulting on an international basis.

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