NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

IMPROVE YOUR INFLUENCE: BUILD STRONGER RAPPORT

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

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THE GOAL:

Influence others by understanding and developing "friendships of utility."

NANO TOOL:

At every stage in your career, from new leader to seasoned CEO, you need the support and influence of people you do not know well to get things done. Aristotle had a name for these kinds of relationships. He called them "friends of utility" — the practical, work-based friends who are neither the people closest to you (he called these your "friends of virtue") nor the people you see mainly when you are looking to relax and have a good time (whom he called your "friends of pleasure").

Normal, working relationships with friends of utility, those that occupy the 9-to-5 part of our day, are critical to our career success. Can you expand your network of these friends without either implicitly promising a closer relationship than you really want or ending up pretending to have fun with people who are, truth to tell, no fun at all? Of course, if you are a boss, your formal and informal authority will rally friends of utility to your team and the relationship boundaries may be easier to define. But what if you're new to an organization, a team, or a business unit? How can you build working relationships to help you connect with others and solve the problems you are being paid to solve — without getting into ambiguous relationships that keep you up at night? These five action steps can help guide the social engagement needed to do just that.

ACTION STEPS:

To quickly and successfully make "friends of utility," follow these five rapport-building, boundary-defining steps:

1. **Break the ice by getting people to talk about their favorite subject** — themselves. A large part of your success in working well with others comes from your awareness of the automatic, semiconscious reflexes that help humans signal to one another that they are willing to engage in everyday cooperation. That usually begins with asking people to talk about themselves. Harvard neuroscientists found that when people talk about themselves, the same sensation of pleasure in the brain that we get from food or money is triggered. These neuro-chemical triggers make people more open to you and your friendship, and more receptive to your ideas.

2. **Don't be afraid to smile**. This is standard advice in sales, but do not underestimate its importance in everyday life at work. Smiles are important because they subconsciously communicate that you are going to be an easy person to

cooperate with. What's more, they also prompt you to feel better yourself, which opens your communication channels and makes you more receptive. Finally, unconscious tendencies to mimic the expressions we see on others' faces will often trigger your new acquaintance to mirror your smile, creating a great context for problem-solving at work.

3. **Discover some ways you are similar to the other person**. Research shows that we like people more when we share something in common with them. Early in your relationship, look for what psychologists call "similarity" — with its hoped-for "liking effects." Casual "chit-chat" about movies, jobs, backgrounds, family, tastes, and sports may sometimes appear to be wasted time to some, but these are important conversations that can help you establish a common set of topics you can go back to with workplace friends to give these relationships an informal feeling — helping them operate more smoothly when deadline pressures mount or there is tension in the air. These also are rich sources for metaphors and images when you need to provide feedback or communicate an idea. If you know John likes to fish, you can coach him to be more patient with his workers by reminding him that the best fishermen know how to bait a hook and wait.

4. **Don't try too hard**. The search for similarity fails when the other person senses that you're trying too hard. Research on employment settings, for example, shows that people who make major adjustments to please others lose their respect. As you balance your authentic individuality and a need to belong and build rapport, avoid extremes. Clinging to eccentric forms of authenticity or deferring too much to social norms you don't believe in won't help you build rapport — it will alienate others or lead to mounting resentment inside yourself.

5. **Tactfully establish boundaries**. Human relations are always fluid, with different people seeking different levels of connection all the time. At work, it is easy for someone to mistake your outreach to create a working relationship for an attempt to connect at a deeper, friend of virtue level or a desire to share Happy Hour at the local brewpub every Wednesday and become a friend of pleasure. Don't be afraid to establish the boundaries you need to keep your workplace relationships just that — workplace relationships. There is nothing wrong with saying, "I really appreciate your asking me to join the fun at the bar. But I've got plans right after work. Maybe another time." And mixing work with romance is always risky, so there is no blame in wanting to keep those spheres of life separate. "I always try to keep my personal life and my working life separate," you can say. "But I am really flattered by your offer to _____ [fill in the blank!]."

HOW LEADERS USE IT:

• Google HR's Project Oxygen, formed to help build better bosses, came up with eight good behaviors of effective managers. They include getting to know more about your team members' lives and interests outside of work, and expressing concern for their good health and personal well-being.

• Indra Nooyi, CEO of PepsiCo, is well-known for her authentic relationships with her employees, noting that those ongoing relationships reassure her team that she doesn't just turn to them when she needs something. "You have to treat each person as though they are the most important person in that company," she said.

• Gallup's report, "State of the American Manager," based on research on thousands of managers and employees in 190 industries, notes that, "The best managers make a concerted effort to get to know their employees and help them feel comfortable talking about any subject, whether it is work related or not. A productive workplace is one in which people feel safe — safe enough to experiment, to challenge, to share information, and to support one another. In this type of workplace, team members are prepared to give the manager and their organization the benefit of the doubt."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *Springboard: Launching Your Personal Search for Success*, G. Richard Shell (Portfolio/Penguin, 2013). Provides scientific insights and personal assessments for determining a personal definition of success and focusing on what gives meaning and excitement to your life.

- G. Richard Shell teaches in Wharton Executive Education's *Executive Negotiation Workshop: Bargaining for Advantage*, *Strategic Persuasion Workshop: The Art and Science of Selling Ideas*, *Advanced Management Program*, and many others.

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, Director of Innovative Learning Solutions at Wharton Executive Education. It is jointly sponsored by Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Professor of Management Michael Useem, Director. Nano Tools Academic Director is Professor John Paul MacDuffie, Professor of Management at the Wharton School and Director of the Program on Vehicle and Mobility Innovation (PVMI) at Wharton's Mack Institute for Innovation Management.