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Interpersonal Communication: One Smile Away from a Lifetime of Success

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TUTORS COLUMN

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Abstract

The reason I chose to write my tutors column on interpersonal communication is the application it has in every tutoring scenario. Without effective interpersonal communication skills, you might not be able to develop the feedback that is most beneficial to your peer. Instead of helping them uncover their voice and passion for writing, you might become a broken record, repeating grammar issues that they knew they had but were too lazy to fix prior to the session. As a tutor, we are expected to be masters of the English language. We can catch problems in a paper that most students wouldn't realize are there, and we can use our logical knowledge to assess any situation. That is why interpersonal communication skills are so vital for tutors; they will help create an environment of trust and intimacy so we as tutors can best help any situation.

Keywords:

Communication, Skill, Friendliness, Connection

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TUTORS COLUMN

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Interpersonal Communication: One Smile Away from a Lifetime of Success

Throughout my adolescence I was told by adult-figures that I carry a wonderful smile. They told me if my smile was genuine, it could brighten the darkest heart of a stranger. It can lift the spirits of anyone going through troubling times, and can ultimately lead to lifetime friends. Towards my pre-teen stage of life, I realized that smiling created a silent form of communication. Smiling was saying, "Hello, have a great day!" to someone without opening my mouth. I didn't know it at the time, but I was practicing my interpersonal communication skills. Effective interpersonal communication is an essential skill that inevitably leads to the successes in a person's life. Flash forward to today, and I am still practicing my interpersonal skills as a tutor at the Utah State University Writing Center. I open with a warm-hearted smile and greeting, and it changes the dynamic of the tutoring session and creates an intimate, friendly environment. Having the ability to exchange information and leave a lasting impression on someone is one of the greatest assets a person can gain in their life not just for the workplace, but also in their private lives.

According to Soteris Phoraris from *Career addict* on Jan. 10, 2017 interpersonal skills are the number two most important skill in the workplace (behind working together in teams). He lists 10 reasons why interpersonal skills are the most viable skills you can learn, but instead of writing an exhaustive list, I will state the most important ones. Strong interpersonal skills teach us effective communication, helps us be relatable, teaches us empathy, and helps us be an effective leader overall.

Just reading this list we can understand how important interpersonal communication is. All of these reasons can be applied to having a better session, and ultimately, once you master interpersonal communication, you can become a better tutor.

“Don’t wait for people to be friendly, show them how.” I have only been a tutor for two months now, and I have realized how much truth is carried in this quote. Before I was a tutor, I had to visit the writing center twice for English 2010. I will admit that I was one of the students who didn’t want to be there, that my paper was already pretty good and I don’t need someone to tell me otherwise. As soon as my session started I knew the writing center was something I didn’t think it was. My tutor started the session with a warm-hearted smile, and we started talking about our personal lives. My tutor at the time was a pre-law student just like myself, and in the short session we bonded over certain classes we had taken and our favorite professors. Then, when the attention was brought back to my paper, I felt a newly established trust between me and the tutor, and I was able to let my pride down and take the advice given to me. He was able to help me strengthen my thesis and conclusion, a skill I use even today when tutoring others. He then went the extra mile and told me I may be interested in working at the center, and since then I have never looked back. This was the moment that the heavens opened and my mind was clear. I wanted to become a tutor to be able to affect someone’s life just the way he affected mine. If it wasn’t for this tutor with amazing interpersonal skills, I would have never had the chance to better my writing skills and eventually become a tutor. All of this happened because of the skills used through interpersonal communication.

The special case between me and my tutor is not a new phenomenon. Before every shift, I tell myself that if I become emerged in my peer and what they want to work on, I can give them an experience just like the one I had. After coming to the writing center for my third shift of the semester, I had a breakthrough moment. A student came in needing help on an assignment for connections. Cool, I thought. I took connections two years ago and the assignments are still pretty fresh in my mind. Her assignment was called becoming a learner. “What do you need

help with on this assignment?" I asked. "I need to finish it. I hate this assignment," replied the peer. Oh boy, I thought. How am I going to turn this situation positive? So, after looking over her paper for a moment, I decided to switch my tutoring style. With a warm-hearted smile that maybe was too big, I asked, "How come you wanted to attend college at beautiful Utah State?" Caught a little off guard, she replied "Um, I really like the mountains and I want to pursue law as a career." Bingo. We ended up talking about fun hikes around Cache Valley and all the experiences there are to have in the Political Science department. I pointed her in the direction of where to apply to be an intern for the Utah House of Representatives, an internship I completed the previous semester. Once I had her feeling connected to me on a friend level, we looked over the paper for a second time. For the remaining five minutes, we were able to write up a strong thesis, four ideas for body paragraphs, and I even quickly taught her how to create a works cited page in MLA format. What she said still lingers in my mind every tutoring session: "I cannot believe this place actually helped me, I feel like I can write an excellent paper and I made a new friend." If I didn't take the initiative to open myself and be friendly towards her, she would not have left the center with that giddy feel good sensation. The importance of connecting with a peer using interpersonal skills can be the difference between the best session you ever had and one you wish never happened.

As tutors, we are the gateway to knowledge. We are there to provide for a student and give them help when they sometimes do not realize they need it. If we all focused on creating stronger interpersonal communication skills, we will have more outstanding sessions and leave a lasting impression on the students we tutor. The change in interpersonal skills can be something as big as showing them which internship would be most beneficial to them, or something as little as giving them a warm-hearted smile.

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