

Big Mistake

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Forgetting to Stay
One Step Ahead



“Behavior is a mirror in which everyone displays his own image.”

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

People tend to focus on small things that can affect your future. Impressions are made in seconds. Most of the time, these impressions determine the outcome of a situation before the actual interaction begins. We’ve all heard the saying, “You don’t get a second chance to make a first impression.”

Most businesspeople determine if they want to do business with you based on these first impressions. By planning ahead, you can decide what you want your image to be and what impressions you would like to leave with them. This gives others every opportunity to do business with you, hire you, and be loyal to you.

On the Side

“Recently we were selecting a vendor to furnish our new office. We couldn’t believe the treatment we received. Some vendors acted as though they were doing us a favor. Others arrived a few minutes late to our first meeting. We hired the vendor who had the most professional people—the people

You Did What?

who treated us well and acted as though they were thrilled to be with us. They were willing to do whatever it took to make us happy. It's a pity that the other vendors overlooked the possibilities. It turned out to be \$100,000 worth of business."

—A San Francisco law firm

Think about the people you know who are successful and professional.

Ask Yourself These Crucial Questions

- What makes them professional?
- What did I learn from them that can help me become more professional?
- How do I want people to perceive me?
- What image do I want to project?

There are three basic components that contribute to a person's impression of us:

- 7 percent of an impression comes from the words we use
- 38 percent of an impression comes from the way we sound (our intonation and enunciation)
- 55 percent of an impression comes from our nonverbal messages (our body language)

These components determine how others perceive us and also how they react to us. Being one step ahead means leaving nothing to chance. You must perfect the details of how you present yourself.

Tips

Your goal in business should be to give people the opportunity to actually hear what you have to say. You lose your competitive advantage when people become distracted by aspects of your appearance or by behaviors that you can easily change.

- Always stay “one step ahead” of your competition.
- Be on time.
- Be dressed appropriately.
- Be dressed for where you *want* to be in your career, not for your current position.
- Be informed.
- Be interested, not interesting.
- Use appropriate language.
- Be personable, not personal.
- Respond yes or no, verbally or in written form, when you are invited to a function. People remember.
- Follow up and follow through.
- It is better to “under-promise” and “over-deliver.”
- Send handwritten thank-you notes. (For more information, see chapter 3, Being Sloppy with Written and Verbal Correspondence.)

Attitude is everything! As Norman Vincent Peale once said, “Any fact facing us is not as important as our attitude toward it, for that determines our success or failure.”