

Impress in an instant

The first seven seconds are crucial in any meeting. **Lesley Everett** explains how to make them count

Do your preparation before any meeting or interview and make sure you know who will be there. Consider what you know about them and find out more if needs be. People love you to be interested in them - it makes you a more impactful and memorable person.



2 Arrive well. By this, we mean arrive a little early to have an informal chat beforehand where appropriate. Remember also to think about your posture and to smile. Don't look like a shrinking violet and wait to be spoken to. Look approachable.

Know what your handshake says about you. Test it out. A good, firm (but not too firm) handshake, direct eye contact and a smile make a powerful first impression.



4 Consider what is an appropriate outfit. Who is the client? What is the environment? What are their expectations and what are your objectives? Getting your outfit wrong could mean you don't look like you fit in. Pay attention to good fit - if your clothes don't fit well you'll never look well-dressed. Check in a full-length mirror before you leave.



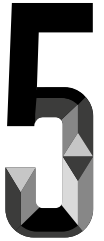
We make a first impression in a very short time - between five and seven seconds. Some studies say that we form an impression of someone within 10 milliseconds. First we take in, subconsciously, non-verbal indicators such as dress, appearance and body language. We then note the quality of and interest in the voice, and not so much what is said at that stage. If we like what we see and how we hear it, we hook into the content, or not if we don't.

This is not to say that image is more important than content. It isn't - it needs to be backed up with substance every time. However, we shouldn't forget the fact that people do judge us on first impressions and how we look, so we need to make sure the perception they have is accurate, authentic and works for us, not against us.

Be aware of the halo or horns effect. If you make a great first impression then others will look for other positive things you say or do and what others say about you, and the impact increases. If however you make a negative first impression others will subconsciously pick up on other negative things that you do or they hear about you to compound the issue.

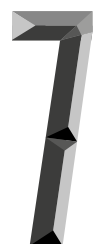
So, what is the best way to make those seven seconds count? It's impossible to write a foolproof plan, but if you follow these seven steps, you'll have a pretty strong start.

Check out your breath. Not easy to do yourself, but licking your wrist and sniffing it after a few seconds works. Or get others to tell you... you'd rather know! And make sure there are no other physical distractions - spinach in the teeth, coffee around the mouth, pet hairs on your trousers, and so on. These will definitely be noticed.



6 Consider your eye contact. If you're in an environment where there are lots of people, make sure your eye contact isn't all over the place. There is nothing worse than someone looking over your shoulder for somebody more interesting while they're talking to you.

7 Think about the little details. We've already discussed appearance and clothes but shoes, in particular, get noticed so make sure yours don't let you down (worn away soles or heels, etc). And don't arrive cluttered up - if you have a laptop, briefcase, coat, umbrella and luggage, leave it at reception if you can.



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