



Interpersonal Skills

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Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills

Interpersonal Skills, for all the mystery and high-talk surrounding them, could be something as simple as

handling a conversation. It is

all about learning the art of giving in rather than giving up. It also could be understanding how to use facts and emotions to get people on your side.



To communicate effectively, the first thing we need is not only a good **collection** of words, but also a good **selection** of words. Indeed, knowing how to speak is fine, but what to speak is the backbone of any conversation. The **CollectionSelection Model** of speech adds value and pleasure to any conversation you have. For example, take a look at the usage of the word **astounding** in the following sentences:

- *Incorrect:* This soup tastes **astounding**.
- *Correct:* What you have achieved is an **astounding** feat.

The objective of Interpersonal Skills is to have a pleasant, informative, and valuable conversation that leaves a lasting positive impression of you in others' minds.

Active listening

Communication is a two-way process where active listening plays as major a role as speaking fluently. Speaking fluently without listening will make any conversation a very short-lived one.

Hearing is simply picking up sound waves in our surrounding and realizing that there has been a source of sound, whether you have seen it or not. **Listening**, on the other hand, is not only picking up sound waves but also understanding the meaning of the words spoken, analyze them, interpret them, and act accordingly. In short, hearing involves only the brain, but listening involves the mind too.

Active listening helps in getting a deeper understanding of what the person is saying, which in return, will help you arrive at the most appropriate conclusion. In addition to that, it also helps you to communicate more successfully and build a receptive, cooperative image in the mind of the speaker.

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Art of asking

Many people shy away from putting their queries forward. They think that asking questions would create an impression about them being rude, intrusive, or pesky. Although there are certain situations where it is best to refrain from putting your queries forward, asking questions is not some scornful activity in itself.



THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

Questions can be broadly classified under two categories:

- **Open-ended questions** – These questions are also known as the "Who-questions" as they are usually preceded by "who, when, where, what, how, and why". While answering these questions, people tend to focus more on giving descriptive answers. **Example:** "Why did you think this was the best decision of your life?"
- **Close-ended questions** - These questions can be easily answered in a few words, even with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. They are asked to get a quick response from the listener about facts and figures. The listener tends to put more stress on his memory as compared to processing thoughts while answering these questions. **Example:** "Are you a resident citizen of this country?"

Small talk

Small Talk is the friendly, amiable conversation people have with one another on general topics such as weather or traffic that may open doorways to knowing each other better. Communication experts consider small talk as an art, and they believe a pleasant small talk can lead to many frank, detailed discussions on business too.

Let's see how small talk leads two people to share details about each other:

- **Initiation** – At this stage, the people in the conversation normally talk on general topics such as the weather, traffic, time of the day, busy schedule, etc. This gives an idea as to whether the other person is in a conversational mood or is avoiding conversation.
- **Knowing each other** – This is where people introduce themselves to the other person and offer details about their name, work, and the reason they were at that particular place, for example – "I am Arnab. I am a trainer and I was on my way to delivering an online training session."
- **Opinion Sharing** – Here the discussion moves towards slightly more "weighty" topics like politics, corporate way of life, philosophy, where the opinions of each other are listened to and valued.

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- **Expressing Thoughts** – Once all the above stages have been cleared, you reach the final stage where both the persons can feel sufficiently comfortable in each other's company to be able to disclose intimate details about each other.

Proceeding with a conversation

To improve your interpersonal skills, the most important step is to address the issues that prevent you from initiating a conversation with someone. It could be shyness, discomfort around authority figures, or lack of content. Knowing the reasons behind your hesitation could help you understand your areas of concern.

To be able to start a conversation and hold it pleasantly over a length of time, you need to be really interested and involved in the conversation. That will only be possible if you have a genuine love for meeting and knowing new people.

Having a collection of conversation starters will help if you have a few witty lines and introductory lines ready that will help you in all occasions. Simple gestures like smiling and then waiting for a return smile before introducing yourself, commenting on something in the vicinity, commenting on a shared interest are just some of the starters that can get the other person in a conversational mood.

The secret behind making a small talk is to relax. The more relaxed you are while talking, the more natural you will sound, and the more interested the other person will be in listening to what you are saying.

Tips while talking

While talking to someone, remember that people like to talk to people who can receive and share information simultaneously. If you dominate the conversation without giving any stress to what the other person is saying, that will end the talk very quickly. On the other hand, if you only listen and don't provide any intelligent or reasonable contribution to the discussion, people will think of you as someone not worth their time talking to.

While having a conversation, make sure that you completely understand what the other person is saying before making any remark on it. Misunderstanding or even partial understanding of somebody's statement could cause a serious social error. It is always advisable to use repetition in conversation, both to clarify your statements and also to understand what the other person meant by his words.

Examples – "Let me make myself clear here, so that everybody has understood exactly what I meant to say.", "If I understood you correctly..."

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It is also important to keep summarizing the content as the conversation becomes more detail-oriented. There are times when a lot of facts are introduced which need to be kept in mind to understand the context of the discussion. Whenever you feel that the details are getting slightly difficult to understand, it is best to paraphrase and try to summarize the entire content so that any discrepancy can be addressed.

Using names in conversation

How do you feel when you are walking through a crowded street that is dense with strangers walking up and down the road, and amidst all that, you hear someone calling out your name? I guess you would drop whatever it is that you were doing – be it walking, crossing the road, or talking over the phone – to look at the direction your name was called from.

We all have experienced similar situations and the reason is – a human being's name is the shortest and quickest way to building an emotional attachment with him. Our names carry a powerful, emotional attachment with them. It is observed that people immediately start paying you more attention and giving you more chances of interaction if you mention their names correctly, especially when meeting them for a long time.

Start the introduction by mentioning your first name and your last name. That will also give a cue to the listener(s) to state their names. Once they do that, repeat their names by acknowledging their presence by saying – "It's a pleasure meeting you, Arnab." It will create an immediate friendly atmosphere and lend an air of familiarity to the discussion.

Making up for forgetting names

We all have gone through times when somebody greets us and we have no idea as to what his name might be. It might be unnerving, especially so when he is referring to you constantly using your name. But the worst situation is when he gives you some business opportunity and asks you to mail your response to him!

What do you do then?

Remember that using a name can add many advantages to your interpersonal skills which can be as easily subtracted on forgetting it too. Many people forget names thinking they might not be that important. Others have a genuine issue with their memory. But the trick is to never let the person know that you are still searching for his name in your mind.

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Now, how to handle this situation? Always ask for a business card. If the guy doesn't carry one, ask him which email he uses for business purpose? When he replies, say that you knew that one, you just thought he has come up with something else.

If another colleague (whose name you know) is also in the vicinity, try introducing this person to him. Say – "Hi, let me introduce you to Jayanta, the HR of our company". The other person now has to give out his full name out of courtesy.

Influencing others

I am sure many of us have wished, on seeing a hypnotist perform his art on a hapless member of the audience, if only this power would have been with you. Well, you got the next best thing! It is called Influencing People. While we can safely agree that we don't have the power to control anyone telepathically, influencing people can give a powerful insight into the way they think and function, which helps you in approaching them in an agreeable way. This includes trying to understand their business and personal environment, knowing their business needs, personal feelings, and ethics.

Active Listening and sharp observation

are the two very important skills needed to know what can convince other people. We all send subconscious messages when we interact and reading between the lines may give us the hint that we were looking for so far.

Empathizing, also known as "putting yourself in someone's shoes to see where the stone pinches", is a very effective way of understanding the other side of the story that the person wants to share with you. Understanding and addressing his needs will make him think highly of you as someone who cares.



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Nurturing common grounds

A major part of the success you get in communicating with others depends on the style and language that you use in your communication. If you are talking to your supervisor explaining him a situation, you will agree that you won't use the sentences you use when you are talking to the neighborhood grocer.

What you say, combined with the way you say it, determines how the listeners perceive your message. There are times when the speaker has to be firm, and there are times when he has to be friendly. There could also be times when you have to exercise authority, but it is advised to keep listening intently and empathize whenever needed in all these cases.

Always remember that a person reacts under certain circumstances. In other words, circumstances dictate a person's behavior. Trying to communicate with “hmm” without trying to understand the condition he is in will only lead to a massive fall-out.

Successful people have mastered the art of a “You win, I win” conversation, where they will listen, establish a common ground by empathizing and then finding a way to put their proposal through, without hurting anybody's sentiments. That is only possible due to their constant understanding of the issues the listener is facing and partly consoling, partly validating, and part realizing the issues themselves.

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You win I win

While handling a negotiation, the most important thing to remember is that you are talking to a person who believes he has an equal right to opinion and an equal right to present his points. While you might be thoroughly prepared and be backed with facts, there will often be situations where the other person will choose to disagree with what you are saying for numerous reasons.

Some of them could be his own long-held beliefs, unwillingness to change or adapt, or simply the fact that he feels threatened in the presence of someone who is intellectually superior and refuses this fact to dominate his thought.

We can never know what factors influence a person toward denying certain things that are clearly right or accepting certain things that don't make any sense, but fighting with them and always trying to be right is a very poor approach towards knowing. Instead of trying to sound and appear right at all times by trying to rain facts and figures, it is a great idea to ask him to present his points and contribute to the discussion so that he feels that he is also bringing equal weight to the table.

There are times when we just have to concede a point or two, just so that the conversation, and subsequently the deal, does not fall through. It is no way being implied that you have to compromise on important points, but the very nature of a negotiation is to see that both sides win. When situations like these come, it is better to give in to a few changes, as compared to giving up on the deal altogether.

Maintaining reliability & trust

Many people complain that when they approach a business house to inquire about the services they need, the person talking to them treats them cordially, responds to their queries, builds a connection, and assures them of good service.

The customers happily sign up for the deal, but after the papers have been signed and the payment done, nobody responds to their repeated calls and emails. And the person who talked to them and gave them their word has now been replaced by a man with a stern voice. What went wrong?

Impressive presentation of your points and influencing skills can help you get the proverbial foot in the door, i.e., give you the initial opportunity of creating a positive image, and this lays the foundation for a solid and long-lasting relationship.



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However, the most important part of it is to maintain the same relationship over a long period of time. That needs continuous commitment towards maintaining that relationship. You have to keep in touch with the people whom you have left a good impression on. For example, notification emails, emails or texts on birthdays and anniversaries will help build and maintain a long, steady, and productive business relationship.

Making an impact

It is an oft-repeated phrase that creating a Powerful First Impression sets the tone for a pleasant and constructive conversation. The first impression a person draws of you is a gut instinct, and cues from body language are generally registered more strongly than mere verbal means of communication.

A few things that one should always keep in mind while meeting someone for the first time is to dress suitably as per the occasion and groom properly. Always try to have a positive mindset and the aim should be to be a problem-solver and not a problem-digger. Try to give options to a situation that you have been asked to analyze and most important of all, smile while communicating. Your body language and eye contact will tell volumes about your confidence levels.

It is also advised to not try and emulate someone else's thoughts, just for the sake of showing agreement to a particular line of thought. They will ask you to elaborate on it and subtle changes of disagreement in your voice and gestures will be easily visible to the trained eye. Hence, try to be yourself as much as possible. Reinstatement and summarize your interests and strengths respectively when the meeting comes to an end. Remember that people always appreciate those who are willing to go the extra mile in their quest for success.



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Putting your opinion forward

In a meeting or a social gathering, people will expect you to contribute to the discussion. In situations like these, it is very important to realize that even if your opinions might be honest and true, they could hurt the sentiments of a lot of people who might not be agreeing to these opinions of yours. Even if what you mentioned was correct, some might feel offended by your direct statements.



In these cases, it is always advisable to use a diplomatic tone. There is nothing wrong for two completely different persons to disagree on a point. But the objective should always be to put your contradicting thoughts in such a way that the listeners judge the sentence, and not you. This art is called agreeably disagreeing or constructive disagreeing.

In a constructive disagreement, which is bound to happen when a meeting of talented and dynamic people is held, the idea is to make sure that personal egos and prejudices don't overwhelm the discussion.

The focus of every agreement or disagreement should be to bring improvement and greater success, and on finding a solution and not settling personal scores or gaining one-upmanship. Mutual respect should be there for all participating members, even if their views could be clashing with yours.

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Getting results the right way

In today's result-oriented world, there is a lot of focus on achieving goals, setting targets, and meeting them. While that is crucial in today's world, you will do good to remember that any relationship – be it personal or professional – owes its existence and value equally on the other person too. No relationship can be a lasting one if the other person is not being taken into consideration. There is a tendency to be self-centered when you are eager to get good results out of a deal, but you should have the same eagerness towards meeting people too. Respecting people and their personal boundaries is a good way to give them respect. Over-eager calls on weekends and excessive mailings are only two examples of many ways in which you can easily tip to the other side of ambition.



Learn the act of making requests, and not commanding people to meet your demands even if you are a supervisor, or the boss. The ones who obey you when you shout at them do it out of fear your designation demands. You could say that they are respecting the designation, and not you.

Polite talking and respectfully presenting a point are not only easier than bossing over individuals; they also produce an amiable environment where the employees work out of a genuine sense of passion, as compared to a sense of obligation.