



What sort of a first impression do you make?

1 April 2019

This is something we don't think much about. Well I tend to forget about it most of the time. While reading through some of the information I am going to give to you, I realised – aaaaarghhh – I am not doing some of the right things at all. Often when I come out to see a client I have my cell phone in my hand and my eyes on the cell phone. That is a no-no according to research. Also, research says don't start off with talking negatively or about negative topics. So what do I do? Just lately one of the first sentences out of my mouth when I meet new people is about loadshedding and how lousy it is. There is a lot of research that has been done on making first impressions in scientific journals, whether it is meeting clients for the first time, on a first date, or attending a job interview. Below are some of the outcomes of that research, including recommendations.

SOME FACTS

You have between 7 and 30 seconds to make a first impression. If that first impression is negative it is exceedingly hard to change it. People form beliefs about us based on their first impression and as we know beliefs tend to stick. People tune into information that supports their beliefs and tune out cues that don't support their beliefs. So whatever that first impression was they got of you, they will look for evidence in the future to support it. Based on their first impression they will expect you to behave according to that impression and will look for evidence to confirm it. If you want to change a negative first impression you are going to have to work really, really hard, for a very long time to change it. Also, people are particularly sensitive to negative impressions. More so than positive ones. So the negative impression sticks more than a positive one does.

We know that physical appearance has an impact on perceptions. There is lots of research to show that physical appearance influences what you earn, whether you are convicted of a crime, whether you are hired for a job and a host of other things. There are 4 facial cues which impact first impressions.

1. Having a babyface – which means big eyes, large forehead, short chin and round head – is often interpreted as needing a lot of care. Such people are treated kindly but not thought of as very capable.

2. We also judge people according to the facial similarity to people we know. If someone looks like your stingy Aunt Martha you are inclined to assume they will be stingy too.
3. The third facial cue is fitness or attractiveness. We tend to like faces that are symmetrical and in proper proportion.
4. The final facial cue is emotional expression. If you look angry or cross or mean you don't appeal to people. Because of the need to survive, human beings have become really good at reading emotional expressions.

How to make a great first impression

1. Be on time. If you are late people make all sorts of assumptions about you including you are lazy, inconsiderate, don't care, sloppy etc.
2. Present yourself appropriately. You don't have to be dressed to the nines, but you do need to look presentable and neat. No broken clothing, dirty hands, messed up hair. Also consider what the person you are meeting is likely to wear. You want to be yourself, but don't go out of your way not to fit in.
3. Smile when you meet people for the first time. Be open and confident. Stand tall, give a firm handshake and make eye contact. Keep your chin up.
4. Don't talk on your cell phone when meeting someone, give the person 100% of your attention. In fact, put your cell phone away. People will not think you are the world's best multitasker if you are talking on your phone at the same time as greeting them. They will think you are rude.
5. Be aware of the way you speak. If your first meeting with someone is really important, such as an interview or a meeting with a big client, you may want to practise and record yourself so you can play it back and listen to how you sound. Speak clearly and in an even tone. Don't talk too loudly or too quietly. Don't use slang unless you know it is acceptable, and don't use filler words such as um or aah as they can make you seem less intelligent. Choose positive topics. On meeting someone for the first time, don't go into a doom and gloom discussion. Remember you are creating a first impression, which will stick.
6. Your general emotional state is important. If you are miserable, angry, irritable, it will show. If you need to, practise getting into an upbeat, positive and confident state. You cannot afford at your first meeting to be in a bad mood or that is how you will be labelled, probably forever after.

So remember to think about the first impression you are making. And make it a great one.