**REFINING YOUR SOCIAL SKILLS**

**by Simon Moss**

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| **Introduction** |

Everyone, regardless of whether they are sociable or not, can improve their social skills. This document describes some practices and insights that you can apply to socialize more effectively. To begin, decide whether you would like to be more confident, likeable, trusted, perceptive, understanding, persuasive, adaptable, or conciliatory. Read the sections that correspond to the attributes you would like to develop.

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| **How to feel more confident** |

Most people are, at least somewhat, confident in some circumstances but unconfident in other circumstances. To enhance your confidence, first observe some other confident people. Watch how they greet other people, ask questions, deliver compliments, encourage the other individual, show empathy, assert their needs, and deliver jokes.

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| **Homework** | In the following table, record some of their comments or behaviours—comments or behaviours you admire or could even attempt in the future—in the relevant rows. |

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| Situation | Comments or behaviours you admire |
| Greeting the other person | Example   * For a few minutes only, pretend to seem more cheerful and sociable than you feel. This behaviour has been shown to improve the mood of some people. * Use gestures that occupy space—such as sitting in a chair with one arm perched on the back of another chair. This sense of space tends to coincide with a feeling of confidence |
| Asking questions |  |
| Answering questions | Example   * Occasionally, speak in a slightly lower pitch than usual. You will seem more influential, firm, and confident. * Do not feel the need to answer a question immediately. Defer your answer a few seconds. This delay can actually enhance the credibility of your answers as well as enable you to utilise your intuition to improve your answers * Attempt to complete your answers—that is, in group settings, generally maintain your answers even if people interrupt |
| Delivering compliments |  |
| Encouraging the other person |  |
| Demonstrating empathy |  |
| Recounting a story | Example   * When you start a story, imply the ending will be interesting, with comments “Something very strange happened. I was…” * Inhabit the character. If you describe yourself as running, initiate movements that simulate running |
| Speaking assertively |  |
| Delivering a joke | Example   * Pause before you deliver a punch line * Vary the tone of your voice to attract attention |
| Other | When people vary their pitch and tone, rather than speak in a monotone voice, they seem more interesting—even if their words are not meaningful, called the Dr Fox effect |

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| **Homework** | Imagine delivering these comments in a specific, hypothetical situation. Attempt to imagine this situation as vividly as possible. You might initially feel awkward, but these feelings diminish over time |

Next, you should construct some notes that you could store in a wallet or bag. On these notes, write the practices that are recommended in the first column of the following table. To enhance your confidence, you can apply these strategies before social gatherings. The second column justifies or clarifies these practices.

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| Recommended practice | Justification or clarification |
| Before social events, close your eyes for a few moments and imagine yourself conversing with the people with whom you are most confident—often people who are reserved rather than domineering. | When interacting with people who are reserved rather than domineering, we do not feel as submissive. We feel more confident instead. |
| Before social events, close your eyes for a few moments and remember a time in which you felt powerful and important | After we remember times in which we felt powerful and important, we are not as vigilant and worried. |
| Before social events, close your eyes for a few moments and contemplate your one or two of your favourite activities at work | Whenever we feel satisfied with our job, we become more sociable and confident |
| When you arrive at a social gathering, direct your attention to the people who seem the most friendly and supportive. | Over time, if we apply this strategy, our attention is biased towards friendly and supportive people. Our suspicions about people diminish—and so our confidence improves. |

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| **Did you know?** | People who eat plenty of fermented foods, like kimchi, sauerkraut, miso, or yoghurt, are actually not as likely as a typical person to experience social anxiety. This finding shows how our lifestyle can affect our confidence. |

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| **Did you know?** | If you are feeling nervous, remember that people will tend to underestimate your anxiety. |

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| **How to become liked and trusted** |

Most people like to be liked. They want to be perceived as likeable and trustworthy. To increase the likelihood that you will be liked and trusted, you should practice the words or comments that appear in the first column of the following table. Initially, attempt to use some of these words or comments in texts or emails. Then, after a few days or weeks, use these words or comments while speaking to trusted friends or family. Finally, use these words or comments in other conversations.

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| Recommended words or phrases | Justification or clarification |
| While communicating to one person, attempt to refer to the positive attributes of other people. | If you utilize words like “thoughtful”, “sincere”, or “kind” to describe other people, anyone listening becomes more likely to perceive you as thoughtful, sincere, or kind as well |
| While communicating with someone, occasionally demonstrate that you have adopted the perspective of this person. | You might say “I imagined what life might be like in your position for a while, and …” |
| While communicating with someone, indicate their feelings are understandable. | You might say “I can really understand why you might feel that way” or “That does sound really hard” |
| Refer to the people or communities you have assisted in the past or would like to assist in the future | If individuals donate money or dedicate effort to help some community, they tend to be perceived as more trustworthy, benevolent, and honest |
| Refer to your feelings or hunches. You might say “I feel that…” or “My hunch is that…” | When you refer to your emotions or hunches, people are more sensitive to your feelings. They perceive you as a fellow human being and not as a stranger |
| When communicating to someone you know—but someone who seems quite wary rather than trusting—ask this person “How was your day” during a conversation. Then, of course, listen genuinely to their answers. | People who are wary, rather than trusting, can feel somewhat threatened or uncomfortable in response to compliments or other comments that are intended as supportive. They perceive these comments as manipulative. But, for some reason, the simple question “How was your day” does not elicit these feelings of threat and instead tends to foster trust (Cortes & Wood, 2019). This sentence is not as likely to foster trust in people who tend to be trusting anyway. |
| During conversations, indicate that you care deeply about social issues, such as abortion, euthanasia, gun control, or animal testing. And, over time, consider arguments that support and refute your position on these issues | People tend to trust individuals who care deeply about social issues--like gun control or capital punishment--even if they disagree with these individuals (Zlatev, 2019). They trust these individuals because they recognize they contemplate moral issues and thus are likely to demonstrate more integrity. |

In addition, your body language also affects the extent to which you are liked and trusted. That is, your mannerisms, gestures, posture, and facial expressions all shape the perceptions of other people

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| **Homework** | Practice the body language that is recommended in the following table. To practice, while watching TV, Netflix, or another platform, imagine you are interacting with someone on the program. Utilize the appropriate body language. |

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| Suggested activity | Justification or clarification |
| If you feel uneasy during a conversation, subtly mimic the posture or mannerisms the other person exhibits for a few seconds or so | You might lean in the same direction, tap your foot or hand at a similar speed, and so forth. This similarity, if subtle, can promote trust. |
| Nevertheless, if the other person seems dominant, adopt a more submissive posture, perhaps with your hands in front of your chest and your legs together. If the other person seems submissive, adopt a more dominant posture, with your elbows away from your chest, your legs apart, while leaning back slightly. | Two people who seem dominant seem to clash: they both feel the need to dominate. Two people who seem submissive also clash: they feel awkward with one another. |
| Likewise, if the other person acts dominant—and directs the conversation—behave more submissively. If the other person acts more submissively, you might need to direct the conversation more and choose the topic to discuss. |  |

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| **Homework** | In meetings or social gatherings, sit or stand in the most conspicuous spot—such as a spot that is bathed in light, in the centre of other people, or slightly higher than other people. People seem more important and confident in these spots. |

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| **Homework** | Record places that evoke a pleasant odour, such as a café next to a bakery. If possible, arrange to meet people in these places. People seem more likeable in these places. |

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| **How to be perceptive and understanding** |

To be likeable and trustworthy, you need to be able to respond appropriately to the needs and preferences of other people. Therefore, you need to decipher their feelings, worries, and concerns. You need to determine whether they feel upset, frustrated, or content, for example. The following table offers some insights you can apply to develop this skill.

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| Suggested activity | Justification or clarification |
| Before conversing with someone, remember a time in which you felt proud but helpful. For example, you might remember a role in which you were granted the responsibility to assist other people. | When you feel a sense of power, but the urge to cooperate, your capacity to decipher the needs and emotions of other people improves. |
| While conversing with someone, shift your body or chair slightly so your left shoulder is closer to this person than your right shoulder. | When your left shoulder is closer to someone than your right shoulder, you interpret their mannerisms, gestures, and expressions with the right hemisphere of your brain. This hemisphere interprets the needs and emotions of other people better. |
| Hours after conversing with someone, replay some of the conversation in your mind. Sometimes, at this time, you will experience a strong intuition or feeling about what the person really wanted. | Research indicates these intuitions or feelings tend to be quite accurate. |

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| **Persuasive** |

Once you become perceptive, your capacity to convince and persuade other people improves. Yet, the following table presents many other strategies you could apply to influence other individuals.

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| **Homework** | Rank these strategies from the practices you could most easily apply to the practices you could not as easily apply. |

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| Recommended practice | Justification or clarification |
| Before you want to convince someone, ask a few questions in which they can respond with the answer “Yes”. You might ask, for example, “Do you feel that managers here could be supportive” if you know the answer is likely to be “Yes” | After people say “Yes” a few times, they feel more certain and confident. Consequently, they are not as vigilant or defensive. |
| To seem convincing when you speak to someone, vary the pitch and volume of your voice, pause occasionally while speaking, sit upright, and nod quite frequently while listening | These behaviours increase the likelihood you will be perceived as intelligent. |
| When attempting to convince or persuade someone, do not gaze into the eyes of this person constantly. Instead, perhaps shift your gaze, as if staring into the air to help you concentrate. | When people feel that someone is staring their eyes, they can become more defensive. |
| To convince someone of some argument, indicate you are quite certain, but not entirely sure. | You might say “Although I cannot be entirely sure, my strong sense is that…” |
| To persuade someone to enact some behaviour, ask this person whether they are willing to initiate this act. People are often more compliant in response to the word “willing” | You might say “Would you be willing to…” |

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| **Homework** | Develop a list of questions in which people tend to answer “Yes”. |

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| **Did you know?** | When negotiating with someone, offer precise values--such as $21. The other person is more likely to concede to your demands, because these precise offers imply you are knowledgeable. |

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| **Overcoming unhelpful habits** |

Even after they observe these recommendations, some people still initiate some behaviours that are unhelpful in social settings. This section helps you overcome these habits.

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| **Homework** | Decide which of these habits, or other habits, you exhibit   * I interrupt too often rather than listen genuinely * I trivialize the feelings of other people, with comments like “Don’t worry about it” or “You’ll be right soon” * I speak too softly * I sometimes apologize more intensely than necessary * I sometimes lie, exaggerate, or offer excuses |

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| **Homework** | Record some more appropriate comments or behaviours—comments or behaviours that conflict with these habits |

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| **Homework** | Imagine the precise circumstances in which you might apply these appropriate comments or behaviours. Imagine using these appropriate responses as vividly as possible. |

Finally, you should practice a couple of these recommendations every few days. But, do not feel obliged to apply these recommendations all the time. Otherwise, your behaviour might seem unnatural and thus suspicious.

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| **References** |

Cortes, K., & Wood, J. V. (2019). How was your day? Conveying care, but under the radar, for people lower in trust. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 83, 11-22.

Zlatev, J. J. (2019). I may not agree with you, but I trust you: Caring about social issues signals integrity. Psychological Science (0956-7976), 30(6), 880–892.