

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RESPECT

Respect is an important component of personal self-identity and interpersonal relationships. It tends to be a self-reinforcing behaviour. Treating someone with respect means:

- showing regard for their abilities and worth
- valuing their feelings and their views, even if you don't necessarily agree with them
- accepting them on an equal basis and giving them the same consideration you would expect for yourself.

Respect begins with oneself

Each of us has our particular way of coping with the world. Some of us are assertive – we take charge of situations, we make decisions, we exude self-confidence. We expect to be listened to and respected, and we generally are. In contrast, some of us can lack self-confidence and under-value ourselves. This can negatively impact our ability to form relationships and engage effectively with others. We can struggle to share and reflect on our emotions, we find it difficult to adapt to change, and feel ill-equipped to tackle our challenges.

Simple strategies that can reinforce our sense of self, give us the courage to find our voices and earn us the respect of those around us, include the following:

- Use body language – Act as though you are confident, e.g. a positive posture
- Speak positively and project confidence. Don't be boastful, but don't diminish yourself with your words.
- As far as possible, surround yourself with people who are positive and supportive of your best interests.
- Practise calm assertiveness. Think about what you want to say and how you can speak with confidence. Practise your way to a more confident self. Picture yourself in the typical kinds of situations or conversations that make you feel undervalued and disrespected. Imagine how you'd like to respond if you were brave, confident and assertive. Then begin to use those responses in real situations. You might be tentative and anxious at first, but work towards that image of calm assertiveness that you've envisaged for yourself.

Creating a culture of respect

Harvard Business School professor Amy Cuddy describes two dimensions against which people tend to evaluate one another: warmth (can I trust this person?), and competence (can I respect this

person?). Cuddy notes that while many people, especially in a professional context, believe that competence is the more important factor, warmth, or trustworthiness, is in fact even more important. According to Cuddy, while competence is highly valued, it is evaluated only after trust is established: 'A warm, trustworthy person who is also strong elicits admiration, but only after you've established trust does your strength become a gift rather than a threat.'

In every relationship, there's a balance to be achieved. We want to earn the trust and goodwill of our colleagues and peers on one hand, while also being assured and assertive enough to ensure that our opinions and our abilities are valued and taken seriously. In other words, we want to be both liked and respected.

Psychologists Holloman and Yates (2013) note that one of the ways we can build a culture of respect, at home or at work, is by rephrasing our language to be positive, rather than negative. While their work was in relation to teens, their findings are equally applicable to engagements with colleagues, clients or patients.

They have identified 11 categories of words that foster respect:

- Words of Encouragement: Let people know how much you admire their ability to overcome challenges and recover from failure
- Words of Guidance: Encourage people to ask questions and give them guidance
- Words of High Expectations: Encourage people to envision and pursue ambitious goals
- Words of Hope: Help people move on from a difficult issue/day by envisaging a better tomorrow
- Words of Sensitivity: Show empathy and compassion
- Words of Relationship: Share your feelings to enable you to build connections
- Words of Understanding: Try to see things from the perspective of others, practise empathy
- Words of Respect: Build a climate of respect, that goes beyond narrow achievements
- Words of Unity: Foster a culture of collaboration and cooperation
- Words of Accountability: Hold everyone accountable for their behaviour.

Concluding thought

In summary, the psychology of respect really comes down to this:

- Respect and value yourself, so that the rest of the world recognises you are someone to be respected
- In order to win the respect and consideration of others, be sure to demonstrate respect and consideration for those around you.

Sources:

<https://hbr.org/2013/07/connect-then-lead> (Amy Cuddy, Susan Fiske, and Peter Glick)

Amy Cuddy, *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*, 2015

Holloman, H., & Yates, P. H. (2013). Cloudy with a chance of sarcasm or sunny with high expectations: using best practice language to strengthen positive behaviour intervention and support efforts. *Journal of Positive Behaviour Interventions*, 15(2), 124–127.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-moment-youth/201402/the-language-respect>