

## Being Personally Inviting with Others

The next important area in becoming a long-distance inviter is being *personally* inviting with others. Most human interactions have a basic process of interdependence: The greatest life support systems are relatives and friends, and invitational education places a high priority on personal relationships. Professional success, no matter how great, cannot make up for lack of success in personal relationships. It is important to cultivate and treasure a circle of trusted friends and acquaintances as well as to seek out new relationships and explore fresh interests.

A most important aspect of inviting others personally is being "real." Johnson (1993), Rogers (1965, 1967, 1980) and Jourard (1964, 1968, 1971, 1974), among others, have emphasized the importance of appropriate

self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships. Disclosure begets disclosure, and it often helps to share personal feelings, to acknowledge that everyone wakes up on the wrong side of bed, goes in the wrong bathroom, and forgets appointments.

One additional aspect of inviting others personally is to develop and maintain unconditional regard and respect for other human beings. As discussed earlier, comments or behaviors that are perceived by others as demeaning, insulting, sexist, or racist are usually interpreted as disinviting regardless of one's intentions. Kidding others about their physical appearance, behavior, background, or misfortunes can be very disinviting. Saying "I was only kidding" may not be sufficient to repair the damage of a cruel jest. As someone commented, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will surely kill me." Here are some practical ways to avoid lethal statements and to be personally inviting with others:

**Promote civility.** Common courtesy is a most important tool in invitational education. This is usually accomplished by greeting others by appropriate name, showing respect by being prompt with appointments and commitments, promoting "please" and "thank you," and in general demonstrating basic concern and appreciation for others and their feelings.

**Let people know you care.** Often a get-well card is sent to those who are ill, but a welcome back note is overlooked. A thoughtful birthday, holiday, congratulatory, or other card or note to relatives, colleagues, students, and friends lets them know that they are in your thoughts.

**Warm up the class.** At the beginning of each class period, a personal greeting, a little light humor, a brief comment on world events, or an inquiry into how things are going can set the stage for learning. Just as joggers should limber up their muscles before jogging, teachers should limber up their classes before teaching.

**Break bread together.** One of the oldest forms of community is sharing a bit of food and drink. By arranging for something during break or other appropriate times, you set the stage for facilitating good feelings and friendships.

**Keep things simple.** When someone comes with a complaint, avoid second level problems, such as an angry exchange or counter complaints.

Focus on what the person is saying, listen carefully, and be willing to express regret (this is not the same as an apology). If possible, take some positive action to let the person know that at least you listened and understood his or her feelings.

**Stay abreast.** Make a special effort to enter the world in which today's student lives. Keep abreast of contemporary fads, fashions, heroes, films, sports, actors, singers, and other current student interests. Using an example from real life can be both personally and professionally inviting.

Positive beliefs about people, coupled with personally inviting behaviors, are basic to invitational education. Yet, as important as it is to be *personally* inviting with oneself and others, it takes even more effort and skill to become *professionally* inviting. This leads to the next two areas—being professionally inviting with oneself and being professionally inviting with others.