

You Only Get One First Impression by Deborah Chaddock Brown

As you read this I'm winging my way from Ohio to Honolulu to compete in the Sweet Adeline's International competition. We have a full schedule planned before our actual performance Thursday 6:30pm Hawaii time. Once we take the stage we'll have only SIX MINUTES to leave an impression with the eight judges sitting in the pit listening and watching our every move. Recently a coach spent the weekend with our chorus helping us with a few last minute details to perfect our performance and she had this to say:

"From the minute you take the stage, long before you open your mouth to sing, you need to exude confidence. Walk tall, shoulders back, smiles firmly in place and make eye contact with the judges. Send the judges the message that they had better watch out because you are going to knock their socks off."

Imagine if we approached every sales call, board meeting or first time introduction with that attitude. An attitude that says:

Here I am - I'm confident - I'll provide value - This is going to be memorable!

Each first impression is a Make or Break Moment – a moment in which others will make certain judgments about your ability, your professionalism and your value. How can you make sure the impression you leave is desirable?

Non-verbal cues

Dress: Wear clothes flattering to your figure and at least one step more professional than those with whom you'll meet. If they are business casual, then add a jacket to your attire. Dressing professionally in this day and age of jeans and Polo shirts shows that you respect the person you are meeting with enough to dress up.

Stature: Stand tall, shoulders back, head high (but not looking down) and offer a firm (but not crushing) hand shake.

Facial expressions: Offer a smile and make eye contact. These two simple motions make all the difference in connecting with your audience.

Actively listen: Use body language to convey interest; leaning in, cocking your head, expressive eyes, and nodding let the other person know you are listening and interested.

Verbal cues

Ask questions: We learn more when we ask questions and listen carefully to the answers. Try it sometime. People will say "She's such a great conversationalist!" or "He really understood the problem." Often times it was just that you asked questions that allowed them to explain the issue.

Wait before offering your opinion: Let the conversation swirl around you, ask questions, listen to answers and opinions until 70-80% of the discussion has taken place before jumping into the conversation. If you talk rarely but offer value – you'll be viewed as the person with the answers.

Remember E.F. Hutton? E.F. Hutton is remembered for its advertising slogan: "When E. F. Hutton talks, people listen." Is that you?

What kind of first impression do you leave? What do you want people to say about you? What judgments do you make from other's first impressions?

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