

## **Make a good first impression in less than 60 seconds**

**It all comes down to wardrobe, haircut, posture, eye contact, a handshake, diction and a smile**

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Remember that old saw about having only one chance to make a good first impression?

Sure, it's corny, but it's true.

"Usually, in less than a minute, people can size you up," said Daryl Dagenais, a human resources consultant with Vertex Human Resources Solutions Inc.

It's also essential if you want to get anywhere in your career.

**Consider the situation Lynda Goldman once encountered:**

Goldman, a business etiquette and image consultant and the author of *How to Make a Million Dollar First Impression*, remembers being asked by a major bank to help a job candidate who had made a negative impression during her interview because of the way she looked.

"She was badly dressed and her clothes were out of style but she was very qualified for the job," Goldman said. "The bank also had another candidate in the running for the job who was less qualified but who had made a good impression through her wardrobe. They wondered if I could fix the person with the poor dress sense."

However, a week later, the bank called Goldman back and said they had hired the less qualified candidate.

"I think they decided it would be easier to train her than to teach the qualified person how to fix her image."

Sad, but true. Deep down, people are really quite shallow and nowhere more so than in the workplace. Yes, your brilliance, skills and personality will propel you through your career, but it's best to wow everyone from the start with that ever-important first impression.

"We have busy lives and we don't have time to get to know people, so we tend to make quick judgments about them," said Goldman, adding that the speed of life makes first impressions even more critical.

Here are some ways to make a positive first impression in a job interview, networking event or workplace.

Start with the visual, Goldman said.

"What people see conveys an instantaneous impression."

Body language should be open.

"That suggests that you're open to the world," she said. "You should face someone squarely. If you have an object in front of you or your arms are folded across your chest, your body language is closed. Also, if you're in an office and you stay behind your desk or a table, you've created a subconscious barrier. It's best to come out from behind the desk or table when you greet someone. It shows you're open to having a new experience."

Eye contact is also key but not consistently across all cultures. While Europeans and North Americans value direct eye contact, some cultures view it as overly assertive, she said.

Posture can also convey a positive image.

"People forget about posture, but it's important," Goldman said.

"If you see someone across a room and your impression is that he's confident, what you're noticing is the posture. I always say that good (straight and erect with head held high) posture gives you the same benefits as a new suit, but it costs less."

Wear clothing that is reasonably stylish.

"It should be clean and it should fit properly. I was once called to work as an image consultant for a professional woman who was having trouble finding a job. But she was wearing a pink suit that was about 20 years old and it no longer fit her. She could barely get the buttons done up. She said clothes were unimportant to her," Goldman said. "But you have to invest in decent quality clothing."

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In fact, "dress for the occasion but always dress a notch above," said Dagenais.

And be sure to add to the overall visual image with good grooming, she said.

"You should invest in a decent haircut and take care of your teeth and skin to reflect overall good health," Dagenais said. "The person who sees you may not pick up consciously that you're well groomed, but will be assured at a subconscious level that you're in good health."

Once the visual cues are accounted for, behaviour is an important way of projecting a positive impression, she added.

"In a networking event, for instance, you should listen and ask open-ended questions. You'll learn about the other person and endear yourself."

However, a conversation should never be one-way, she said.

"While you're eager to listen to others, you have to be ready to disclose information about yourself," Dagenais said. "Self-disclosure is interesting because it encourages others to talk about themselves."

Smiling is also often underrated as a means to positive image building, she added.

"I knew a manager in a company I worked for who was always smiling. Everyone loved him and he did very well in his career. He never played favourites and he talked to everyone."

A word about the handshake. There is a happy medium between bone-crunching and limp-as-a-dead-fish, Dagenais said.

"It's the extremes that are a concern. The handshake should be not too hard and not too soft. You can determine if you've got it right by asking your friends to evaluate your handshake," she said.

Another important first impression element is the tone of your voice and articulation of speech, Dagenais said.

"The voice tone should be neither too loud, nor too soft," she said. "And articulating your words is very important. People who are confident pace their speech. If you talk too fast or don't speak clearly, people may be too polite to ask for clarification."

Dagenais, who has made a career interviewing job candidates, says there's one other thing that makes a good impression on her.

"I'm impressed when people know things about the company they're interviewing for. They do their research ahead of time.