Appropriate Self-Disclosure

Appropriate self-disclosure can help people to trust you and like you. Usually when people work together or hang out together, personal life will come up as a topic. One person will disclose something, and the other person will be expected to disclose something in return. It could be as simple as "yeah, rush hour makes me crazy too," or "I have a nephew that same age." Even when the self-disclosure is small however, it indicates to the other person that you are willing to be open and honest in the relationship and that you aren't hiding yourself.

All of this doesn't go on consciously of course... we don't usually look at someone who doesn't reciprocate self-disclosure and say "that guy is untrustworthy," but subconsciously, that may be what happens. It also helps people to be comfortable around you when you are interested in their lives. For instance, at my job, a man sits in the cubicle next to me who always wants to talk about his grandchildren. If I choose not to listen to him, our relationship would become more strained. If I choose to listen to him, and reply appropriately, then usually the conversation ends with both of us happy, and we've improved our relationship a tiny bit every time.

This will carry over into work. If he has a question about a work topic, he is likely to come to me first. I have shown him that I am willing to listen to him about personal things, and so he will come to me for a listening ear about work things as well. He feels comfortable around me, and knows that I won't mock him, and that I will try to help. That's always a good thing to know about someone, and helps people to not be defensive and over-protective of themselves in a conversation. You don't get to that point without some appropriate self-disclosure.