

SHOWING POSITIVE REGARD

What do we mean by showing positive regard?

Showing positive regard refers to the consistent demonstration of the ability to engage in a way that conveys sincere interest in and appreciation of others.

'Regard' is a rather outdated term, which means to 'behold' someone or to hold his or her attention. When you show someone 'positive' regard you are holding their attention and being present in the moment with a sense of interest, approval and warmth. By doing this you allow them to feel you are, for this moment, quite captivated by them and authentically engaged with them.

Why is it important to show others positive regard?

All human beings have a very deep desire to be appreciated by others. For example, we want to be seen as interesting; we like to be admired; and we love to feel we are being entertaining. From the time babies learn that their smiles gain positive attention from adults, in the form of praise and smiles returned, they use their big gummy grins on any onlooker in an innocent exchange of positive regard. As we grow, we learn to be less obvious, but the importance of positive regard remains, as it is a true human need.

Think about the last time you were engaged in a mutually enjoyable exchange with another person; a time when the two of you were both fully in the moment, face to face, smiling, and bantering; or perhaps having a deep conversation about the state of the economy. Whatever it was, you found this person very interesting and their views novel, entertaining or stimulating; clearly this was mutual from the level of shared interest being shown.

Sit with this memory for a moment. Recall how it felt, what your body felt like while in this exchange, what your mind was doing, where your energy levels were. It would be highly likely that your body was relaxed and devoid of tension, that your mind was focussed only on what was within the scope of your exchange; that there was no nervous internal chatter; and that you felt warm and energised. You would have walked away from that exchange feeling buoyant and you would have had a smile on your face and a spring in your step. You would have felt a strong sense of self-esteem, having received such positive attention, and you would have felt good about humanity in general, having experienced such a mutually enjoyable social exchange.

Imagine if every interaction left you feeling this way? What sort of person would you be? What would you be capable of achieving? In your answers to these questions lays the answer to the question 'why is it important to show others positive regard?'

Why is it so easy to slip up in the area of showing positive regard?

We can get so caught up in the 'busyness of business' that we forget about the connections that we can be creating through interactions with others. Templates of what it means to do good business these days tend to come down to quantitative measures – how long it takes to do a task, how efficient we can be, how large we can we get our margins and profits, how streamlined we can

operate. Our action plans are full of tasks, quotas and targets. But how many of us have 'make a positive human connection' on our 'to do' list or action plan. Yet what is at the base of your business – what is it built on? Chances are it's built on serving the needs of people, in one form or another, so it follows that relationship building is business building.

Some people do not show positive regard because, in the current competitive economic environment, this would be seen as a professional weakness. There are many people in business who believe that the best way to do business is to detach themselves from any emotional connection with others, so that they can make self interested decisions in the most objective and rational way possible, and not feel any emotional consequences from making decisions that disadvantage others.

Still others are weary of showing positive regard due to sexual politics. Females can find themselves constantly being vigilant, and holding back their natural level of positive regard, in order not to be seen and judged as being flirtatious. Men can be caught in the same trap of super vigilance, and holding back their natural level of positive regard, in case it is misconstrued and they suddenly find themselves facing the weight of the law being thrown at them.

We are also operating in a postmodern society, where globalisation has broken down borders, and mingled cultures that a century ago had no contact at all. So there is confusion about the different customs and correct conduct to engage in with various cultural groups. Do I look this person in the eye? Will it be offensive if I shake hands or touch a shoulder while speaking? They look so serious, will I be perceived as inadequate if I smile or laugh? These anxieties over the correct behaviours can lead to us playing it safe and not engaging at a warm level at all, rather we act as neutral as possible, and keeping interaction at a superficial level.

Furthermore, with the technological and information explosion, so much of our communication now takes place via email, virtual chat rooms and telephone – often mobile, while on the run. Communications experts have posited that 55% of the meaning we gather from communication is visual; 37% tonal and only 8% taken from the actual words we use. It is therefore, extremely difficult to demonstrate genuine positive regard when our primary mode of communication is not visual and often not even auditory.

How can you excel in showing positive regard?

The sad thing about all of the above examples of why people withhold, or are cautious about showing positive regard, is that we rob others of receiving the fullest of our selves and we miss out on the uplifting feeling that comes in such exchanges. Our smiles, our active listening, our nods and questions, our encouragement and laughter at humorous stories, our reinforcement of how interesting we find another person are gifts that we can give every person we encounter, and the gifts come back at us ten-fold when the exchange is mutual.

Some people are naturally gifted at showing positive regard. A friend of mine, Gabrielle (Gabi), comes to mind. Gabi is someone who has an innate interest in people. Whenever she speaks to another person, she takes a very genuine interest in them. You know it's genuine and that she was actively listening, because the next time you see Gabi she will ask you specific questions relating to your last conversation ("How did you end up going with that presentation you were preparing for

last time I saw you?”). She is open with her praise (“You know you are one of the best parents I know, I love watching and learning from you. I am storing up all that I see for when my daughter get to that stage”). She welcomes you with big hugs and always takes time to look you in the face upon greeting you and say “It’s so good to see you again”, and at the end of a visit, once again she will reinforce how much she enjoyed spending time with you. This isn’t something I’ve seen in Gabi simply because I’m her friend, I’ve seen her engage the same way with everyone – men, women, children and the elderly. She has a way of looking at you as you speak which conveys the message “You are fascinating! I am loving sharing this moment with you.”

Not surprisingly, everyone adores Gabi. I have heard her referred to as ‘a saint’; ‘Florence Nightingale’; ‘the nicest person in the world’ and ‘the ever-lovely Gabrielle’.

We can all excel in showing positive regard, just like Gabrielle, by simply seeing each encounter as an opportunity to share in a new and interesting social exchange. If you are able to foster the mindset of a ‘student of life’, where every person you come across is your teacher; if you make it your personal mission to always leave anyone you have a social encounter with in a more positive frame of mind than they were when you first met up with them; if you stay entirely present in the moment when engaging with others, and do not let self-consciousness stop you from smiling warmly and sharing (genuine) words of admiration or encouragement, you too will be an expert in sharing positive regard.

When committed to showing positive regard it is important you are careful to use your social intelligence. Some people are not able to fully accept positive regard for a whole gamut of reasons. It may make them feel uncomfortable, nervous, anxious or suspicious. If, when you are relating on such a positive level, you find the other person’s body language contracting, it may be that they are not able to accept your positivity. Do not take it personally, instead understand that they may have any set of circumstances that play into their negative signals, so just back off, show respect, and match their demeanour to help them feel more comfortable.

Evaluate your own ability to show positive regard

- Reflect on the last 24 hours:
 - How many people did you engage with in a very positive way?
 - What were the circumstances behind these interactions?
 - Was the demonstration of positive regard mutual?
 - Do you find that you only show positive regard to your ‘favourites’?
 - On hindsight, were there any situations/conversations you had in which you could have shown higher levels of positive regard?
- Think of the last ten people you have had contact with in business:
 - How many of them did you fully engage with on a positive and giving level?
 - Did you show positive regard only colleagues, or also clients, suppliers and others in business?
 - Did you operate with each of these people with the aim of showing total respect and appreciation, and the goal of making their day?

- Keep a record for a two week period:
 - List the people you have worked with.
 - On a scale of one to ten, score yourself on how well you showed positive regard to each person.
 - Next to their names note any specific identifying context (ie: what sex were they; were they of subordinate, equal or superior status; do they engage positively with you; do you personally like/respect them?).
 - Make any additional notes about people you interacted with whom you found hard to conduct a positive social exchange with.
- Think of someone you know who is exceptional at showing positive regard. How would you rate yourself in comparison to this person (if they were a 10, what would you be)?
- In your next review with colleagues, clients, suppliers and peers, ask specifically about the personal attention you give them. Encourage them to honestly share with you any specific examples of times you have engaged with them in a very positive way and if there are any areas that you can improve in.

Improve your ability to value others

After you have completed your evaluation, if you have noticed some room for improvement, you might like to try some of the following strategies:

- Make notes about people who have shown you high levels of positive regard, including:
 - How did the interaction feel at the time?
 - What ripple effects occurred after the interaction?
 - Did the way they showed positive regard feel genuine, and if so, what specifically was it about that interaction that felt genuine?
 - What could have been done to make the encouragement more meaningful and motivating?

Allow these insights to provide behavioural guidance, added motivation and inspiration for you to commit to becoming exceptional in your own ability to engage in a positive way with others.

- Make a list of the people you work/associate with who you find hardest to show positive regard to. Set a target to ensure you make an effort to engage positively with them. Revisit it each week to see how you are improving.
- Do a mental audit each time you are engaged in conversation with someone, ask yourself:
 - Am I present in the moment?
 - Am I listening attentively (rather than thinking about what the next thing I will say is)?
 - Am I asking questions and taking an interest?
 - Am I allowing the other to finish their sentences completely (rule of thumb: count in your head to three before you speak in case the other person is still collecting their thoughts and have more to add)?

- Am I using visual cues to encourage interaction (smiles, nodding, keeping eye contact)?
 - Am I looking for common ground and like-mindedness?
 - Am I expressing gratitude for this interaction?
 - Am I choosing to enjoy this exchange and relaxing into the conversation?
 - Am I expecting the best of myself and the other in this social exchange?
- With people you find it hard to show positive regard to, ask yourself:
 - What is (are) the specific behaviour(s) that I find alienate positive exchange?
 - How well do I know this person?
 - Am I expecting him/her to show me positive regard before I reciprocate?
 - What can I personally learn in order to demonstrate higher levels of positive regard with this person?

Further resources

If you would like to develop further in the area of responsiveness, the following books, courses and consultants may be worth considering. Please note that High Ideals does not endorse or receive any direct benefit from recommending the following resources, the list is simply a suggestive collection of materials that members of the High Ideals management team have found useful in their own development.

- **Body Language**, by Allan Pease is a book that will give some excellent tools in observing others' body language while adapting your own to ensure positive interactions.
- The **Fish!** Series of books and videos by Lundin, Pual & Chritensen have excellent inspiration and focus on how to 'make someone else's day'.
- **Managing to Have Fun**, by Matt Weinstein, points out that 'when we feel good we tend to be good'. This has some great ideas regarding improving the connections, relationships and results in workplaces.
- <http://www.mindtools.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it is an incredible resource to assist people in developing their own professional skills regardless of whether they run their own business or work for someone else.
- <http://www.selfgrowth.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it offers both personal and professional self-development information and resources. You can type in any search word you want, such as "sustainable decision making" and you'll get a list of articles, blogs, resources and links to other sites which could assist you in your own development.
- <http://www.high-ideals.com> – Check out the Member Directory section for High Ideals members who offer services which could support you, such as coaching, mentoring or consulting on High Ideals criteria/values.

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High Ideals would like to acknowledge and thank Karina Butera for her work on this document. Karina is the Managing Director of High Ideals, a life coach, sociologist and speaker. To find out more about Karina, please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

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