

Are You Standing in Your Own Way? First Impressions can affect your success....

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I work with CEO's and their C-Level teams on their sales strategy, tactics through implementation to substantially increase profitable revenue. Often I am working with a business unit of a large company and include the sales team with management. Frequently the first thing I notice is they need some fine-tuning on how they make their first impressions to the business world. I have read several articles by recruiters stating they are shocked at the poor first impressions many CEO's and c-level executives make so this appears to be wide spread problem.

First impressions last much longer and carry much more importance than we may think. They can make or break an opportunity to create new relationships and build existing ones. Creating a poor first impression can prevent someone from moving forward with you and making introductions you need. It is nearly impossible to change a negative first impression.

You will close larger deals that are more profitable faster, when you make a great first impression that starts building your credibility. I have seen people show up with dirty glasses, bad breath, looking like a mess wearing ill-fitting wrinkled clothes and expect to do business. I have met people who have no idea how to effectively describe their company when I say "What do you do?" Some answers are too quick and others drone on and on and they are almost all about themselves, not talking about what they do for their clients and the outcomes their clients receive by working with

them. Everyone should have an effective, compelling 30 second intro ready to give that sounds interesting.

I host a c-level Roundtable almost monthly and I am frequently approached by people who want to come speak. One man emailed me his bio as a Harvard MBA asking to speak. I suggested he attend a Roundtable so I could meet him. He came dressed like he shopped at the Goodwill in kakis and a oversized navy jacket looking like they were thrown on the floor at night and wore them again this morning. He also looked scruffy. No, he did not get to speak to my Roundtable because I was embarrassed to even have had him attend!

Numerous articles and books describe research showing the first impressions we create are based on the first 7 seconds, verbal, non-verbal, written and spoken. First impressions are created in person, over the phone and on email. Everything is evaluated in all forms of communication in creating a first impression.

Why should we care? People can think what they want, we know who we are ... right?

We must care, because we may be limiting our own success if we blow it.

The negative first impression carries more weight than any attempt to make it more positive in future meetings. If you came across as self important, curt, abrupt, or did not have the appearance of a successful businessperson, you may never be able to get past that negative first impression to build a relationship. You can never create a second first impression.

The initial communication may be in email, voicemail or in person. Problems can be due to a curt email, poor English or the tone of voice used in a voicemail, phone conversation or email. It is easy

to sound angry or curt in email. These all impact creating a great first impression and developing a relationship.

Before calling a businessperson, prepare what you will say if they answer the phone and what you will say if you get voicemail. Be clear, concise and compelling. Sound professional, pleasant and have a smile in your voice. In this fast-paced business world, state why you are calling and what you want them to do or consider. Repeat your phone number twice. Limit the number of messages you leave and space your calls out to be persistent but not a pest.

When using email for communication, be very careful not to sound curt or unprofessional in your communications. Remember, sending an email is a written communication that can have a very long life and be copied to many other people who will develop impressions of you. Be proper in you email and have a positive compelling tone. Open your email with “Hello John” or “Hi John” ... tell them your information as if you are writing a business letter. Sign off on the email as you would a letter, “Very best, ...”.

It is very easy to write in phrases, bluntly, and sound like you are “telling”, “directing” or otherwise being an unpleasant person with whom to communicate. Review your email before sending and delete anything that can create a negative first impression. Always be aware that every email you send can be printed, filed and forwarded to thousands of others or posted on the internet. Protect your reputation and professional image.

Whether if we like it or not, people evaluate our physical, visual, vocal attributes and behavior at first glance to create a 7 second first impression. When you meet someone for the first time in person, 93% of the first impression is based on visual body language and our dress. Yes, that means only 7% of your first impression is based on the words you say. However, if the first time you meet someone, you approach them cussing up a storm, that would definitely make the strongest impression!

They notice if you are wearing appropriate professional apparel. If a suit is required, is it quality? Dressing men has everything to do with quality and color. The darker the color, the more powerful and avoid brown. White starched shirt with a red tie is for power, wearing a blue tie creates a peaceful impression. I have heard that a stripe tie going up to the right for people facing you creates a strong positive impression of you. I call it the upward graph tie. It is suggested men only wear 3 accessories: watch, belt and ring. I was interviewing a man recently for an executive sales position paying \$300k+. He had several accessories that included a bracelet that fell off during the interview. He then fumbled to put it back on his wrist for several minutes of the interview. I was so not impressed. NEXT!

For women, a suit jacket with matching slacks is thought of as being more contemporary. However, a skirted suit in a dark color with a white blouse or top is the most professional and powerful dress for women. Red can be a very powerful color for women. Women's skirt length should be at the knee for business and absolutely forget low cut tops. One important rule for women is no cleavage.

Don't wear a controversial fur coat, or smell like cologne or aftershave. Some people have strong politics and others may have allergies and you can create an instant negative situation. One example: A sales rep spent months getting an appointment with a decision maker for a large fortune 500 prospect company and her sales manager. The sales manager showed up at the meeting wearing a mink coat and perfume everyone could smell. The decision maker was allergic to strong odors and an animal lover so she was turned off by the fur coat and repelled by the perfume. The meeting ended after 15 minutes rather than the agreed one hour.

I heard about another sales call where a CEO and a company executive attended a sales meeting at a prospect's office. The meeting was with a former military man who ran a very formal conservative office. They did not investigate the culture in advance and wore open toed shoes, a sweater and showed up 20 minutes late. They did not get the business. Wonder why?

To build credibility and start developing trust, prepare, prepare, prepare! Before calling a businessperson, prepare what you will say both if they answer the phone or if you get voicemail. These will be two very different messages. Be clear, concise and compelling. Sound professional, pleasant and have a smile in your voice. In this fast-paced business world, state why you are calling and what you want them to do or consider. Repeat your phone number twice. Limit the number of messages you leave and space your calls out to be persistent but not a pest. Be careful calling their cell phones until you have a relationship or are invited to.

When using email for communication, be very careful not to sound abrupt or unprofessional. Be proper in your email and have a positive compelling tone. Open your email addressing them by name, tell them your information as if you are writing a business letter. Always have your spell check on and sign off on the email as you would a letter, "Very best, ...". Have your contact information on both your initial emails and replies so they don't have to search for your phone number if they want to call you. Mobil email can do spell check as well as have an automatic email contact signature, so you have no excuses. Always make it easy to do business with you!

Keep it short or they won't read it, and review your email before pressing send. It is very easy to unintentionally sound critical or blunt in email. There is no excuse for creating a negative first impression with an email. You have the time to do it right.

Always be aware that every email you send can be printed, filed and forwarded to thousands of others or posted on the internet. Protect your reputation and professional image.

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When introducing yourself and your company, you need to say something compelling about the results your customers receive by working with you around the 3rd sentence. If you drone on and on about how great your company is, they will lose interest. You need to tell them something that will inspire them to want to know more about you and your company. Years ago people would call this your 60 second elevator speech. But I have noticed that in our fast paced business world we only get 15 to 30 seconds to make a great impression with what we say, so use it successfully!

One other way you make a positive or negative first impression is by being on time. Never be late! It is just as bad as having misspelled words in your emails or proposals.

Don't be late for a scheduled phone call or fax sending information requested by email. NEVER be late for meetings! You may think it just shows you are a popular, successful busy person. Not! It shows everyone you don't respect their time and therefore, perhaps you are not respectful in business and don't deserve the customers respect. That makes it very hard to build credibility and trust doesn't it? If teammates attending appointments with you can't

meet you 15 minutes early or will be late, tell them not to come. You can't risk someone else ruining your reputation.

Build and protect your valuable first impressions that create your business reputation. Your reputation follows you everywhere, make sure it is powerfully positive!

Some people will be drawn to you and others will not. There are 'your people' and 'not your people' in the world, you will seldom be adored by everyone, but you can strive to be respected and appreciated by the majority of businesspeople.

When you make the best possible positive first impression, you have opened the door to many future opportunities. People will feel good about introducing you to their network, invite you to important meetings or events, etc. Your appearance as a credible, powerful, successful businessperson will open doors for you, so do everything you can not to stand in your own way!