

Small Talk Rules

65 LESSONS I LEARNED FROM THE
GREATEST COMMUNICATORS

GREGORY PEART, M.ED.



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The names in my examples have been changed for privacy reasons.

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To my Dad, who inspires me to dream.

To my Mom, who inspires me to create.

To my Wife, who inspires me to persist.

To my Sons, who inspire me to play.

And to every friend I met along the way.

You know, a lot of people say that if you dig long enough and hard enough, you will get to China, and that may be true. But what they don't tell you is that if you dig long enough and hard enough in a conversation, you get to a friend.

—Michael Scott in NBC's *The Office*

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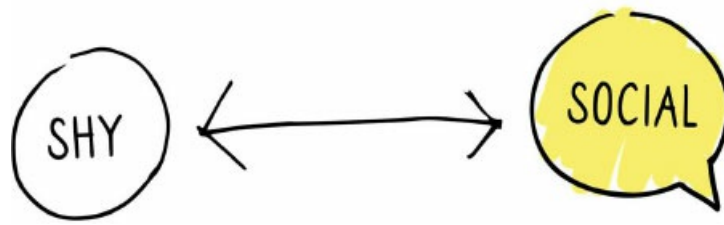
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THE SOCIAL GAP



Friday pizza and movie night was one of my favorite family traditions growing up. It was the one evening every week I could truly relax and unwind without feeling any pressure to communicate. Until one fateful night, when my dad asked me, “Could you call and order the pizza this time?”

“I don’t want to, could you?” I woefully replied.

My social anxiety often prohibited me from performing even the simplest of social tasks. It didn’t help that I had the social skills of a department store mannequin. The severity of my shyness problems didn’t hit me until one day in 10th grade art class. I was seated at a large table, and the amiable girl nearby turned to me and suggested, “You know, *you should try to find a personality.*” I was stunned. Where does someone even find a personality anyway? Last I checked, Amazon.com wasn’t selling personalities yet!

It became clear that my lack of social skills would be detrimental to my dreams. Shyness and ambition don’t mix. I had a choice to make: give up on my dreams or fix my shyness. I felt like a bird trapped in its cage, forever cursed to watch the world go by. Whereas, social people were like the free birds gleefully flying from tree to tree, effortlessly chatting with any new bird they encountered. Initially, I explored all the communication resources I could get my hands on, but I found most interpersonal communication literature either too academic or overly shallow and simplistic.

It became clear that I needed to launch my own observational study to discover the secrets of the socially successful. I started my journey with the question: *What do the best communicators say and do differently than everyone else?*

This book is the culmination of over 17 years of in-depth field research and analysis of over 22,000 real-life conversations. The many dialogue examples presented throughout the book are unfabricated; they are the product of 100% certified organic, free-range social interactions. All names have been changed to protect privacy. The lessons are loosely ordered from foundational to more advanced; with a little practice, you should see immediate benefits.

I’m happy to report that after all these years, I’m finally free to fearlessly chase my dreams without the chains of social anxiety holding me back. I actually *look forward* to meeting people and developing relationships. Ironically, this recovered shy guy currently manages *internal communications* at a large corporation.

Everything in this book I learned the hard way, from people much more skilled than I. It contains a ton of things that I wish I had known at the start of my journey. They worked for me, and I think they will work for you, too.

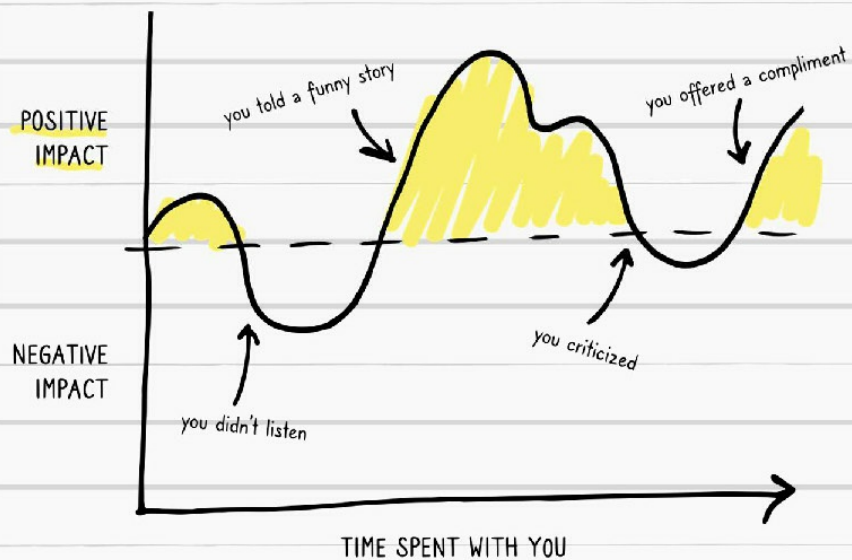


HOW TO BE MORE ENGAGING

Section One

LESSON 1

ELEVATE YOUR EMOTIONAL IMPACT



“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” – Maya Angelou.

Likability is a multibillion-dollar business. Consider all the money and time people spend upgrading their clothes, hair, cars, physiques, and sometimes even... *social skills*. Everyone possesses an underlying desire to be likable—it’s human nature. However, likability is rooted in something fundamentally deeper than the brand of shoes on your feet.

Many years ago, I worked for a highly regarded CEO. Everyone who knew him liked him, and comments like, “He made me feel like I was the only person in the room,” or “He seemed genuinely interested in talking with me,” were commonplace. Great (and likable) leaders often treat every interaction as special; they give people their full attention, bring positive energy, and show genuine interest. Countless leaders have ascended the corporate ladder solely because of the genuine relationships and connections they forged along the way.

The single biggest factor contributing to likability is *how good someone feels when they’re around you*. And how someone feels around you is strongly linked to the two emotional levels of human needs:

1. Shallow desires

2. Deep desires

On a shallow level, people want to relax, learn, play, laugh, be entertained, and generally enjoy themselves. The deep level is the heavier stuff—people want to feel loved, respected, valued, and truly heard.

Start becoming hyper-aware of how you make others feel on both levels—are you contributing value on a shallow level? Are people able to relax around you? Do you know how to play and laugh and tell interesting stories? Alternatively, do you bring down the energy? Are you overly negative or rigid?

How about on a deeper level? Do people feel they can trust you? Do you make them feel heard? Do people feel like you respect them? Do you inspire or help? Alternatively, do you make them feel insecure, judged, incompetent, or disrespected?

You don’t need to become the most likable person in the room. Make efforts to improve your emotional impact and you’ll naturally enhance the quality and success rate of your relationships.

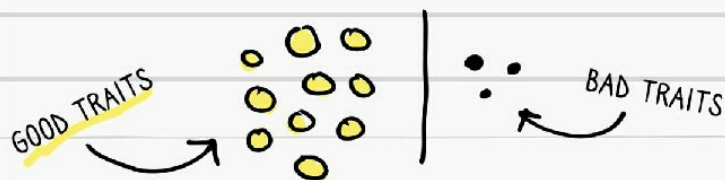
You can start by caring more about the well-being of others. Show appreciation. “You’re always so good at X—how do you do that?” or “This really saved me some time, thank you for finishing that report.” Ask follow-up questions based on previous conversations. As the great Dale Carnegie once said, “You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.”

Think about the people who make you feel comfortable. They’re usually comfortable in their own skin and are okay with being a little vulnerable. They tend to go with the flow and bring positive energy to every interaction. They care for the people around them. Strive to be someone who appeals to both levels of human emotional needs.

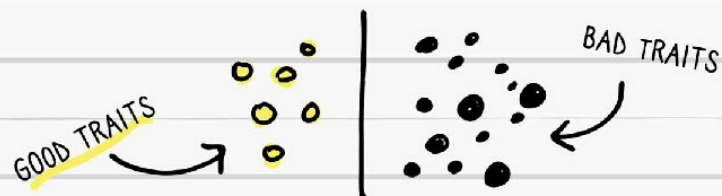
LESSON 2

INCREASE YOUR LIKABILITY RATIO

GOOD LIKABILITY RATIO



BAD LIKABILITY RATIO



Likable personalities share a fundamental structure—they essentially contain far more good traits than bad traits. Of course, no one is perfect, but your entire social success hinges on maintaining a solid likability ratio of good to bad attributes. And not all attributes are equally influential. Effective social skills are often powerless at preventing a single intolerable or toxic personality trait from decreasing your likability. To put it another way, if a core aspect of your personality is rubbing people the wrong way, it's vital that you take steps to address it now before improving any more social skills.

I was at a social event recently where a woman was telling story after story—she was thoroughly captivating the group. However, when I later tried to talk with her one-on-one, she was a terrible listener and frequently shifted the conversation back to herself. I was turned off immediately and had no desire to continue the conversation (or the relationship!) with someone so narcissistic.

Sharing commonalities is another factor strongly linked to likability, but commonalities are dependent on other people. On the other hand, the more likable your core personality, the *better results you'll see from every single social setting*, regardless of who is present.

Take a close look below at the **8 Most Likable Personality Traits** list. Try to rank the traits in order from “most like me” to “least like me”? You could argue that the opposite of each trait constitutes the most *unlikable traits*. Are any of the unlikeable traits to blame for some of your past negative social experiences and poor first impressions?

The 8 Most Likable Personality Traits

1. **Be Humble.** Don't brag. Admit mistakes. Embracing your flaws is disarming and people will warm up to you more easily.
2. **Be Caring and Unselfish.** Genuinely care about others and what they say, think, feel, and do. Listen. Ask follow-up questions. Be nice.
3. **Be Positive.** Don't be a downer. Bring positive energy. See the good in situations.
4. **Be Enthusiastic.** Give your words and expressions life. Put some feeling and energy behind what you say, feel, and do. Be passionate about something.
5. **Be Goal-oriented.** Have some direction in life. Share your goals with people. People are drawn to ambition.
6. **Be Playful.** Lighten up and don't be overly serious or defensive. Be flexible. Go with the flow.
7. **Be Honorable.** Stand for something. Have integrity. Keep your word.
8. **Be Genuine.** Be vulnerable and open sometimes. Don't always hide behind a façade. Authentically express your feelings, passions, and interests.