

## Chapter 12

### **Build Bonds from the Beginning**

*You never have a second chance to make a first impression*

Whether you're meeting a stranger for the first time or making an initial encounter with a new employee or colleague, newly acquired in-laws or a new group -- trust starts developing (or declining) from the beginning. Your first 10 seconds together determine how long it will take to build trust - or if there will ever be a bond between you.

You need to earn other people's trust. You can't buy it, fake it or force it. You inherently know the drill when you plan and prepare for first encounters with anyone. Think about the effort you put into getting ready for your first date. Females usually spend hours plotting scenarios with a best friend. Some actually rehearse what they are going to do and say. Girls often try on dozens of different outfits for just the right look. Boys may do a little research online, in magazines, or ask an older man for advice. Both parties want to be at their best.

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What you do, what you say and how you appear in the first few seconds set the stage for any future relationship. Your new cohort will size you up, just as you form an instant impression of him or her. You never have a second chance to make a first impression.

Your attire, your body posture, your gestures and facial expressions work together to create an image of you, as well as your first words. Most people know grooming, deportment and dress rules, but don't know what to say. There are several simple steps to starting conversation to help you make the best possible first impression on someone new. Begin building trust from the bottom.

Here's a five-step formula to follow on any initial encounter:

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#### **1.Start talking about low-risk topics such as the weather or non-controversial news.**

"Are you looking forward to spring?"

"What's your favorite season?"

"What do you know about the new building going up on the corner?"

**2. Listen actively to the other person's responses.**

Show interest through your face and gestures.

Nod. Smile. Engage. Laugh. Enjoy.

Maintain eye contact with the other person.

**3. Ask questions that draw everyone in:**

"Did you enjoy the holidays?"

"Did you have a nice weekend?"

"How were the roads yesterday on your way home from work?"

**4. Reveal a small (but not too personal) fact about yourself to show you trust your new acquaintance enough to share something about yourself:**

"It was my best weekend in a long time. I did absolutely nothing!"

"I just returned from a shopping trip to Chicago."

"The first snowfall always makes me feel like a kid again."

**5. Ask an easy-to-answer question to encourage your new acquaintance to also make a small, self-revelation:**

"What's your favorite holiday?"

"How did you spend the weekend?"

"Which season do you like best?"

Follow generations of advice and avoid bringing up politics or religion, especially early on in any relationships. Subjects like sports teams or college allegiances can also be too controversial for first encounters. Keep your conversation light.

These five-steps can also work well in some situations with people you already know. For example, if you're passing out assignments to subordinates or students, getting straight to business (*I have a big project for you to work on . . .*) may be too blunt. It often works better to foster the trust you need to accomplish something big at work or school. Spend a few seconds being friendly before barging into a request or demand. Take a little time to make small talk before tackling a big task.

**Example:** A sales manager calls a meeting to set record-high, new sales goals for her staff. Before breaking the news that their monthly quota has been raised to selling 10,000 widgets, she follows the formula for building trust:

**1.Start talking about low-risk topics such as the weather or non-controversial news.**

"The first snowfall makes me feel like a kid again. What does winter do to you?"

**2.Listen actively to responses. Show interest through your face and gestures.**

Nod. Smile. Engage. Laugh. Enjoy.

**3.Ask questions that draw the group in:**

"Who's going out of town for the holidays?"

**4.Reveal a small (but not too personal) fact about yourself.**

"I'm going to downsize my decorations this year!"

**5.Ask an easy-to-answer question to encourage some self-revelation from your staff:**

"Are you going to do anything new or different this time?"

A sure sign of people-ability is taking time to take interest in others, regardless of the situation. Showing that you care about others as human beings also builds trust. Creating trust takes time. Don't hurry to your main message. Slip slowly into making demands or requesting help. After following the formula for building trust, ease into more serious business by asking:

- "Are you relaxed now and ready to get back to work?"
- " We need to talk seriously now about an upcoming project."

In the case of someone you already know well, such as a co-worker or spouse, you may have fallen into the habit of giving commands without taking time to develop trust. Being overly direct to your spouse first thing in the morning is likely to backfire. Rather than growling "take out the trash," start with a few comments that cement trust by showing your interest in the other person goes beyond garbage duty:

- "How did you sleep last night?"
- "What do you have planned for today."
- "Did you remember it's garbage day?"

Your spouse, your co-worker or your subordinate will be more likely to respond positively if you take the time to acknowledge them as human beings before asking them for help. You may have been delinquent in the past, but it's never too late to work on rebuilding trust.

Many American corporations and institutions have learned the hard way what it takes to earn public trust. Although lying, cheating and unethical behavior top the list of public trust-busters, failing to put people first runs the same risk. That's especially true at traumatic times. Spokespeople for both small and large organizations can build or break public trust depending on how they respond to an emergency, accident or disaster.

Before making comments about a recent school bomb threat, for example, a wise principal puts students first. When interviewed, school administrators, corporate leaders and agency representatives with good people skills start with something like: "We're glad to report that our school children are safe," or "We want to begin by extending our sympathy to families of the victims."

### **Remember**

- Trust builds relationships and holds them together.
- Building trust takes time. Take time to show interest in others.
- Without trust, there is no real communication or camaraderie.

**Rehearse.** Practice the 5-step trust-building steps above.

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