

Getting on with other people

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WHATEVER your role – leader, manager, professional, customer, client – you have to be able to get on with others in order to achieve the outcomes you want. Getting on well with people at work can be difficult; misunderstandings and conflicts arise, we don't always get the results we want and often we get results we don't want. This applies to life outside work too. Here are my top tips for:

- Getting on with others.
- Disagreeing constructively.
- Having the positive impact and influence you want.

Top tips for getting on with others

Build rapport, not only when meeting people for the first time, but also when you know people well.

- Make eye contact, smile, do some small talk, ask them how they are and what's been happening, and pay attention to the answer. Look for common ground on which you can build connections.
- Ask open questions beginning with 'what' and 'how' rather than 'why', which can feel too challenging and make people react defensively. For example, 'what are your thoughts about that?' and 'how do you feel about that?' rather than 'why do you think that?'
- Listen to the answers and show you are listening, by asking follow-up questions, repeating back some of what they have said, and checking your understanding ('so you mean...'). We often believe we are listening, but in fact our minds are thinking about something else, like the email we have just received or what's for lunch. Truly listening to someone else, rather than just nodding and looking like we are listening, is more difficult than you would think.
- Look for areas of agreement rather than disagreement and build on common ground. Look for the positives in what people say, find areas on which you can agree, build on their ideas, give positive feedback, such as 'I really like that suggestion...').
- Make sure your tone of voice and body language are consistent with what you are saying. You might say 'that's interesting' but if your body language is slumped, your face shows boredom, and your tone of voice is monotonous, they will not feel you are interested in them. Similarly, looking at your phone or laptop when you are with others can make people feel snubbed.

How to disagree constructively and have a positive influence

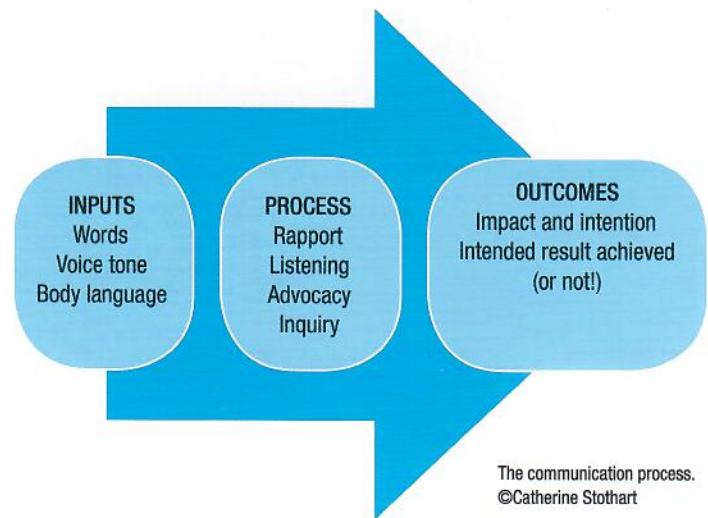
Disagreeing constructively

Getting on well with other people does not mean avoiding disagreement. In fact, debate and disagreement can lead to innovation, better solutions and positive change. According to Gandhi, "*honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress*" but unfortunately, as the economist JK Galbraith said, "*in the choice between changing one's mind and proving there's no need to, most people get busy on the proof.*"

How you disagree can determine whether conflict leads to resolution or escalation. Here are some tips.

- Avoid emotive language and personal attacks. Conflicts can escalate quickly, as our flight or fight response is activated before a more considered response kicks in. Take the heat and pace out of the situation by using a calm tone of voice and measured body language – don't point, shout or wave your arms about.
- Advocate your own position by explaining, giving examples and sharing your reasoning. Don't feel threatened by challenge but use it as an opportunity to explain your own position.

- Seek to understand their position by probing their thinking and exploring their ideas. Repeat their views in your own words. This acknowledges the other person, checks you have heard correctly, and gives you time to think.
- Have a collaborative mindset. Don't raise objections. Instead, ask for clarification, seek ideas and make suggestions.
- Look for win-wins, rather than win-lose outcomes, it's not a competition! Consider the problem from their perspective. Put yourself in their shoes, rather than sticking firmly in your own.
- Avoid 'red flag' phrases. When you disagree with what is said, use 'and' not 'but' to bridge to your point of view. For example, 'and I think...' not 'but I think...', 'I appreciate what you think and I think...' 'But' is like a big red flag that you are about to disagree, while 'and' defuses the potential conflict. Avoid other red flag phrases such as 'with respect', 'I hear what you say' and 'you should...' Most people don't like being told what to do.
- Switch from the past or present tense to the future. What are we going to do? How can we move forward? Move the conversation onto the future and how to resolve the disagreement. Use phrases such as 'would you be willing to...' in order to find areas of agreement on how to move forward.
- Show respect for them and their views. People are particularly sensitive to what they regard as a lack of respect. When you



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communicate with people, bear in mind that we all have deep seated needs to feel that we matter, are respected and are liked. So even during conflict, treat them as if they are important to you and you want to get on with them. Remember that you will have to carry on working with the person after this conflict is resolved. What can you do or say now, that will help to build a better relationship with them for the future?

Positive impact and influence

You can't change other people's behaviour, but you can manage your own, and how you behave will influence how they respond. Being aware of how you come across to others is essential if you want to build positive working relationships. This means being aware of your body language, tone of voice, choice of words and most importantly, the motivations and emotions driving your behaviour. Some points to think about:

- Clarify your intention. What is it you want to achieve? Why are you communicating? Keep your purpose in mind during the interaction. Once you are into a discussion, it's easy to lose sight of what you hope to achieve.
- Consider your words, tone of voice and body language. Are they consistent with what you want to achieve? Having positive influence and impact is about being able to match your behaviour to your intention.
- Monitor whether your impact matches your intention. Is your behaviour helping or hindering the impact you want? How are they responding? Being alert to the reaction of someone to what you have said will show you whether they have received it as you intended. If their reaction surprises or puzzles you, this is an indication that they have not

interpreted your communication in the way you intended. Ask them what they are thinking, such as 'you look surprised, what are your thoughts about this?'

- Engage their positive emotions. How do you want them to feel at the end of the conversation? Bored, nervous, angry, confused? Or curious, confident, relaxed, clear? Make sure what you say and do generates positive emotions.
- Be aware of your emotions. If you notice that you are starting to feel frustrated or irritated, take steps to manage your mood, otherwise your feelings will come out in your behaviour and will have a negative impact on the people you are interacting with. Get up, walk around, change your speed and tone of voice, say something positive.
- Act in a way that helps other people maintain their self-esteem. Don't criticize them, or make them feel they are wrong, don't interrupt or talk over them. Instead, ask their opinion, encourage them, show interest and concern.

Finally, remember that if you can match the impact of your behaviour to your intention, you are more likely to achieve the influence and the results you want.

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Catherine Stothart is the author of *How to Get On with Anyone: Gain the Confidence and Charisma to Communicate with any Personality Type*, published by Pearson at £12.99.