



First impressions do count

In just a millisecond, people take in a massive amount of information when they meet you. Most of this perception they have about you is based on how you look and sound. If you get it wrong, it's very hard to override the negative perceptions the person already has of you.

The last thing you want to be doing is making life harder for yourself - That's why it's so important to give the very best first impression. Here are some practical tips that can really make a difference

Eye contact

Engaging the person by using good eye contact when you first meet them is vital. If you struggle to hold your eye contact, the person will read only negative messages into your behaviour. Bad eye contact could lead to people perceiving you as nervous, disinterested, lacking knowledge, uncomfortable, shifty, untrustworthy, and the list goes on. Maintaining good eye contact is one of the cornerstones to giving the very best first impression. You'll have to work at this if it doesn't come naturally.

Facial expression

Know what you look like. Some people naturally look happy because they are expressive. They smile and look happy instinctively. This is how you must look when introducing yourself. If you're not a very expressive person, you'll have to take a step into the unknown and push the boat out a bit. This will feel completely unnatural because it's against your inclinations. Don't worry though, keep practising and it will start to feel easier and more natural. It's worth the effort – negative behaviour or expressions are contagious. So are positive ones – Look and act positively if you want your first impression to send out positive vibes that can be caught by others around you.

Remember names

Don't forget to remember the person's name. You'll naturally be drawn to the person's appearance rather than what they say. This means that you might miss their name when they say it – so, the problem isn't that you've forgotten the person's name, it's that you never heard it in the first place. So the trick is to *remember* to remember the name. Once you've remembered it, use it. You'll give a better first impression if you address the person by their name once they've told you it.

Handshake

You've heard it before, yes I know – but your handshake really is of vital importance. Make sure you get it right. Your hand needs to grasp the other person's hand properly rather than just catch their fingers half heartedly. In other words your hand needs to engage the other person's, not just flirt with it. Your forearm should be on the same line as your thumb and forefinger at the top of your hand. This ensures that your hand is at the same angle as your arm. You don't want your hand to appear at an unusual angle. This can give the impression of a weak or nervy handshake and makes it more difficult to grasp the other person's hand. Make sure you gauge the firmness of your grip. Shake the hand firmly but not too animatedly.

Posture

The way you stand or sit not only makes a big difference to how confident you look but also to how confident you feel inside. Standing tall with your shoulders back and head high not only relieves tension but also makes a person look secure and confident. Standing tall is a simple thing that goes a long way to showing self-confidence. You'll need to think consciously about this when trying to give the very best first impression. It really does make a huge difference. In essence – don't slouch!

Content

Know what you're going to say when you introduce yourself. Don't forget to tell the person your name (I know this sounds mad but sometimes people do forget). Think about what you normally say when you introduce yourself to someone. Get into the habit of saying the same positive thing every time. That way they'll be no embarrassment and no chance that the person sees you as a person who lacks assertiveness.

Tone of voice

Your tone of voice will make a big difference to your level of assertiveness. 38% of the way your message is perceived comes from the tone of your voice. Try to sound enthusiastic and positive. People will respond more positively to you if they see you as a positive and interesting person. Don't sound monotone. People will lose interest in you quickly.

Speed of delivery

How fast do you talk? Assertive people avoid any chance of distracting the other person; they talk at a measured pace. One way to control your speed is to take deep breaths. Taking a few long deep breaths if you feel 'wound up' or 'panicky' will help you to feel calmer and to control the pace of your message. Sounding calm when you talk makes you sound more assertive and gives the person a better chance to assimilate your message.

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