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Building relationships

Situation

PSF is an international company operating worldwide. It has recently started a new project which will introduce a single standardised software package across its organisation, replacing the different softwares used by countries at the moment. Rachel is the project leader with Lucas and Gabriella in her team, supported by Eric, who is an external consultant.

Lucas is the most recent member to join the project team. He's come to headquarters directly from the airport. He's going to meet Rachel, the project leader, and the two other members of the team, Gabriella and Eric, for the first time.



Rachel



Lucas



Gabriella



Eric

A Introduction

DISCUSS

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT!

First impressions are extremely important. Whether they are in your business or social life, it's vital to know how to create a good first impression when you meet someone for the first time. Here are some tips and tricks to help you come across as polite and professional.

- Be on time.
- Make eye contact and smile.
- Show interest by asking a few polite questions.

Read the short text 'First impressions count'.

- 1 How far do you agree with the idea that first impressions 'are very important'? Why?
- 2 What do *you* typically say and do when meeting someone for the first time to come across as 'polite and professional'? Brainstorm some ideas.

THINGS I SAY

THINGS I DO

VIEW (0.40–2.05)

Watch Bob talking about meeting people for the first time.

- 1 How important does he think it is to handle first meetings well? Why?
- 2 Bob says that people 'think about relationships at work very differently', due to their culture and personality. How can this make it more difficult to appear polite to others?
- 3 Why does he say it might be impolite to ask personal questions in a first meeting?

REFLECT

- 1 How far do you agree with Bob about first meetings? Why?
- 2 Bob says that when meeting people from different cultures, 'first meetings don't always go as well as we would like'. What do *you* think can help to make first meetings with people from a different culture a success?

B Lucas and Rachel meet

VIEW (2.06–3.10)

Now take a look at the first meeting between Lucas and Rachel. Write down your thoughts and feelings about Rachel and Lucas, about what they say and do, as you watch.

Lucas	Rachel

REFLECT

Look closely at the kinds of things which you noted down. What kind of comments are they? Why do you think you noted down the points you did?

C What happened?

VIEW (3.11–5.00)

Listen to Bob's comments about this first meeting.

- 1 What opinion does he suggest people might form of Rachel and Lucas after seeing this first meeting?
- 2 How does he recommend that people should form opinions on first meetings?

VIEW AGAIN (5.01–5.44)

Watch the meeting again and practise open and positive thinking. This time note down as many positives in the behaviour of each person as you can.

REFLECT

Compare your notes on Rachel and Lucas with the ones you made when you viewed the first time. Have you changed your opinion? How useful is it to view people positively on first meetings?

D What did you see this time?

VIEW (5.44–7.34)

Watch Bob summarising possible positive points about this first meeting. Does he mention anything you missed out? Did you list anything *he* missed?

REFLECT

Do you see any risks to thinking positively in this way? Why / Why not?

E Later, in the team meeting

DISCUSS

How could Lucas make a better impression on Rachel?

- 1** Look at the different approaches he might use below, and tick those which you think Lucas should use when he presents to Rachel and the team.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ Keep it short | ☐ Be direct | ☐ Be funny and make jokes |
| ☐ Show conviction | ☐ Ask the audience questions | ☐ Focus on results and efficiency |
| ☐ Be structured | ☐ Show flexibility | ☐ Tell anecdotes |

- 2** What other recommendations could you give Lucas for communicating with Rachel effectively?

VIEW (7.35–9.29)

Let's see how things go after Lucas meets the rest of the team. He is finishing off a short presentation.

- 1** Which of the ideas above does Lucas use?
- 2** What rather direct comment does Rachel make to Lucas during the presentation? How does he handle this situation?
- 3** Overall, how successful do you think Lucas has been with his presentation?

REFLECT

Lucas was flexible, but people can think very differently about flexibility. Look at these two statements which show different attitudes about being flexible. Which do you agree with more? Why?

I am happy to adapt my behaviour and communication style significantly to others to make sure that they feel comfortable.

I don't like to adapt too much because then I feel superficial. I prefer to just be myself. I think this is more honest.

F Reflections

DISCUSS

We're going to see Lucas talking later about meeting Rachel and making his presentation to the team. What do you think he will say?

VIEW (9.30–10.59)

Now watch Lucas reflecting on the experiences of the day.

- 1 What was his first impression of Rachel?
- 2 What personal information about Rachel has he discovered which helps him to better understand her behaviour at the first meeting?
- 3 What had Rachel planned well, according to Lucas? Why is he so happy about this?
- 4 Overall, how does Lucas feel about his first day and the project team?

REFLECT

What do you think about Lucas's assessment of the day?

- 1 Do you think he is making the right conclusions? Why / Why not?
- 2 How important do you think it is to reflect on experiences as Lucas is doing?
How often do you do it?

G Conclusions

DISCUSS

Have you ever been in a similar situation to Lucas? What general lessons can you learn about communicating across cultures from his experiences?

VIEW (11.00–12.30)

Listen to Bob reflecting on the lessons to be learned from Lucas's experiences and compare his ideas to yours. Which conclusions are the same? Which are different?

REFLECT

What do you think you can do to improve your approach to first meetings and relationship building at work?

PRACTICE

You are new members of a project team and meeting each other for the first time to say hello and get to know each other socially.

Each of you has a 'behaviour card' which instructs you to use a specific behaviour alongside your normal personality when socialising with other new members.

Walk around the room to meet as many individuals as you can (3–4 minutes for each person), to say hello and ask a few polite questions to get to know them. During these conversations, observe the other person carefully and, after a couple of minutes, try to adapt your behaviour a little to the style of the other, as Lucas did at the project team meeting.

After the exercise, discuss the following as a group.

- Guess what behaviour is written on the cards of the people you spoke to.
- Discuss how positively/negatively you experienced the behaviour of others.
- Discuss how easy it was for you to adapt yourself to the specific behaviour on your card (and why / why not).

Behaviour cards



You talk for a long time before you allow the other person to speak. You see this willingness to share information as a form of politeness.	You ask a lot of follow-up questions to learn more about what people have just said to you.	You frequently interrupt people so you can comment on what they said. You see this form of commitment to the conversation as politeness.	You often make negative comments about people and experiences, because you believe a critical mind is a professional mind.
You work hard in a conversation to discover and talk about things you have in common.	You try to use words which others use in their conversation, to show respect for their ideas.	You show interest in what people say to you by using expressions such as 'Really?' and 'Interesting'.	You listen silently and don't respond very much to what is said, because you think it is polite.
You give long and detailed answers to every question you are asked. But you don't ask many questions. You are comfortable with silence.	You like to smile a lot at people you are talking to, because you want to be friendly.	You don't hold eye contact for more than two seconds, to communicate a sense of respect.	You stand very close to other people, because you believe that relationships are important at work.
You ask quite a lot of 'personal' questions. You see this as politeness.	You like to give very strong opinions. You think it is important to be honest.	You hold eye contact for a long time and look at people intensively to communicate respect.	You often ask questions such as 'What do you mean?' or 'Why do you say that?' to check you really understand what others are saying. You think that asking these questions is a sign of interest and politeness.