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10 Hidden Habits of the Best Communicators

When someone is talking to you, you don't want to feel like you are being manipulated, but that is exactly what is happening. As you process every word, your opinions are being influenced, and any conversation is always a mix of push and pull.

Some people are natural influencers, and some are less natural. When someone is clumsy in their communication, it is all too easy to come across as being manipulative, pushy, secretive and guarded – this does not bode well for the best result. However, when someone is seemingly effortless when they chat, listeners are far more receptive to the messages that they receive.

At this point, I'd like to share one of my favourite quotes:

*“You can have brilliant ideas,
but if you can't get them across,
your ideas won't get you anywhere.”*

- Lee Iacocca

There is an art to effective communication, and many of the most effective habits are not obvious to the listener at all. While they might not be entirely hidden, the best communicators are able to do the following ten things with such effortless ease that the listener is slowly seduced:

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

A listener cannot easily tell how much you are actually taking in. They might be speaking, but your mind could be on your upcoming evening out. The best communicators have a laser focus not only on what people are saying, but they look behind the words to understand why people are saying it. There has been a lot of research into the role of micro-expressions in developing rapport, and some scientists believe that the listener can pick up on tiny clues in your body language which show that you truly care.

MINDFULNESS

Establishing an emotional connection is impossible if you are not fully present in the room. The moment that you get distracted by other thoughts is the moment that you lose the thread of any conversation, possibly at the crucial moment that someone is opening up. Learning to focus on key words in every conversation helps to anchor the listener in the moment and ensure that their response is appropriate.

MIRRORING

If you are mindful in your observation of the speaker, it is easy to pick up on their language and mannerisms. The art of NLP can seem a little clumsy if it is overdone, but using some of their phrases and copying certain aspects of their body language can often help hugely in establishing rapport and trust. You might not fully agree with what they are saying, but by mirroring them, they will get the sense that you are on their side.

SILENCE

When you are sending non-verbal messages and seeking to build an understanding, it is often important to give the other person some mental space to catch up with you. If you are speaking at 100mph while gesticulating wildly, they won't know what to make of the conversation. Periods of silence will help both parties to absorb what has been said, and they will seem far less painful than you think. Silence is something to be initiated, it doesn't just happen of its own accord.

EMPATHY

Silence has another effect. It gives the listener the impression that you are trying hard to understand them. We are of course able to think at the same time as speaking, but we have an unconscious bias that tells us that people who speak all the time aren't great listeners. Use those silences to understand the person you are talking with. Analyse what has been said, how they reacted, and where the conversation should go next.



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CLARITY

When you have established a solid rapport by understanding the other person, being mindful of what you are saying and what effect your words have on them, it is important to use the opportunity wisely. Choosing your words carefully for the maximum effect is one of the hallmarks of the best communicators. Less is always more, and the power of just one word used in the right context is astounding. Say what you mean, no more, and give them time to think about it before you move on.

PURPOSE

We live in busy times. For a conversation to feel meaningful, both parties have to understand that it is leading somewhere. It is fine chatting about the weather for five minutes every now and again, but for someone to be genuinely engaged in a conversation, they have to see what is in it for them. Great communicators put verbal flags in the ground of what they want out of a chat, and they won't abandon a conversation until their objectives have been achieved. There is nothing worse than saying "I want to get to the bottom of your problem" only to leave the conversation two minutes later.

RESPONSIBILITY

The phrase "it takes two to tango" is equally valid for any conversation, but if one partner takes responsibility for the success of the chat, the other partner will be far more likely to follow. If both people take a "yeah, whatever" approach, it is likely that nothing will be agreed. If you have a feeling that your conversation partner takes a responsible attitude towards its resolution, you will feel far more comfortable with opening up and sharing your deepest thoughts. If people are invested in you, you invest in them.

AUTHENTICITY

This is low down the list, but it is probably the most important element with every great communicator. They are true to themselves, they don't sugar-coat the truth in tricky situations, and they don't say things for the effect that they might produce. Talking to them is a consistent experience, and when you get to know them, you almost know what they will say. Knowing that someone is speaking their mind rather than telling you what you want to hear is unfortunately pretty rare these days.

STORYTELLING

Lastly, great communication is all about drawing you into a story. It isn't about you, but it could be about you. You see the issue through your mind's eye because you are bought into the story that surrounds it. This is the final piece in a great communicator's armour. If you can't tell a compelling story, you will never get anyone on board with what you are trying to say.

To finish, it is important to say that communication is an intensely unique thing. Sometimes certain tactics will work, and at other times a different approach might be required. However, you can be sure that the most effective communicators will use all of these tactics on a regular basis.

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