

Which matters more:

By Lori Silverman

Sometimes epiphanies are instantaneous. Other times they occur so gradually we cannot recall when our thinking shifted, which is what happened to me. When I taught leadership workshops in the 1980s, I told participants, "It's better to be respected by your employees than to be liked." And I said the same thing to my staff. Today, I believe just the opposite—that you will be more effective at work and in life if you spend time developing your likeability quotient. While respect in and of itself rarely leads to liking, being liked does lead to being respected by others.

The rationale for liking

What advantages does being likeable bring? If people like you they will allow you to persuade them. If they like you, they will go out of their way to help you. If they like you, they will forgive almost any faux pas. However, if they only respect but do not like you, you could be the best at what you do and follow every policy, procedure and social protocol to the "t" and it will not matter.

This is why home-based parties that sell make-up, clothing or jewelry work so well. You are typically invited by someone you know and like, and you probably know many of the guests. The host welcomes you in a friendly manner and usually offers food and beverages for you to enjoy. It also explains why new insurance or real estate professionals are encouraged to solicit initial prospects from their list of friends. In these situations, it has been shown that liking has more to do with the sale of a product than the product itself. Not surprisingly, employers take advantage of liking when they promote employees recruiting family and friends for open positions.



RESPECT or LIKING?

Increasing your likeability quotient

It is possible to consciously and deliberately increase your likeability. Actors, anyone who engages in sales (retail, real estate, investments and insurance, for example), prominent business leaders and politicians do it regularly. So do those who date!

Believe it or not, physical attractiveness does make a difference. Research has shown that people associate being good-looking with traits such as talent, kindness, honesty and intelligence. It is why I take extra care to select a flattering and appealing outfit and to ensure my make-up is pleasing to the eye when I am the keynote speaker at a conference.

When I meet someone for the first time, or want to increase my likeability with a colleague, I use the BLM (Be Like Me) approach to building trust and rapport. People like others whose backgrounds and interests are similar to theirs. Take time with people you interact with regularly to identify commonalities in attitudes, values, experiences and hobbies you have in common.

People also like it when you praise them, especially when you have something genuinely positive to share. I take a few minutes each day to send e-mails, thank-you notes on specially-selected stationery, or to call someone to express my appreciation. For me, it is part of my daily activity rather than an extra task.

Find ways to have more frequent contact with people you want to like you. Why? People who are familiar to us seem more likeable. You know this from experience. If

you regularly take the same bus, or walk a certain route, you will often see the same people. Over time the casual "hellos" that you exchange may lead you to strike up a conversation and eventually to develop a relationship.

Here is another technique you know works. Bring food that people like to a meeting. Have treats available in your office. Ask people to lunch. Food matters. People tend to transfer the favorable feelings they have while eating to those they are with and to the topic at hand. This is why fundraising events are often held around a meal or the social hour. And why food often works magic at home-based sales parties.

Making the first move

If you want to reap the benefits of being liked, start by freeing up five minutes a day to try one of these techniques. In the long run, chances are heightened it will bring you the respect you deserve.

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