How do you build relationships? An 11-step program

Here are some tips for getting your relationships off the ground. Some of these ideas we learned in the first grade but, as adults, we sometimes forget.

1. **Build relationships one at a time.** Fortunately or unfortunately, there are no short cuts. Sending out a newsletter helps you keep in touch with lots of folks, but it's no substitute for getting to know a real person.

2. **Be friendly and make a connection.** This may seem self-evident, but a friendly word or smile can make someone's day. Try to find something in common: all of us want to have close connections with our fellow humans.

3. **Ask people questions.** People love to talk about themselves and about what they think. If you ask people about themselves and then take the time to listen attentively, they can become your fast friend.

4. **Tell people about yourself.** People won't trust you unless you are willing to trust them. Tell them what you genuinely care about and what you think.

5. **Go places and do things.** When asked why he robbed banks, the robber replied, "Because that's where the money is." If you want to make friends, you have to go where the people are: picnics, conferences, events, fundraisers, parties, playgrounds, bowling alleys, little league games, bake sales, etc..

6. **Accept people the way they are.** You don't have to agree with them all the time in order to form a relationship with them. No one likes to be judged.

7. **Assume other people want to form relationships, too.** Underneath the crabbiest looking person is often a lonely soul hoping someone will make a crack in their shell.

8. **Overcome your fear of rejection.** Most of us suffer from a fear of rejection, and there's only one thing to do about that: get over it. If you want to form relationships, plan on being rejected some of the time. You will be richly rewarded the rest of the time with the new relationships you have made.

9. **Be persistent.** People are often shy and suspicious. It takes a while to win trust. You can almost always form a relationship if you stick with it.

10. **Invite people to get involved.** People want to become part of something bigger than themselves. Many people are looking for an opportunity to meet other people who share common goals. At the worst, people will be flattered that you invited them to join.

11. **Enjoy people.** If you genuinely enjoy people, others will be attracted to your attitude. People will more likely want to be around you.
Community Tool Box

How do you sustain relationships?

Okay, now you've built some relationships. Relationships, like any other living thing, need care to keep them alive and healthy. So what do you do with them to keep them going?

Pay attention to people.

Check in with people when you need to. This may take only a few minutes a week, but those few minutes can make the difference in helping your friend or co-worker remember the importance of the work you are doing together.

Communicate openly

People need to communicate. It's a good idea to set aside some time just to talk about the way things are going. When people don't have a chance to talk about important issues, misunderstandings can occur and tensions often build up. Communication is a discipline that has to be practiced regularly; it's like taking vitamins or doing push-ups.

Appreciate each other

Everyone needs to be appreciated in order to keep relationships going. If you notice that someone did a stellar job of collecting the necessary data for the committee, say so. If you enjoy working with someone, let them know. We are all human beings and appreciation helps us thrive.

Extend yourself

Go a little out of your way, at least once in a while. If your co-worker needs to spend some extra time with his daughter, you might tell him go home early and you'll finish up the grant proposal.

Volunteer to do some work for their organization (if they are not already in yours)

If you lend them a hand, they are likely to think well of you and give something back in return.

Challenge each other to do better

We all need a buddy to help us stretch ourselves beyond what we think we can do. We can also build stronger relationships by challenging our work partners to take on bigger challenges.

Back each other when things get tough

Loyalty is essential to keeping relationships healthy. We may not agree with a co-worker or friend, but we can stand by him or her when they are in a jam.

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