

## How to make a good first impression

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There's more to showing your best side than a winning smile or the right footwear

RECENT Princeton University research found that the window of opportunity to impress is even shorter than previously thought: humans make judgments on someone's trustworthiness within the first 500 milliseconds of hearing their voice. So if it takes a mere half a second for a stranger to decide on your character, how can you ensure people see your best side from the outset?



### DRESS TO IMPRESS

Business culture has grown increasingly casual over the years. But despite the likes of Mark Zuckerberg wearing jeans to work, a number of independent studies maintain that dressing smartly can increase your chances of business success. According to research from Cornell, for example, business dress for men should mean a dark business suit, with a conservative dress shirt and tie. Women, meanwhile, should wear a dark suit, dress shirt and pumps.

A new study from Harvard Business School (HBS), however, found that sticking out in distinct ways can lend you an air of presence or influence. In one scenario, shop assistants thought clients in gym kit were more likely to splurge than well-dressed individuals. In another, students afforded more respect to a bearded professor in a t-shirt than a well-groomed one in a tie.

The best advice? Take time before your first day to understand the company's culture. "And never wear perfume or cologne to work – leave these things for evenings and weekends," expert Lisa Quast recently wrote in Forbes.

### THE HANDSHAKE

Scientists from the University of Manchester may have discovered that one in five of us hate having to shake hands (with limp wrists and a lack of eye contact among the biggest complaints), but as professor Geoffrey Beattie points out, it's "one of the most crucial elements of impression formation". His guide to the perfect handshake applies to men and women, and reads as follows: "use the right hand, a complete grip and a firm squeeze, approximately three shakes, with a medium level of vigour, held for no longer than two to three seconds."

Yet Beattie misses some important detail. According to author LisaMarie Lucconi, for example, you should only offer your hand after an introduction has been made. Why? Because you may find yourself so busy presenting your hand that you don't catch the person's name, "which is the whole reason for this process," she told Business Insider. And eye contact should last three seconds – any less and you look weak; any more and you come across as "creepy".

### THE RIGHT TONES

According to Jordan Belfort, the former stockbroker whose rise and fall was portrayed by Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, "it's your tonality and your body language which allows you to be established as someone worth listening to." Some may doubt any advice coming from a fraudster-turned-motivational speaker, but he's right that certain tones are more pleasing to the ear. A Princeton study found that males who raised their tone, and women who alternated the pitch of their voices, were seen as more trustworthy.

### BODY LANGUAGE

Gestures, posture and facial expressions all convey powerful messages to the people you come into contact with. Yet most people are unaware of the messages their body language sends. So HBS research recommends you ask yourself these two questions when next in a meeting: am I fidgeting? If you're sitting still, then all is "probably" well. If not, it's likely the person you're talking to will worry that you're disinterested. Secondly: am I interrupting? "In any healthy debate, people will occasionally interrupt". But do it too much, and you may seem inflexible.

And according to a Duke University study, subtle forms of mimicry can prove useful if trying to increase rapport – and your chances of getting what you want.

