

Networking & Relationship Building

Welcome to the Student Activities' Online Leadership Toolbox. My name is Imad Mohamed, and I am a Graduate Advisor at Student Activities at Minnesota State Mankato. I am going to be your podcast guide. This podcast is about learning important leadership skills and strategies that are helpful when building professional relationships and networking.

One of the key leadership traits is to be able to inspire followership. A leader may be able to provide shared vision and supervision; however leaders must develop a relationship with the people they inspire to guide. Developing successful professional relationships creates a welcoming environment where people are inspired to reach their maximum potential. Thus, developing successful relationships requires leadership skills and strategies.

The core factor that drives successful relationship is making people feel important. One can do this by paying attention to people, using common courtesy. For example greeting people and asking how they are doing, shows a sense of care and acknowledges their presences. Another way to acknowledge that people are important is showing appreciation. One way to this is by simply saying "thank you." Another way is leaving, a "thank you" note for individuals who have helped you. Furthermore, give staff public credit for contributions. Do not take credit for something others have done even if you were leading a project. Showing appreciation lets people know that they are important and that they contribute the success of your work.

Another important factor in building and maintain relationship is active listening. It is important to listen to what your coworkers, peers and staff members have to say. Listening itself may not be enough, active listening is to give people you are communicating with your undivided attention physically and mentally. People may share concerns with our relating to work or personal life. However, a key thing is to keep your commitments to your staff or coworkers. Only promise things you know you can deliver to others.

Not being able to deliver after promising something simple decreases your credibility and may bring harm to your relationship with others.

So far we have talk about important factors in building relationships that includes acknowledging the presences of others through greeting, showing appreciation, giving credit to others, and active listening. However, it is important to keep in mind that building relationship with individuals is not a one-time process. It takes time to build good relationship with individuals and to maintain it. Networking is a way to start building a healthy relationship with individuals.

Following are few things you could keep in mind while networking during meetings and events:

- Prepare for every meeting and event
- Adopt and practice positive attitude
- Approach the person standing alone
- Smile or say hello to “break the ice”
- Prepare a brief self-introduction
- Ask questions and identify common interests
- Make small talk
- Commit to listen first and talk second
- Have fun!

I will leave you with this. Strong leadership does not negate the need for relationships or collaboration; it embraces them. Leaders by themselves achieve very little; the measure of effective leadership lies in the results a leader achieves by inspiring others. In organizations those results come by working with people, either as individuals or as teams. Networking and relationship building is important as a leader, but maintaining a relationship is equally important as well.

This podcast was presented by Student Activities at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Find other podcasts at mnsu.edu/activities/toolbox.