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How Approachable Are You?

Building Relationships With Your Team



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Do you get the impression that people are avoiding you?

Being approachable is key to building relationships with your colleagues, and to creating a strong team in which trust, confidence and ideas can flow. When you're approachable, team members do not sit on, or cover up, problems. This means that they are able to bring issues to you before they become full-blown crises, because they know you won't react badly.

Team members who have approachable managers feel able to contribute ideas, and find the workplace a safe environment in which to do so. They're not scared about being knocked back, because they know their manager is open to their suggestions and will consider them fairly.

Certain organizations have reputations, correct or otherwise, for keeping their leaders in "ivory towers," far away from their team members. In these high "power-distance" situations, you might have to call your boss "madam" rather than by her first name, and go through a PA if you want to talk to her. She might have her own reserved car-parking spot, chair meetings from the end of the table, send overly formal emails, and so on. It can be scary to approach this kind of person!

Often, leaders who act this way do so as a way of maintaining their authority. However, they will be missing out on opportunities to identify issues or discover ideas for improvement by not being "on the front line." You'll be much more approachable if you reduce power distance.

How approachable you appear to others is very much down to you. Sure, some of the people who work for you may have a fear of authority, but you need to break down those barriers and create an environment of trust.

Approachability is about being accessible, consciously breaking down perceived barriers, having appropriate body language, and using the right verbal communication and listening skills. Take our quiz to find out just how approachable you are, and discover strategies for becoming more approachable in areas that are holding you back.

How Approachable Are You?

Instructions

For each statement, click the button in the column that best describes you. Please answer them as you actually are (rather than how you think you should be), and don't worry if some seem to score in the "wrong direction." When you are finished, click the "Calculate My Total" button at the bottom.

Our quiz is based on four attributes that make up approachability: looking available, using the right body language, and having good verbal communication and listening skills. We look at each attribute in more detail below. By improving in these areas, you'll become more approachable and find that your team is more productive and creative as a result.

Look Available

(Questions 2, 6, 14)

It seems obvious, but looking available is one of the most effective steps we can take toward breaking down physical barriers, reducing power distance, and keeping lines of communication open. Not much says "leave me alone" more than keeping your office door closed, not talking to team members because they're less senior than you, or expecting people to address you differently from everyone else!

If you don't have an office, improve your visibility by getting up from your desk and walking around. Your desk is your turf, and this can make it hard for team members to approach. So, go and speak with people at their desks, where they feel comfortable, or talk to them somewhere neutral, like at the water cooler. Use this informal time to [recognize good work](#), and to gain feedback. You'll be amazed how much people like to share their thoughts when they're asked!

Hewlett Packard® founders William Hewlett and David Packard famously used this approach in their company. Since then, the term [MBWA](#) - Management by Walking Around - has become popular. But it takes more than simply strolling through your office or around your site. You

must make a determined and genuine effort to talk to and understand your team members, to find out what they do, check they have what they need, make sure they're happy, and to take action where necessary to correct things that are going wrong.

And don't just talk about work; indulge in a little [personal disclosure](#) . Sharing information about yourself is important when you're in a leadership role because it shows others you are empathetic, compassionate and authentic. Speak about your family, what you did at the weekend, and your hobbies. [Build rapport](#) with others by finding out about their lives outside work, too. (If you share information and take time to chat, you'll probably find that you end up liking the people you work with - that's great, and mutual liking and respect can be hugely powerful!)

If you're in and out of meetings a lot, let your team know where you'll be and when you'll be back. Tell everyone how to contact you if there are any problems, and make sure you're available. Should you not be able to respond immediately, reassure people that you'll do so at the first opportunity you get.

Listening Skills

(Questions 5, 7, 8, 9, 16)

Put simply, if your team members think you are not listening to them, they won't want to approach you.

Good listening is not about hearing what someone is saying and waiting for him or her to finish so you can have your "two cents." You have to engage your eyes, as well as your ears, give the other person your full attention, and draw on your emotional intelligence. Being switched on in this way builds trust and respect, both of which are important for increasing approachability.

Engage in [Active Listening](#) . This is the process by which you pay attention to the words someone is saying, and understand the complete message that he is sending. Listening in this way is important, because it shows you are paying attention, so your colleagues feel engaged and valued.

Another approach is [Empathic Listening](#). This can help you win your team members' trust and get to the root of any issues they may have. Do this by identifying key points and repeating them back to the speaker to get her to open up. What's important is to pay attention to what's not being said, as well as what is - the absence of words can often be telling.

Verbal Communication

(Questions 1, 4, 7, 11, 13, 15)

There is a huge crossover between appearing approachable and being positive, and this is especially important when we consider what comes out of our mouths. What we say is a crucial part of approachability, because good verbal communication helps us build [trust](#) and a strong [team spirit](#) .

Few people will want to engage with you if everything you say is negative. Although it will always depend on the circumstances, team members will have more confidence in approaching you with ideas or problems if they are not fearful of the outcome. With this in mind, make sure you acknowledge ideas from your team and give credit where it's due.

(You don't have to go over the top. Try to give much more positive feedback than negative (because people take negative feedback much more to heart than positive feedback - a simple "thanks for the suggestion" encourages people to contribute again.)

If an idea is great, make sure you give your team member the recognition he deserves. [Research](#) shows that receiving praise raises our dopamine levels - the neurotransmitter associated with feelings of joy and satisfaction - which helps us establish good working habits. But if an idea is not so good, you need to explain why. Failure to do so may leave your team member feeling like his input is not wanted, and this can stifle future creativity.

Responding positively to good ideas is the easy part. It's how you react to bad news that's the real test. Self-regulation, which is an important part of [emotional intelligence](#) , isn't always easy but problems can fester if team members are too scared to come to you with their issues. Appreciate that it takes courage to speak up when something is wrong, so always thank the person for letting you know.

Body Language

(Questions 3, 8, 10, 12)

Check out Brandon in our [video](#) on body language and ask yourself if you would want to pitch to him if he was your manager. He doesn't realize it, but his bad body language is creating a negative working environment, which could be stifling innovation within his team.

Your team members could be sitting on ideas that could transform your organization but previous experiences, when you've seemed disinterested, may have put them off telling you about them. And you could be none the wiser!

We know that positive managers tend to have [happy teams](#) , and they are naturally far more approachable than those with a negative outlook. Positivity shines through all communication,

including our posture, eye contact, hand gestures, speech, and tone of voice. And how we hold ourselves determines the way people act toward us.

Using the right body language is a vital yet simple way of increasing your approachability. Smile more, unfold your arms, look your team members in the eye when you talk to them, and speak slowly in a moderate to low tone. Take your time when you're walking to and from your desk - even if you're in a hurry - and remember to look around rather than straight ahead or down at the floor.

Key Points

Being approachable is the foundation of building good relationships with your colleagues, and of creating a strong team in which confidence can grow and ideas flow. You can improve how approachable you are to help break down barriers, and to create an environment of trust.

Develop your skills by increasing your visibility, using appropriate body language, and working on your communication and listening skills.

HOW APPROACHABLE ARE YOU?



You work hard to be the best leader that you can be... But do you sometimes feel that your people may be ever so slightly scared of you?

If your team feels unable to approach you, it may hide problems, and you'll fail to identify issues or miss ideas for improvement.

