



Winning the respect of others

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Anna was just below executive level and looking to move into the executive ranks. She certainly had the knowledge and experience to be there. What she didn't have was the respect of her colleagues. Like many people, women especially, Anna grew up believing she was there to do her job, make others happy, and take care of what others needed done. While this did help her succeed in her role, it didn't help those in charge feel that she was a good leader for the company. And while she was very good at performing in her role and meeting company targets, she was not someone whom others would think of as a person who would be great in directing a business.

So, what were some of the aspects that needed to be changed? What behaviours did she need to demonstrate that would win her the respect of colleagues and executives. Have a read through below and see what you can work on to ensure you get more respect at work, and even in your personal life.

1. Don't minimize yourself. **Never speak badly about yourself or put yourself down.** I know one person who sat at a board meeting and made a joke about herself being a dumb blonde. Never do that. People will take you at your word. Do not use words such as "silly me", "how stupid of me", "how could I do that" etc. You may make a mistake, but then offer to fix it, don't knock yourself. Part of this is also to not over-apologise. Some people say "sorry" a lot of the time. Don't apologise unless you really have something to apologise for.
2. Have **clear boundaries and enforce them.** If someone is rude or abusive to you, then go and tell them that is unacceptable and unprofessional behaviour. Say "no", when you need to say "no". Don't keep on accepting ridiculous amounts of work. People will pile on the work if they think you will just do it. And if your boundaries are violated then speak up. You can also say "no" if something is clearly not for you. Don't take on the work of others because they don't want to do it or come with some feeble excuse.
3. **Stand up for your values and beliefs.** Don't agree with everything just for the sake of agreeing. Although you may think this is making you an agreeable person, it can also be interpreted as someone lacking in courage and conviction. And sometimes other people think you are not intelligent enough to have your own ideas. To be respected you need to stand for something. If you want to change your mind because there is evidence to suggest you were not correct, you can do that. But take a stand on what matters.

4. In a similar manner **keep your promises and commitments** to yourself and others. If you agree to do something, then do it. Without needing reminders and follow ups.
5. Try and **be consistent**. Be someone who is consistently reliable. Be consistent with what you say you will do. Be consistent in the way you treat people. Be consistent in your performance. Variability can be good if you are in a creative role, but variability in behaviour confuses and annoys people. And doesn't win you respect from others. Deliver on your promises and meet your deadlines.
6. **Take up space**. Don't hide away in a corner and never say anything. Undervaluing yourself and being too modest will hurt you. People tend to take you at your own value. If you don't see yourself as belonging at the table, and act in such a way that others see that too, you will not win respect. You are more likely to be unnoticed and ignored.
7. Master your **body language**. Walk tall. Sit up. Make eye contact. Look interested in conversations. You want your body language to show that you believe in yourself and know you have value to contribute.
8. Master your **verbal language and communication**. Don't over-explain. One of the signs of someone lacking in confidence is to over-explain. Say what you want to say. You don't need to justify in many different ways what you want to say. Say it with clarity and to the point. Don't use filler words such as "um" and "aah" and "maybe". It makes you sound uncertain and others will not take you seriously. Get to the point with what you want to say. Speak in a confident way.
9. **Treat others with respect**. You won't be respected unless you do. You also won't be liked if you don't treat others with respect, and although being liked and respected are not the same thing, being disliked or even hated will not win you respect.

If you are like Anna and you want to change your behaviour, how do you do it? Firstly, you want to identify what you may be doing wrong, and you can do this by asking those around you for feedback. You can also think back to different situations and think about how you dealt with these different situations. Secondly, once you know what you want to change, you then need to practice the changes. To do this one of the best ways is to model the behaviour of people who do it well. You can also practice on your own the way in which you want to deal with these situations (called behaviour rehearsal), either on your own, or even better, with a friend or colleague who can make comments and suggestions.

It will take time to change the way you react to and behave in different situations. So, don't expect perfection on the first go. And also understand that you take a few steps forward and then a step back. Progress is not linear. But if you are aware of how you act, and you reflect on your behaviour and practice new ways of acting, you will get it right. You will find people respect you, you will find yourself treated well, and you will find yourself taken seriously