

Big Blunder 1 } Forgetting to Stay One Step Ahead

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

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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." People tend to focus on small things that can affect your future.

Research has confirmed the importance of first impressions. 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 others with. This gives them every opportunity to do business with you, hire you, and be loyal to you.

In an ideal world, others would not judge us. In the professional world, judgments are made and impressions happen within seconds of first meeting someone. It is important to take time to think about first impressions and how others perceive us. Some aspects of first impressions include posture, body language, appearance, and your personal style. If done right, this can play a role in forming favorable impressions that will go a long way toward building your career.

There are three basic components that contribute to a others impression of us:

- The words we use make up 7 percent of an impression.
- The way we sound, that is, our intonation and enunciation make up 38 percent of an impression.
- Our nonverbal messages and our body language make up 55 percent of an impression.

These components determine how others perceive us and how they react to us. Being one step ahead means leaving nothing to chance. You must perfect the details of how you present yourself. Think about the people you know who are successful and professional.

Ask Yourself These Crucial Questions

- ◆ What makes the people I admire 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?

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 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

Tips

Your goal in business should be to give people the opportunity to know how good you are at what you do and 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. Take a look at the first set of tips, which we will expand on throughout this book:

- Always stay one step ahead of your competition.
- Keep your emotions in check.
- Be completely present, no matter the circumstances.
- Eliminate distractions, including your phone, when engaged in a conversation.
- Be on time. Even better, be five minutes early to be safe.
- Be dressed appropriately.
- Be dressed for where you *want* to be in your career, not for your current position.
- Be informed.
- Be protective of your brand on social media.

- Be interested, not interesting.
- Use appropriate language.
- Return telephone calls and emails. You never know when you will need the sender to return a call or note to you.
- 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.)
- Be aware of the messages you are sending all day, every day.

As you continue to advance in your career, be open to opportunities. Adopt a mindset of growth, and always find people to give you feedback for your growth.

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.”