

What successful people do in the first 90 seconds

Successful people communicate both respect and rapport, sending a message of both competence in their abilities and concern for the other person. When people feel they are dealing with someone who cares about them and is competent, they are less resistant or difficult and more open to be influenced. They listen more, trust more, become more cooperative and helpful.

So how do you create trust and rapport in the first 90 seconds? Use a blend of 20 behaviors we call the *Secret Combination*.

From the pioneering work of Pat Kirkland, founder of Pat Kirkland Leadership, Inc. (formerly Skills2Success), the behaviors listed below will instantly establish a positive, productive relationship with anyone you meet, both face to face or on the phone:

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1. **Use the person's name** at least three times during the conversation (beginning, middle and end). This is especially important to do if it's the first time you are meeting/speaking to them. This might seem insignificant and the truth is not many people do it, so it will set you apart from others.

Why is this behavior so important? Using the other person's name sends the message that you are friendly and interested in them which in turn makes them want to respond similarly. In this regard, your behavior is shaping their behavior. We call this the "Law of Reciprocity"™. It is the beginning of creating rapport between you and the other person.

2. **Use Eye Contact**, (OK, so it's not very effective over the phone.) In face-to-face interactions, using sustained eye contact sends the message that you are a confident individual, have nothing to hide, and are interested in the other person. The general guideline for this behavior is uninterrupted eye contact for 3-5 seconds.

You may be like a lot of people and hold eye contact for 1 to 2 seconds before breaking contact. Although this feels comfortable because it is a familiar pattern, it can make you appear unsure of yourself or disinterested in the other person.

Unfortunately, many of us don't hold eye contact long enough and don't even realize it or the negative effect it may have when meeting others. In many cultures when you do it, you send a very positive message about yourself and how you feel about the person with whom you are interacting. To practice, while speaking to someone, have them count out 5 seconds so you know what it feels like. Do this regularly until 3 to 5 seconds starts to feel normal.

3. **Raise your Energy!!!** Why is this so important and how do you show it? Well, just imagine individuals who don't demonstrate energy when they meet you. They come across as disinterested or detached. The message that's sent is, "I'm bored", "You're wasting my time", which communicates, "I don't care about you". This might not be the message they intended, unfortunately, that is often what gets interpreted.

We find that successful people raise their energy into what we call the “zone of performance” which sends a much different message, “I’m glad to meet you”, “I’m interested in you”. This communicates “I’m looking forward to talking/working with you”. And we all know how much more enjoyable it is to interact with someone like that!

Imagine an energy scale from 1-10 (1-2 very low, 3-4 low, 5-6 neutral, 7-8 the zone, 9-10 over the top). Most of us think we normally operate at a 7-8. In fact, many of us are operating at 5-6. This is what we call a gap in perception and is a missed opportunity! Being in the “zone of performance” is like being in a very positive mood. So how can you raise your energy to step into the zone? One simple way is to increase the volume of your voice by one level. Another idea, put a warm smile on your face. Greet a few people at this higher level and you will see a positive reaction. Plus, energy is contagious, so watch it come back to you!

4. **Be still** - Someone who is physically calm will give a much more confident impression than someone who is fidgeting or has tics. If you don’t think you have any tics, ask someone to observe you when you’re involved in a conversation with someone else (or better yet, film yourself)!
5. **Be precise** - Both in your gestures and words. Get rid of those “uhmmms, ahhs”, etc. It unintentionally communicates you are unsure of yourself or your message.
6. **Use pauses** - Lots of people speak too quickly. Rather than trying to slow down your speech, pause between thoughts and for emphasis. Powerful people take up time and space!
7. **Good posture** - It’s obvious that folks with good posture just look more confident and the added benefit, when you look more confident, you start to feel more confident!
8. **Use concise wording** - Avoid babbling or repeating what you’ve just said. It’s like adding water to wine; it just doesn’t have the same effect.
9. **Use bullet-point speech** - Often we “data dump” when talking or give overly detailed explanations to impress others. If you express yourself using shorter phrases, you will be more effective in getting your message across and therefore leave your listener with a more positive impression of you.
10. **Keep head straight while speaking** - Nice people tend to tilt their head to the side as a sign to show they are listening (and they don’t even know they are doing it, really!) The problem is, it is often a sign of submission. In a wolf pack the submissive wolf will often tilt its head to expose its neck to the leader of the pack to indicate “OK, I got it, you’re in charge”.
11. **Make gestures large and firm** - Often we are uncomfortable using big gestures, however, especially when presenting in front of others, the effect is very positive.
12. **Speak in a low pitch and slow pace** - We call this “the voice of authority”. Think about a police officer when they apprehend a criminal. They speak with a deep, commanding voice. Don’t over use this technique, though once in a while it’s very effective (especially with kids and dogs!)
13. **Use a downward inflection at the end of sentences** - This is one of the most powerful techniques for giving an impression of confidence in yourself. The challenge is that it’s not always easy to hear in ourselves. One quick way to find out, record yourself while having a conversation with someone. If you use the upward inflection, you’ll sound like you’re asking a question when you aren’t.

If so, first train your ear to start hearing it in others. The radio is great for this. Professional speakers tend to use the downward inflection; callers or other non-professional radio guests often use an upward inflection. A silly and effective way to practice the downward inflection is to drop your chin to your chest when you say the last word or syllable of a sentence.

Behaviors which indicate likeability:

14. **Smiling** - It's pretty obvious that someone who is smiling appears much nicer, more open and approachable. Researchers say monkeys smile to indicate they are not a threat. With a smile, you are literally saying "today you are safe, today you're not going to die."
15. **Asking questions** - This is an excellent technique for demonstrating your interest in others. This is also particularly effective before giving constructive criticism to someone or when there is tension. It gives the speaker the impression of being heard, reduces resistance and involves him/her in the solution.
16. **Using a friendly tone** - Often in a business environment we tend to speak in a professional and distant manner. In order to create a more open rapport or connection, speak to others as if he/she is a friend.
17. **Use appropriate humor** - It has been proven that humor and laughter create positive physiological responses; relax the body and mind, improve concentration and increase motivation (and more). People naturally enjoy working with others who use humor. To find ways to improve your sense of positive humor, have a look here: http://www.carrollcoaching.com/wp-content/uploads/Humor_article-US.pdf
18. **Make short verbal acknowledgments while listening** - Especially effective when speaking with someone by phone and/or someone who is upset/angry.

Examples: yes, OK, ah ha, go on, I understand, got it. We think we must offer a solution or do something. Often, short verbal acknowledgements are all the person needs to calm down and feel supported.
19. **Make non-verbal acknowledgments while interacting face to face** - Examples, nodding your head, matching their body language, maintain eye contact. These non-verbal behaviors show respect and increase rapport.
20. **Wait for them to finish speaking before you speak** – Sometimes our impatience, enthusiasm or desire to be helpful causes us to interrupt the other. By resisting this temptation, we demonstrate respect and interest in the speaker.

Practice these behaviors in low stress situations, once a day for 5 minutes for at least one month, whether you are greeting a colleague, customer, salesperson or neighbor. You'll probably feel a bit uncomfortable at first. Consider this the investment needed to successfully engage people in the first 90 seconds!

Remember: There's a gap between what we think we are doing and what we are actually doing. Through personalized coaching, we help people close that gap!

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