

5 Traits of Exceptionally Likable People

Want to become the person everyone looks forward to seeing? Practice these habits.

By Carol Heffernan

I was on my second trip around the block, pushing my 1-year-old in the stroller and nudging my 4-year-old along on her princess bike, when I saw them: A couple and their realtor looking at the house for sale right next door to ours. In a bold move, I walked over and introduced myself.

Within minutes of meeting Dan and Sarah, I could tell they were incredibly likable people—friendly, easy to talk with, and interested in getting to know my family. After they became our neighbors, it was clear many others felt the same way.

This led me to wonder: Are likable people naturally able to connect with others? Do they possess an innate confidence and charisma that draws people to them? Or can these qualities be developed and practiced?

Research shows it's a bit of both. Certainly, people gravitate toward those with gregarious personalities. Yet in one study conducted at University of California, Los Angeles, participants connected likeability with sincerity, transparency, and a capacity for understanding others—all characteristics that can be honed over time.

To this end, we consulted with experts and compiled this list of habits likable people share:

1. They greet others with enthusiasm.

Research shows that most people decide what they think of you within the first seven seconds of meeting you. “First impressions are usually lasting impressions, so the trick is to put your best foot forward and manage expectations,” says executive coach and trainer Jill Bremer.

It's no secret we like people who like us, right? If you seem genuinely happy to meet someone, you'll create instant likeability. This includes smiling, shaking hands firmly, and using someone's name both when you say hello and during the conversation.

2. They find a commonality.

After working in human resources for more than 25 years, Barb LeCuyer says one easy way to immediately increase likeability is to establish common ground. “Share something personal and make a connection on some level—even if it's minor.” A mutual hobby, an interest in the same TV show, a love of dogs, anything to open up conversation.

LeCuyer acknowledges, in the world of HR, likeability often overshadows skill level when interviewing job candidates: “If coworkers and subordinates like each other and are happy at work, they'll stay longer. Likable people enhance the work environment.”

3. They use positive body language.

Philadelphia life coach Paula Michele Boyle points out that communication is largely about body language. “It’s not really what we’re saying, it’s how we’re positioning our bodies,” says Boyle.

According to the research of sociolinguist Albert Mehrabian, in a face-to-face encounter:

7 percent of a verbal message comes from the words used.

38 percent comes from the vocal tone, pacing, and inflection.

55 percent of the message is transmitted by the speaker’s appearance and body language.

Body language includes how we position our bodies, the space between us and other people, our facial expressions, and what we do with our eyes and hands. To make a positive impression, be mindful about leaning in to the person you’re speaking with, maintaining eye contact, and uncrossing your arms.

4. They listen well (and ignore their phones!).

We’ve all been in a conversation with someone who obviously wants to do all the talking, or who is scanning the room and not really paying attention to the discussion. And now one of the biggest threats to modern conversation is the cell phone. “If your phone beeps or rings, don’t even glance at it, and avoid texting while talking,” advises LeCuyer. Likable people are enjoyable to talk with because they are present, engaged, and make others feel valued.

5. They ask questions.

According to Bremer, the secret to making small talk is to ask questions. “You want to strive to be more *interested* than *interesting*. To do that well, listen closely to how the other person responds, comment with a matching experience, if possible, and then ask another question.”

Bremer offers this example:

“Have any travel plans for the summer?”

“Yes, we’ll be taking the kids down to Disney World.”

“Oh, we love Disney World. What parks will you visit?”

And so on. √



Start Conversations With Everyone’s Favorite Topic

Executive coach and trainer Jill Bremer says it’s key to show genuine interest when getting to know someone.

“Make it a goal to be ‘seriously curious’ and ask who-what-when-where-why-how questions,” she says.

“Remember, everyone’s favorite topic is themselves. So, when you find them fascinating, they’ll think you’re a great conversationalist!”

What’s Your Plan for Awkward Pauses?

When it comes to awkward lulls in a conversation (we’ve all been there!) executive coach and trainer Jill Bremer advises having a mental list of topics ready to discuss, such as recommendations for restaurants, books, or babysitters.

“You may never need to bring these topics up, but should the conversation grind to a halt, you can rev it up with, ‘Say, maybe you can help me. I’m looking for a good restaurant. Know of any?’”

.....
Carol Heffernan is a Wisconsin-based writer and social media manager.