



DO YOU  
LIKE ME?



{ Want to boost your  
popularity? All it takes is a  
few simple steps. }

Yes

No

Maybe





I'm a slob and a serial plant killer. But in the likeability department, I've always considered myself to be pretty top-notch. My mom and dad like me. My dry-cleaning guy likes me (he gives me Tootsie Rolls). My fourth-grade teacher, Miss Thompson, liked me a lot—enough to award me the class citizenship trophy. My husband likes me, except when I leave dirty, wet sponges in the sink or forget to water the ficus. But am I as likeable as I could be? This, apparently, is no small matter. • Being liked is nothing less than the secret to a charmed, happy, and profitable life, according to Tim Sanders, former staff-leadership coach at Yahoo! in Silicon Valley and author of the new book *The Likeability Factor: How to Boost Your L-Factor and Achieve Your Life's Dreams*. "Life is a series of close calls," Sanders points out. "At each stage,

being likeable can make a powerful difference."

If you're highly likeable (apt to bring people joy, to put them at ease, to give them "a big psychological hug," as Sanders puts it), the doors of life seem to swing open for you. And if you have a low L-Factor? Three words: John Kerry 2004. The wooden face, the strained smiles—nobody was getting a psychological hug from him.

Being liked buys you the benefit of the doubt in all sorts of ways. Appealing people are more likely to land jobs and keep them, while equally skilled but less likeable employees are shown the door. Likeable teachers tend to get higher ratings from their students, research suggests. And according to jury consultants, likeable defendants don't often get sent to the slammer. (Maybe if Martha Stewart had a little of O.J. Simpson's charisma?) Cocktail waitresses earn two to three times more in tips when they flash customers a big grin than when they barely muster a smile.

Even physicians stand to gain from being affable. Primary-care docs who use humor and solicit their patients' opinions are rewarded with fewer malpractice suits. Likeability also helps if you're the patient. Though abrasive people won't get substandard care and doctors certainly don't expect sick people to be all smiles, "all other things being equal, likeability will probably buy you more time and dedicated effort from your physician," says Josh Klapow, PhD, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

But can you really improve what Sanders calls your L-Factor? Isn't likeability one of those traits, like a sense of style or a flair for garden design, that's more or less innate? Sure, Sanders says, you can't turn Cruella DeVil into Katie Couric. Still, he maintains, you can boost your L-Factor from 4 to 5 or from 6 to 7 (out of a possible 10),

By Suzanne Schlosberg  
Photography by Wendell Webber



and those small increases may well determine whether you get hired or get asked on a date. The secret is to follow the strategies below that put other people at ease and make them feel, well, liked.

Me, I'm self-employed, happily married, and not inclined to commit a felony. Plus, I know my dermatologist likes me, because he gave me a hug when my psoriasis cleared up. Surely I needn't be concerned about my L-factor.

But I'm a little short of friends at the moment, having recently moved to a new town. Plus, my first attempt at socializing here didn't go especially well. A lovely woman in my Spinning class invited me to her birthday party, where we had this conversation:

"So, what do you do for work?" I asked.

"I'm a cable-company project manager," she replied.

"Oh my god. I hate the cable company!" I exclaimed. "I have satellite."

It probably won't come as a shock, then, that I scored a 3.3 on Sanders' L-Factor quiz (find your score by taking the quiz "How Likeable Are You?" at right). That's why I set out to test-drive ways you can make yourself more likeable.

Experts say that, while possible, it's no simple task. "If you're monitoring your behavior, you can pull it off for a half-hour," says psychologist Albert Mehrabian, PhD, professor emeritus at the University of California, Los Angeles. "But once you get into an emotional situation, people tend to revert to their old ways." The key to lasting change, he says, is focusing on one facet of your behavior at a time rather than aiming for a total personality makeover.

Here's my 1-month progress report, one strategy at a time. Feel free to chart your own path in any order.

## Choose positive words rather than negative ones.

Wonderful! Excellent! Magnificent! Perfect! With pleasure! These words exude friendliness, according to Sanders. Some words that shouldn't pass your lips include "never," along with "awful," "stupid," "can't," "won't," and, my personal nemesis, "hate."

When I confessed my cable-company insult to Sanders, he urged me to think of the word "hate" as profanity and challenged me to go on a "no-hate diet."

Surely I'd have fared better on Atkins. The very next day, during a discussion about restaurants, I blurted out, "I hate Taj Palace." (What can I say? The chicken vindaloo tastes like it's been marinated in salt.) At least I felt rotten about my slipup, which is half the battle, Sanders says. He urged me to "practice spotting unfriendliness bubbling up inside you and intervene before it emerges." I vowed to try.

## Learn—and do your best to use—people's names.

Most of us can't remember the name of a new acquaintance within 2 seconds of hearing it, but it's not because we're bad with names; it's because we're lazy. Try harder, Sanders says, adding that "it shows respect." He recommends drawing on personal traits to drum up nicknames.

I aced this assignment. At a bike-club get-together, I met a hilarious guy named Eric, who runs a business selling items on eBay. Easy: "eBay Eric." More demanding, though, was a personality-challenged insurance agent named Jim. I couldn't go with "Dim Jim" (bad karma) or "Slim Jim" (he was kind of beefy). I settled on "Just Jim." A week later, I ran into Just Jim at a coffeehouse and said, "Hey, Jim. What's up?" He grinned as if I'd said, "Hey, Jim, you look like Brad Pitt." I could feel my L-Factor surging.

## Play greeter for a day.

"Take it upon yourself to instill a sense of welcome in others, like a department-store greeter or maitre d'," Sanders advises. He recommends priming yourself in the morning by repeating a friendliness mantra, such as "People are welcome in my world." I found this to be a tall order, considering that my family's mantra is "Why did you undercook the brisket?"

Sanders says to stick with strategies that feel authentic to you, so I decided to focus on other aspects of playing greeter—listening, empathizing, and asking lots of questions. I tested this strategy at a Mary Kay cosmetics party I got roped into by a bubbly sales consultant who's so successful that she rides around town in a company-awarded pink Cadillac.

Following the microdermabrasion demo, I went into empathetic-reporter mode. I chatted with one woman about her new church, with another about her daughter's eczema, and with a third about her hospital-laboratory job analyzing bodily fluids. ("Wonderful! Excellent! Magnificent!")

A week later, the pink-Cadillac lady mailed me a postcard that said, "Loved having you. What a great conversationalist you are." Of course, this was probably an advanced strategy to boost her own L-Factor, so I would spend even more money on products that I didn't need.

## Speak in complete sentences.

The more eloquently you speak, Mehrabian has found in his research, the better you'll be received. "Avoid speech errors, things like halting speech and unfinished words. Speech errors show anxiety," he says. *Continued on page 208*



## How likeable are you?

Take our quiz to find out your L- (for Likeability) Factor, on a 1-to-10 scale. This quiz was devised exclusively for Health readers by author and Yahoo! leadership coach Tim Sanders, with the help of William Cottringer, PhD, former assistant professor of psychology at Southeastern Illinois College in Harrisburg. "Your L-Factor," says Sanders, "helps measure the positive or negative feelings you produce in others."

At the bottom of the scale are the truly rotten, like Saddam Hussein or Darth Vader. A 9 is someone like grilling guru George Foreman, who has sold 55 million of his grills essentially because he's so darned likeable. The higher your L-Factor, Sanders says, the greater your chances for success, health, and happiness.

**Directions:** Check the column that represents how often these statements are true for you. Be honest, but don't be too hard on yourself. "Answer from the perspective of a friend who gives you the benefit of the doubt," Sanders says. In fact, for the most accurate score, ask a good friend or your significant other to take the quiz on your behalf, then average that score with your own.

### Your likeability

		Never	Rarely	Some-times	Fre- quently	Always
1	I smile often and have a pleasant tone of voice.					
2	I maintain a positive, optimistic attitude, even when things are going very badly.					
3	People tell me their problems because I am approach- able and a good listener.					
4	I build other people's self-confidence and make them feel good about themselves.					
5	I have a unique ability to help others accomplish their tasks and reach their dreams. I am very helpful.					
6	Others see me as completely honest, trustworthy, sincere, and genuine.					
7	I am very skilled at being sensitive and understanding of other people's thoughts, feelings, and experiences.					
8	I feel happy and peaceful on the inside, and it shows.					
9	I connect with others' interests such as hobbies, hometowns, and affiliations. I love to talk about them.					
10	People see me as relaxed and easy to get along with.					
<b>Subtotal</b>	Multiply the number of checks per column by the number value of the column.	<b>x0</b>	<b>x2</b>	<b>x5</b>	<b>x7</b>	<b>x10</b>
<b>Total L</b>	Likeability score: Add the above 5 subtotals.					

### Your unlikeability

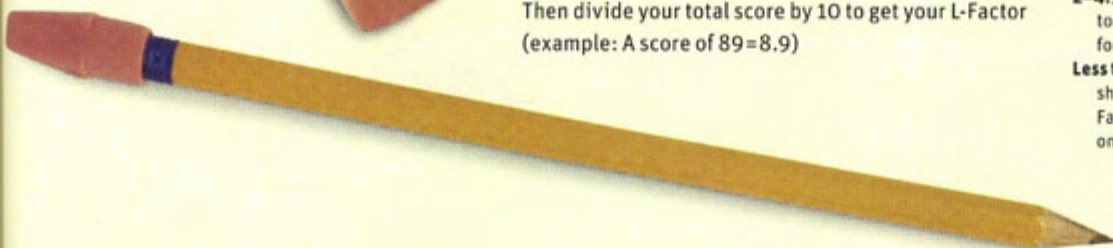
		Never	Rarely	Some- times	Fre- quently	Always
1	There are times when I am not completely honest with people.					
2	Others have said they think I am self-centered.					
3	People ask me why I don't laugh or smile more.					
4	I lose my temper.					
5	I get distracted when listening to others.					
6	I make mistakes in reading other people.					
7	I am critical and intolerant of others.					
8	People complain that I am loud and argumentative.					
9	I have conflict inside that probably shows.					
10	I talk more than I listen.					
<b>Subtotal</b>	Multiply the number of checks per column by the number value of the column.	<b>x0</b>	<b>x2</b>	<b>x5</b>	<b>x7</b>	<b>x10</b>
<b>Total U</b>	Unlikeability score: Add the above 5 subtotals.					

### Your Total L-Factor

L score \_\_\_\_\_ minus U score \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Then divide your total score by 10 to get your L-Factor (example: A score of 89=8.9)

- 9-10:** You easily win over all people
- 5-8.9:** You're much more likeable than most
- 2-4.9:** Your likeability is average to above average; plenty of room for improvement.
- Less than 2:** You might have relationship difficulties due to your low L-Factor. Try the strategies starting on page 138.





## Do you like me? Continued from page 138

Unfortunately, what this strategy gave me was anxiety. Worried that I might say something like, "So, um, do you ... like, um, know ... oh, heck, never mind," I suddenly became less talkative, and silence is not good for your L-Factor. I decided I didn't have a speech-error problem to begin with and stopped worrying about it.

### 5. Make your face more expressive.

Some research suggests that what you say matters less than the look on your face when you're talking. "If you have an expressive face instead of a blank face, if you make eye contact and nod your head, these are ways to enhance your likeability," Mehrabian says.

Widening your eyes suggests interest and passion; narrowing them signals that you disagree or don't believe what someone's saying. I practiced my eye-widening while getting a haircut, until my hairdresser looked at me and apologized, "Sorry, hon, did I get something in your eye?"

At that point I decided to work on my smiling, as research suggests that the more you smile, the more you'll be liked, at least on first impression. Smiling "probably has the greatest impact of any single thing you might do," says Dale Jorgensen, PhD, a psychology professor at California State University, Long Beach.

Adds Sanders, "Take your smile wherever you go, like you take your wallet." So I took my smile to the bank, to the gym, and even, rather heroically, to the dentist. Everywhere I went, people smiled back. I could feel my L-Factor inching even higher.

### 6. Stay relaxed.

"If you stand in a symmetrical position, like a soldier at attention, that shows tension," Mehrabian says. "Leaning back more shows comfort."

He also suggests that you may improve rapport by copying someone else's posture. You might fold your arms across your chest when you're standing at a party talking to a person

who's doing that. "That's a way people show common ground," Mehrabian says. "But don't overdo it."

Before trotting out this technique in public, I secretly practiced it on my husband. I've never been particularly subtle, however. After a few minutes he said, "What's your deal? Are you trying to be like one of those annoying mimes, or what?"

### 7. Raise your relevance.

Smiling, nodding, and eye-widening are all well and good, but they won't boost your L-Factor if you're only a fleeting presence in someone's life. You have to make yourself matter to other people, Sanders points out. "Have your own hot-prospects list, and increase the quantity and quality of those contacts. Have a party, meet for coffee, get out in the world," he suggests.

And so I began taking the initiative. My husband and I invited eBay Eric and his wife over for dinner. I introduced myself to a guy I kept running into at the gym. They all seemed pleasantly surprised. More L-Factor points for me.

### And after a month of practice ...

I'd struck up a few new friendships and become a pro at remembering names by the end of my experiment. Lady Louise (prim and proper, like British royalty), Sarah Farrah (hair like Farrah Fawcett), and Gene Jeans (always wears Levi's) were all welcome in my world.

But my ultimate triumph occurred when I called Tim Sanders to report my achievements. At one point he said, "You know, Susan ... ." My instinct was to blurt out, "I hate it when people get my name wrong!" Fortunately, I was able to get hold of myself. "Thanks so much for the tips," I said instead. "They're wonderful! Excellent! Magnificent!"

*Suzanne Schlosberg is author of **The Curse of the Singles Table: A True Story of 1001 Nights Without Sex.***