

20 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH TEENAGERS

1. **We’re People, Too**

- We can be an intimidating demographic, but you don’t need to have immense amounts of savvy in social media or slang to communicate. To win us over you don’t have to try so hard- just talk to us like real people.

2. **You Don’t Need to Reinvent the Wheel**

- You don’t need to create brand new groups of youth. Go after ones that already exist - like sports teams, youth groups, and student councils. Just be sure to keep things relevant: If they are interested in things like sports, then make all projects sports orientated, and then as the year progresses and they get more acclimated to these projects, one can successfully branch out from the “normal” environment.

3. **We Already Sit In A Classroom for Eight Hours A Day**

- Sitting and listening to a lecture is tough even for adults- even if one is genuinely interested in the topic at hand. Show, don’t tell – we love hands-on, tangible activities that allow us to get up and move, think, communicate and share our ideas.

4. **We Might Lack Confidence**

- Shocking, right? Actually a lot of us assume we can’t make a difference because we’re told we are too young all the time- to drive, to date, to do lots of the things we’d really like to do. A lot of us assume service is just another thing that “will come in time”, because we’re “too young to understand”. We’re not, and tell us so. We’ll appreciate your vote of confidence.

5. **We Might Feel Overwhelmed By It, Too**

- You know that feeling when you watch the news and feel totally helpless towards whatever crisis is currently rocking the world? Yep. We feel like that sometimes, too. If you give us the tools to change something, we’ll feel like we actually can.

6. **But...**

- On the other hand, what discourages some of us inspires others. Teenagehood is the first time we can experience the range of human emotions. It’s the first time we understand what it is to be happy, what adversity feels like and everything else. That’s why breakups hurt so much – we’ve probably never faced such harsh rejection before. This same principle applies to issues like hunger as well. We’re not hard to the world yet. We are still affected by the same stirring images and damning statistics adults have numbed themselves to as an emotional survival mechanism. We haven’t given up on saving the world yet – and that makes us ideal for trying.

7. **We Like Being The Experts**

- Need help with something you don’t understand, especially technology? Ask! Playing a vital role makes us feel important and attached to the project. When we have done something “not just anyone” can do, we know we’ve aided in a unique way, and that’s really rewarding.

8. **We’re Not the Lost Generation**

- We might be part of a group, but that doesn’t mean we personify it. Give us a chance to prove that we are more than our selfies suggest. Don’t box us into a stereotype – if you do, you’re very likely to get a similar reaction.

9. We Smell Your Fear

- Which turns us off, because we don't understand why we're so scary. Relax and take a deep breath. We are a pretty forgiving crowd if we understand you're doing your best. Be confident and sincere, and you'll earn our respect.

10. Inspire Us

- Don't just give us your résumé, tell us short stories about how you got *to* your résumé. That will help you to gain our respect.

11. Honest Feedback

- We're awesome lie detectors. There's nothing more patronizing than a “Good job” we know is forced, or more rewarding than praise we know we've totally earned. Maybe we're doing it wrong. Tell us so. If we're a missing piece of the puzzle or a side of the story, fill us in. If we are doing awesome, tell us so, and be specific as to how.

12. Let Us Play Our Part

- If you let us brainstorm and make key decisions instead of simply giving directions, we feel more invested and attached to the project.

13. We Might Have a Totally Different World-View

- And that's ok. We might have a completely off-the-wall idea on how to solve a problem. Short of anything likely to start a fire and/or get you fired, run with the craziness. It might seem improbably or impossible to you – but people said that about the airplane. Without new ideas, the world gets nowhere. Plus, if we have input, we take ownership.

14. Trust Us

- We understand the ins and outs of more things than you would think of. Give us a proper environment and opportunity to thrive and we promise you we will deliver.

15. We respect and admire what you do, and we know you know more than we do.

- We probably just won't tell you.

16. “Back in your day”, no one liked that phrase, either.

- When you launch into lectures about how youth were “back in your day”, we immediately stop listening. We love hearing stories about your experiences – just please do not throw in a morality tale about how we used to be better/more responsible/less awful/insert generalization here. It makes us feel like you've summed us up and already deemed us to be unworthy. Yes, we are probably different than youth even ten years ago – but that's okay.

17. Feed us

- We're always hungry. And food helps us focus, particularly the pizza variety. This especially true of teenage boys – who will always, always eat more than you think or they say they will.

18. Be goofy!

- Check your ego at the door, and we'll leave ours behind to. If you're not willing to be at least a little bit silly at times, you probably shouldn't be working with teenagers. We do appreciate your lame humor – and it's probably not as lame as we lead you to believe.

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19. Acknowledge The Existence of Cell Phones

- Yes, we’re often glued to them. But that doesn’t mean we have to be separated to still be productive. Incorporate the technology we’re familiar with into your activities and plans – it will feel less foreign to us if we can take our iSecurity blankets with us.

20. One Day, We Will Be You.

- And we will remember some of the things that came out of our mouths as teenagers and shutter. But right now, you’re the only one in the room who has the benefit of seeing the situation through the other’s eyes. Recall what it was like to be us – all awkward and lack of identity – and do your best to sympathize. One day we’ll thank you for it.