

Communicate for Success

However you try to climb the ladder of success, communication will help boost you to the top.

"People do business with people they know, like and trust, and communication provides the data that creates rapport," says Susan RoAne, author of "What Do I Say Next? Talking Your Way to Business and Social Success." "Nobody achieves success alone. You need to reach out to others and develop a network of people and resources."

Ms. RoAne suggests these pathways to increasing your communication skills.



Learn to network

Befriend people in different departments within your company by introducing yourself to them and by inviting a different co-worker to lunch each week. Meet new people in your community by joining associations, getting involved in community projects and attending social gatherings.

Make the most of small talk

"The best mode of communication is plain old conversation. The goal isn't to wow people with brilliant commentary; it's to make them comfortable with us. Finding commonality via conversation is how to do that," says Ms. RoAne.

Ask about people's hobbies, vacations, pets and family. Find out where they're from; you may know people in their hometowns. The object is to find something in common.

Initiate

"Good things don't come to those who wait; they come to those who initiate," says Ms. RoAne.

If you're shy at social gatherings, introduce yourself to people and make them feel comfortable. There are two parts to mingling -- being interesting and being interested.

Be interesting

It helps to be interesting, whether you're talking to one person or giving a speech to a group. Boredom never attracts anyone.

Ms. RoAne suggests you "read your hometown newspaper daily, as well as a national paper. And know what's going on in your industry and your clients' companies."

Give your opinions about something by starting with, "I think," "It seems to me that..." or "My opinion is" so you don't sound dogmatic.

Also, in your conversations, include short personal stories about your own interesting experiences so people can get to know you better.

Be interested

Listen, listen, listen. Most people want someone to listen to them and make them feel important. Listening demonstrates your respect and admiration.

Show your interest by responding to what's being said with questions such as "How did you accomplish...?" or "What was most exciting about...?"

Use the journalists tools of "Who," "What," "When," "Where" and "How" to keep the conversation flowing. Add your own related experiences.

Smile

A smile is the universal body language of acceptance. People don't like to feel rejected, and a genuine smile makes them feel at ease. Add some enthusiasm, and you'll create a spark of positive energy that will be hard to resist.

Keep in touch

Greeting cards, personal notes and short e-mail messages can keep your name in the minds of those you've met. If you keep in touch at least four times a year, you'll be doing better than most. Then, when the need arises, you'll have a network of resources to give you information, guidance and encouragement.

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