

## Seven Seconds.

That's how long it takes for a person to form a first impression. First impressions matter; good first impressions build trust and confidence with clients, employees and peers - whether you are on the phone or at the front door or passing by them in the hallway.

With every new encounter you make the other person makes a judgment about how you look, how your voice sounds, your eye contact and the firmness of your handshake.

When the first impression is bad, it may take a lifetime to undo the impression, especially if you dress poorly, chew gum, look bored or annoyed, have a limp handshake or fail to listen.



So, how do you make a good first impression? Follow these six steps.

### 1. Dress Appropriately

Do your homework. Make sure you know what the person you are meeting is likely to wear. When in doubt, dress a little nicer than what the occasion may call for. This does not mean you have to give up your individuality. Yes, you do have to “fit-in” but you can and should be yourself within the confines of what is considered professional dress.

What is the appropriate dress for the meeting or occasion? If it is a job interview or when you give a presentation:

Women should:

- Dress in solid colors and a coordinated blouse.
- Keep a pair of short pumps handy and make sure they are polished.
- Wear sparse make-up that looks natural.
- Limit the jewelry (especially no dangling earrings or multiple bracelets)
- Have your hair cut professionally.
- Keep the fingernails short and manicured.
- Do not chew gum.

Men should:

- Dress in a suit or sports coat and khaki's and a white or blue long sleeve shirt.
- Black socks and loafers or oxford shoes and make sure they are polished.
- Wear a belt and tie.
- Have your hair cut professionally.
- Have neatly trimmed nails.
- Do not chew gum

## **2. Be Well Groomed**

Put your clothes out on your bed the night before the interview or presentation. Make sure they fit properly. Sometimes you may find an old mustard stain that you hadn't noticed before and you may have to change your attire.

Shampoo your hair and make sure it is styled in the way you want. Use unscented antiperspirants and deodorants. Perfume should be used sparingly, if at all. Many people are allergic to perfume so sometimes it is best if it is not used at all.

Be especially aware of bad breath. If you are a smoker or a coffee drinker, have mints available for after that cup of coffee or after that cigarette. Make sure that if you do smoke, you don't smoke in closed areas. Standing next to someone who smells like a Camel is offensive and nasty.

## **3. Project a Positive Attitude**

Smile on the inside. People can feel your attitude intuitively. A warm smile will take you a long way in putting both yourself and the other person at ease. Project a positive attitude, even when you are feeling nervous.

Be aware of your nervous habits, like having sweaty palms, jiggling your knee or giggling inappropriately. Controlling these inadvertent habits gives you self-assurance and will help others feel more comfortable in your presence. If things don't go as well as you want, learn from the experience and do it differently the next time. There is always a next time.

## **4. Be Confident and Stand Tall**

93% of the information about the other person comes from their body language, which includes how you stand, how you make eye contact and how you carry yourself. Long after we have forgotten the words spoken, people remember how you held yourself. So, stand tall with your shoulders back and your chin up.

Make good eye contact and don't let your eyes wander to who else might be in the room. Have a firm handshake. Maintain an upbeat attitude. Project a warm, confidence that spills over and embraces other individuals with your good will.

## 5. Build Relationships Based on Trust

Listen to the other person. While you are with that individual, it is all about him or her. Give 100% of your attention to that other person. It may help to do some homework before you meet them and prepare some questions in advance. Does this person like to garden, sail, belong to a charitable organization or play golf? Do you have anything in common with this person? What a great way to keep the conversation going.

Conversations are all about the give and take of small talk. Even if you are not very good at small talk, practice. Have a list of potential questions that you can start with such as are you going on any vacations this year, read any good books, seen any good movies or what do you like to do in your spare time?

## 6. Be Polite and Considerate

Politeness and consideration will solidify that first impression. Be on your best behavior and look for ways to show caring and consideration in all you do. Arrive early for the meeting or presentation or job interview. Turn off your mobile phone. Say please and thank you.

Maintain a proper distance from the person to whom you are talking. Getting too close can be a sign of aggression. Master the handshake and avoid the death grip or the limp, lifeless grip. Match the grip of the person with whom you are shaking or turn your hand slightly up as a sign of openness. While shaking hands, always maintain eye contact.



## Summary

It takes just seven seconds to make that first impression and a lifetime to undo that first impression. With every new encounter, you are evaluated and you are evaluating the other person. That first impression will set the tone for all other encounters, so you need to make it good.

Remember the basics of dressing well, having good grooming, and projecting a positive attitude. However, most important of all is the simple act of listening. The simple act of just listening can go far. A polite listener asks good questions and makes small sounds to demonstrate approval. You can say very little and your companion will sense that you are a smart person. Get people to talk about themselves and the rest comes naturally.

Your mother was right when she said that you don't have a second chance to make the first impression.