



# Unit 17

## Managing Your First Impression

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Identify the elements of a strong executive presence
- ✓ Build trust and credibility with others
- ✓ Communicate effectively using verbal and non-verbal techniques
- ✓ Create a strong, positive first impression and maintain that impression as you build a relationship with others
- ✓ Develop key leadership skills, including techniques for coaching, motivating, and delivering feedback

## Unit 17

### Managing Your First Impression

#### **Being Confident**

A major part of projecting your executive image is confidence. Confidence is not just about how you feel; it affects how you look. Luckily, we have several techniques that you can apply in order to gain confidence.

#### **Pretend You're Confident**

Imagine yourself to be a confident person. Get that image in your mind and act it out. Stand up straight, dress better, and try to play the part. If you visualize yourself as confident and successful, that will help you to do things confidently and project a powerful image. When you feel your confidence slipping, visualize and use positive words to build yourself up.

**Consider how to implement this technique in order to break away from old habits and establish productive patterns.**

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#### **When Your Positive Self-Talk Doesn't Listen**

Sometimes we can be so hard on ourselves that we will actually argue with that voice in our head and therefore can't get the positive message track to enter our consciousness. One helpful way of breaking this pattern is to interfere with it. When you catch yourself listening to negative self-talk, play music that inspires you and sing or hum along. It is much more difficult for those negative messages to persist through music. The music can also be the positive message that you need at that time.

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### **Make Eye Contact**

Confident people look people in the eye; people who aren't confident don't, unless it is a cultural restriction. Don't stare or make people uncomfortable; find that comfortable level of engaging in eye contact. (In some cultures it can be considered rude to look people directly in the eye. Make sure that you know your audience.)

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### **Dance**

While this one might get you gasping (for confidence and air!), dancing is a great way to build yourself up. First, we know that the benefits of physical exercise are great, but did you ever think to let yourself go within a class of other likeminded people who are all learning at the same time? Often, you can take a class or two before you have to pay the fee. Then you can decide whether you are more of a salsa, flamenco, or ballroom kind of person.

If you don't have a partner, don't worry because lots of times there are other dancers there on their own. Or, you can take a class in line dancing. Whichever you decide, dance (or even yoga or guitar lessons) will force you to focus on something that you can enjoy.

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### **Know Your Stuff**

Your confidence can't be all a front. While you are looking people directly in the eyes, standing straight, and otherwise acting as if the world were your oyster, you also have to know what you are doing. If you are prepared and sure of your facts, you've got a better chance of projecting confidence. Later on in this course, we'll talk about effective presentation skills and effective leadership skills.

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**Rehearse**

Rehearsing can be as simple as writing out a speech or your intended conversation with someone and practicing it in front of the mirror. For example, you could do a role-play with a trusted friend or colleague as the interviewer before you interview for a new position. To tackle your underlying fear of failure, include imagery with your rehearsal: imagine yourself succeeding.

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**Pep Talks Work**

Rather than dwell on the things that didn't work or the things that didn't go well, focus on what you did accomplish. Give yourself a mental pep talk at the beginning or the end of every day. Remind yourself that you have done some things well.

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**Read Inspiring Biographies and Autobiographies**

Build a file of stories that inspire you most. Remember that our capacity far exceeds our usual level of performance. Accept the fact you will have ups and downs just like everyone else. Experiencing them through reading will help reinforce that concept.

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**Be Thankful**

No matter how bad your circumstances, there is probably somebody worse off than you. As well, build excellent support around you. There are a lot of tremendous people out there to spend your valuable time with. However, relationships are fragile. You must be prepared to devote some time to them.

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**Push Yourself to Accomplish Short-Term Goals**

There is no greater way to build confidence than to get things done. Push yourself to get at least three things accomplished each week that move you closer to your goals. Develop a habit of getting things done and being productive.

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**Do Something for Yourself Every Week**

You deserve it. Find a way to celebrate what you have accomplished or overcome. Give yourself some kind of tangible reward for your efforts.

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**Dressing for Success**

**Introduction**

The way you look is what people see first. Your appearance, as well as your level of confidence when you walk into a room, are the basis for their opinion about you before you even have the chance to speak. No matter what type of work you do, your image needs to support that, not contradict it. Since the 1980's, and particularly in North America, there has been an acceptance of wearing blue jeans as part of the corporate uniform. Fridays in particular became "casual day" when all employees could wear blue jeans or casual wear. This push for casual wear has changed the way many workplaces look today. CEOs dress in suits and ties in some companies, and in T-shirts and sandals in others.

No matter what clothing you select to help you create an impact when you enter a room or meet someone new, there are a few rules. We refer to these as **Seven Factors for Success**.

**Factor One: Iron**

Clothing needs to be clean and free of wrinkles. Get rid of that ruffled college or “just rolled out of bed” look. Learn how to use an iron and use it regularly.

**Factor Two: Grab a Needle and Thread**

Buttons, zippers, and other fasteners need to be properly attached to your clothing to give you a polished look.

**Factor Three: Footwear**

People notice what your feet are wearing, too. Your shoes need to be clean and in good condition. Learn how to apply shoe polish and purchase good quality footwear. You can lessen your credibility significantly with a nice outfit and a poor looking pair of shoes.

**Factor Four: Hair**

Your hair needs to be clean (even if the style of your mop is a messy one). No one wants to be around the smell of dirty hair, and some styles really trap smell.

**Factor Five: Teeth**

Your teeth need to be clean. You don't have to follow the trend of whitening and braces for adults, but your smile is founded on your teeth, and they need to be well looked after in order to support your image. Getting your teeth cleaned regularly also helps to keep your breath fresh.

**Factor Six: Dressing Up**

Dress for the position that you want and the respect you are after. If everyone around you wears baggy shorts and skater shoes because you sell skateboards, that's one thing. If you work in a design company, an art gallery, or a jewelry manufacturer, you will probably dress differently than members of a law firm. If you want to have an impact, you still need to dress well wherever you are. Look carefully through your wardrobe and select clothes that will serve you.

**Factor Seven: Glasses and Accessories**

Long-time glasses wearers have a gift for being able to look through a pair of smudged or dirty lenses, but others will notice that layer of grime. Keep a microfiber cloth handy to keep your glasses clean. Pay attention to watches, cuff links, and jewelry with the same attention to detail.

**Test your knowledge**

**What kind of image do you wish to create (or have you already created) to support your executive presence?**

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**What changes are you prepared to make?**

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**The Professional Handshake**

**The Importance of a Handshake**

Once you've made a positive first impression, it's important to follow it through. During the important first few minutes of a new relationship, a handshake is usually the only body contact between two people. It can communicate warmth, a genuine concern for the other person, and an image of either strength or gentleness. It can also communicate indifference and weakness. Developing a professional handshake is perhaps one of the most valuable business skills you can ever cultivate.

**Five Factors**

The message you communicate with your handshake is determined by five factors.

**Degree of Firmness**

Your grip should be firm, rather than weak. However, you don't want your handshake to be painful to the other person. Consideration is appreciated. Be especially considerate if you are shaking hands with someone in a receiving line who has many more hands to shake, someone who is wearing a lot of rings, or someone who is obviously elderly and perhaps fragile.

**Dryness of Hand**

We all prefer to shake a hand that is dry. While you typically don't want to obviously dry your hands before greeting someone, this is perfectly acceptable if you have been holding a cold glass.

**Depth of Grip**

A handshake is palm to palm. Generally you will place your hand so that the web between your thumb and forefinger meets the web of the other person's hand, briefly. Your hand remains perpendicular. If your palm is facing up, this may be construed as a sign of submissiveness. Similarly, if your palm is on top, it can be seen as a sign of aggressiveness.

**Duration of Grip**

The perfect handshake is about three seconds. You can gently pump once or twice but this is not necessary. Then pull back your hand, even if you are still talking.

**Eye Contact**

While this will vary from culture to culture, in North America we expect the person shaking our hand to make eye contact with us.

**Tips for Success**

Have something to say as you shake hands, if possible. It doesn't require anything witty. It may even be the old stand-by, "Pleased to meet you." However, these few words set the stage for some small talk and are a great start to building trust.

Grasping the top of the other person's hand with your other hand, so that their hand is enveloped in yours, may very well signal warmth and affection. However, this may be seen as patronizing and too familiar for an introductory handshake. Save this handshake for a meeting with an old friend.

**Remembering Names****Why Name Recall is an Important Skill**

There are several techniques for remembering people's names, and the key is to use whatever works for you. You may find that a particular technique works in some instances (like when you also get a business card) but not in others (especially if you are in more casual surroundings). Most people love to hear their own name, and when someone new to us remembers our name, it makes us pay attention.

Avoid the temptation to say that you are horrible at remembering names. This can give off two not-so-subtle messages:

- You are not important, and therefore I won't make an effort to remember your name.
- I don't care if I ever meet you again or not.

Instead, make a conscious decision to get good at learning names. If you do not have a great track record for remembering names, let that change now. Stop telling people (and yourself!) that you never

remember names. Plant the idea in your subconscious that you are fantastic at remembering names and you remember people all the time!

### **Repeat Their Name**

When you meet someone new, repeat their name out loud, and look into their eyes as you do so to connect them to their name. If you can repeat the name, the likelihood of remembering it increases tremendously.

Try questions like:

- “Did I pronounce it correctly?”
- “Could you repeat your name for me?”
- “How do you spell your name?”

Sometimes we are talking with people but very distracted and we aren’t even trying to remember their name. Instead, focus on the person or people you are speaking with, and then repeat their name within the conversation. For example: “Susan, it’s nice to meet you. What do you think of this subject?”

When Susan answers, use her name in your reply, like this: “It’s great to hear what other people are thinking about that, Susan. I’m curious to hear what you think is the most challenging part of this topic.”

Be sure to use their name at the end of your conversation. For example, “Susan, it was a pleasure to meet you today. “

### **Write It Down**

This is a great technique used by sales people, and it’s available for the rest of us too! When you meet someone, write their name down as soon as you can, along with a trigger to help remind you who they are. You can do this in a paper or electronic notebook. Keep a list of new people that you meet and then review it from time to time. This is really helpful when you start a new job and are meeting lots of people, move into a new neighborhood, or when you are consciously networking. As well, try to tie the name to something memorable.

Here are some examples:

- “Sandra, makes her own jewelry, always wears at least two pieces.”
- “Maryanne, fashion consultant, wears various shades of purple (clothes and hair).”
- “Thomas, avid numismatist, looking for a 1982 Canadian penny.”
- “Gabriel, horse rancher and entrepreneur. Promised that I would send him photo of our racing horse.”



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### **Building Trust and Credibility**

We've probably all worked with people (including leaders and executives) that we did not respect. No matter how long we worked with them, and no matter how great our results were, there was something about them which stopped us from trusting them. This lack of respect leads to dysfunctional teams, where people are afraid of repercussions. When people work well with one another, and respect one another, trust is built.

Factors that impact your credibility and your ability to build this trust include small things (like remembering to think of people and send a thank you note) and big things (like being punctual). Credibility and trust are reinforced when people speak about you in a manner that reflects the regard they hold you in.

Earlier, we discussed ways to start building trust and credibility as soon as you walk into a room. Here are some additional techniques that you can use to further develop trusting relationships.

#### **If you say you'll do it, then get on and do it.**

Some people are good at planning and setting things up, but not so good when it comes to the follow through. At some point, you have to stop talking and start doing. If details are not really your strong suit, then make sure that you have people you can delegate to so that the things you say you will do get done. If you break promises, any trust that people have in you will be swiftly eroded.

#### **If you mess it up, own it.**

We all make mistakes, and it's a way to learn how to improve. Instead of pointing the finger at someone else (especially members of your team), make sure the blame falls where it belongs – on you. Leaders and people who want to have impact learn that accepting responsibility for the good and the bad builds trust and credibility.

#### **Be there for people.**

If people feel micro-managed, they feel that you do not trust them to do their own work. Strong leaders allow people to experiment, take risks, and to learn from failure as well as their own choices. Remember to also see what their strengths are and to celebrate when they do things well. Don't try to take credit when the whole team is contributing to success. As well, make sure that you are available when they need your support.

