

First Impressions Are Forever

BY THOM SINGER

THERE IS AN OLD expression, “you never get a second chance to make a first impression.” It could not be truer for business professionals who are looking to create or expand their network. People make decisions about you very quickly and these first impressions are very hard to overcome. If you are having a bad day and dismiss a new acquaintance, they might never forget how you treated them. Because the first impression can make the difference in having a chance to grow a relationship further, you always need to be conscious of how you treat the new people you encounter.

I have found that there are four characteristics to helping assure that you make a good first impression, in addition to your naturally glowing personality.

Appearance and Grooming. While there are certainly exceptions, it is most common for people to expect you to have a certain amount of a professional appearance. Having crazy or unkempt hair or wild clothes often do not work to your advantage in many business circles. While having a personal style is a good idea, making sure that your appearance fits within the professional standards of your field will always serve you well. There are many articles, books and consultants who can assist you in making the correct wardrobe and other fashion choices.

A firm handshake. In the United States it is customary to shake someone’s hand when you meet them. Unless you are a famous germaphobe, like the TV character “Monk,” most people will expect a handshake. A handshake can express confidence or tell the other person that you are a wilting

flower. Firmly clasp your hand to theirs and shake, while looking them in the eyes. Do not squeeze so hard that you hurt the other person. If they are wearing a ring on their right hand, a handshake that is too strong it can cause some serious pain. But do not shake too lightly. If your hand just sits there, with no squeeze on your part, this is called a “limp fish”.... and that is exactly how the other person will perceive your personality.

Look the person in the eyes. You would be surprised how many people never look others in the eye when they are talking to them, especially someone that they do not know well. By looking someone in the eyes you are showing them that you are engaged in the conversation and that you are interested in what they have to say. Looking at your feet, their

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nametag, the centerpiece on the table or across the room will not make the other person feel like what they have to say is important to you.

Do not try to sell anyone you just met on your service. Many people get so excited when they meet someone who could be a potential client that they immediately jump into “selling mode.” They instantly want to tell the person everything they can about why they should be doing business together. This is why many people get a bad reputation in a community for being too pushy. The first time you meet someone you have not yet earned the right to sell to them. It is better to find other areas where you have common interests and begin to build the friendship. There will be plenty of time to sell them your services in the future.

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