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Top 10 Ways to Maximize Your Approachability

By Scott Ginsberg www.hellomynameisscott.com

After reading and researching thousands of books, articles and other resources on communication, first impressions, networking and conversation, I've learned one thing: none of them address what approachability means. Or maybe they just don't take the time to define it, stress its importance and offer suggestions on how to maximize it.

That research was my impetus for writing *The Power of Approachability*. I wanted to give people a clear picture of what the idea meant, along with many small tips and suggestions to put that idea to use – one conversation at a time.

So, straight from the pages of the book, here are my Top Ten Ways to Maximize Your Approachability.

Ready to Engage

The word approachability derives from the Latin verb *appropriare*, which means "to come nearer to." Interesting. It doesn't say anything about the approach-er or the approach-ee. Just "to come nearer to." So the first idea to remember is that approachability is a two way street. It's both you stepping onto someone else's front porch; and you inviting someone to step onto your front porch.

Although this article will address both sides of the street, here's an example of the former. When you arrive at a meeting, event, party or anywhere in which many conversations will take place, prepare yourself. Be "ready to engage" with conversation topics, questions and stories in the back of your mind ready to go as soon as you meet someone. This will help you avoid those awkward "How's the weather" type of discussions.

CPI

This acronym stands for the Common Point of Interest. It's an essential element to every conversation and interaction. Your duty, as you meet new people, or even as you talk with those you already know, is to discover the CPI as soon as possible. It connects people to you. It allows them to feel more comfortable talking to you. And it increases your approachability inasmuch as people will be magnetized to you due to the commonality you share.

A great tip is to ask the right type of questions. Similar to our first example, "ready to engage," you don't want to ask people about the weather. You can do better than that! Instead, ask questions that begin with "What's your favorite" "Tell me the best" or "When was the last time" The CPI is almost guaranteed to be discovered.

Flavored Answers

In the event that one of those Fruitless Questions like "How's it going?" "What's up?" or "How are you?" comes up, don't fall into the F.I.N.E. trap. In fact, fine isn't even a word. No, seriously! I looked the word up in 23 different dictionaries and it wasn't listed! Upon further research I discovered that F.I.N.E. is an acronym for "Feelings I'm Not Expressing."

A great technique is to offer a Flavored Answer to a Fruitless Question. Instead of "fine," try "Amazing!" "Any better and I'd be twins!" or "Everything is beautiful." Your conversation partner will instantly change his or her demeanor as they smile and, most of the time, inquirer further to find out what made you say that answer. Because nobody expects it. And offering a true response to magnify the way you feel is a perfect way to share yourself with others, or "make yourself personally available" to others.

Don't Cross Your Arms

Even if it's cold, even if you're bored, even if you're tired and don't want to be there – don't cross your arms. It's such a simple, subconscious non-verbal cue that too many people practice and it hinders their approachability.

As a result, people won't want to "bother" you. They will form the impression that you are defensive, nervous, judgmental, close minded or skeptical. Honestly, would you want to approach someone like that? I know I wouldn't.

Don't Assume

Every time you assume, you end up making a... yeah, yeah, yeah – we get it. Or do we? How many times have we uttered one of the following sentences, only to be stricken with a terrible case of Foot-In-Mouth Disease?

- You must be new here?
- How's work going?
- Do you remember me?

Remember, just because someone walks in whom you've never seen before – doesn't mean he's new. Or just because you're at a networking meeting – doesn't mean everyone in attendance has a job. And believe me, not everyone you remember – remembers you.

Approachability is a function of comfort, so it's important to sidestep these moments of embarrassment with Success Sentences. These are phrases that allow the other person to offer you're the information you need to know. Examples include, "I'm not sure we've met before," "What are you working on this week?" and "I'm Scott, we met last month at the Chamber meeting."

Options for Communication

Your friends, colleagues, customers and coworkers will chose to communicate with you in different ways. Some will choose face to face, some will email, others will call, while others will do a little of everything. The bottom line is: make all of them available. On your business cards, email signatures, websites or marketing materials, let people know that can get in touch with you in whatever manner they choose. Sure, you might prefer email. But what matters most is the comfort of the other person and their ability to communicate effectively.

A good idea is to give people as many options to contact you as possible. There's nothing more annoying to a "phone person" than when she discovers she can't get a hold of you unless she emails you.

Email Signature

Whatever program you use for email - Outlook, Eudora, Yahoo, or Hotmail - find out how to customize your signature. There's nothing more frustrating than receiving an email from someone who wants to talk further, get together or have you send them something that doesn't have any personal information in the email. So at the end of every email you send, always cross reference the following information:

- Name
- Title
- Company/Organization
- Mailing address
- At least two phone numbers
- Fax number
- Email address

- Website
- A sentence or two about yourself, your company or your job

Think of it this way: have you ever received a handwritten letter from someone that had no return address stamped on the envelope?

Always Have Business Cards

Have you ever told a story about a successful, serendipitous business encounter that ended with the phrase, "Thank God I had one of my business cards with me that day!?" If so, great! You're practicing approachability by being "easy to reach."

If not, you've no doubt missed out on valuable relationships and opportunities. And it happens – people forget cards, get their supply reprinted or change jobs. But the bottom line is; there is a time and place for networking: ANY time and ANY place. Because you just never know whom you might meet.

No Fear

They won't say hello back to me. They won't be interested in me. I will make a fool of myself.

This is the number one reason people don't start conversations. However, practice will make this fear fade away. The more you often you start conversations, the better you will become at it. So, be the first to introduce yourself or say hello. When you take an active instead of a passive role, your skills will develop and there will be less of a chance for rejection. Also understand the gains vs. losses. For example, what's so bad about a rejection from someone you don't even know?

Wear Your Nametag

I've heard every possible complaint about wearing nametags, and all of them can be validated. Case in point:

- Nametags look silly – yes, they do. But remember, everyone else is wearing them too.
- Nametags ruin my clothes – not if you wear them on the edge of your lapel or use cloth-safe connectors like lanyards and plastic clips.
- But I already know everybody – no you don't. You may think you do, but new people come in and out of businesses and organizations all the time.
- But everyone already knows me – no they don't. Even the best net worker's know there's always someone new to meet.

Your nametag is your best friend for several reasons. First of all, a person's name is the single context of human memory most forgotten. And people are less likely to approach you if they don't know (or forgot) your name. Secondly, it's free advertising for you and your company. Third, nametags encourage people to be friendly and more approachable. TRUST me on that one!

© 2006 All Rights Reserved. Scott Ginsberg is a professional speaker, "The World's Foremost Expert on Nametags" and the author of *HELLO my name is Scott* and *The Power of Approachability*. He helps people MAXIMIZE their personal and professional approachability - one conversation at a time. To book Scott for your next association meeting, conference or corporate event, contact Front Porch Productions at 314/878-5419 or www.hellomynameisscott.com.