



## **First Impressions Last**

By Patti Hathaway, Business Advisor & Author

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How long do you think you have before someone will make a judgement about you? minutes? seconds? In her book [The Four Minute Sell](#), Janet Elsea says you have 7 - 15 seconds to make a good first impression. You have about four minutes total for someone to decide if they want to go beyond that first four minutes (therein lies the 4 minute sell).

Let's talk about some of the ways to create positive impressions every time. I'm going to use the acronym CONTACT to describe some guidelines on how you can build effective rapport with others and present yourself professionally.

***Confidence.*** It is critical to project self-confidence through your handshake, eye contact, and your willingness to risk extending yourself first. One of the most powerful things you can do to make a confident and powerful first impression is to initiate in a handshake. This is particularly important for women. The handshake is a common societal expectation for men and is never questioned. In fact, social etiquette experts still advocate that men should wait for a woman to extend herself first for a handshake. Notice, I said social etiquette. In business, it doesn't matter whether you are meeting a man or woman for the first time...you should always initiate a handshake, regardless of your gender, because it shows your confidence.

***Outer Appearance.*** Dress in a manner that is appropriate for the situation. Look at what other respected people in your organization wear and dress similarly. The conservative approach is usually best. Quality is more important than the quantity of clothes and do make sure the clothes fit well or hire someone to tailor the clothing to fit. Remember the attention to the little details can make all the difference in your business presence.

***Names.*** Learn and use people's names when you meet them. Best rule of thumb here is to repeat the person's name three times during your initial conversation with them. Another

technique is to ask a question about their name. Such as "Patti, do you spell your name with a "y" or an "i"?" It'll help you remember it. Some memory experts suggest using associations...such as associating a person's name with another object to help you remember it.

This reminds me of a funny story a training participant from Chicago shared with me about use of associations in remembering names. "Bev" was an interior designer who prided herself on her relationships with her clients and her ability to recall names of past clients using associations with animals. She had used the association technique successfully for some time when she made the following embarrassing mistake. One of her past clients was a rather large, yet stately woman named Mrs. Shepherd. "Bev" had not done any work for Mrs. Shepherd for over a year when she happened to see her one day. "Bev" went up to the woman, shook her hand and said, "Mrs. Husky, it's wonderful to see you again!". Well you can imagine the chagrin of "Bev" when she realized she had recalled the wrong animal/dog association...it was Mrs. Shepherd not Mrs. Husky...and you can imagine the questioning look on Mrs. Shepherd's face.

Again, on remembering people's names, it's best to repeat it three times in your initial conversation. Also, if you forget their name when you see them again, don't be embarrassed to ask their name again. It happens to the best of us.

*Talk.* Speak to communicate, not to impress. Notice your tone, inflection, and pitch...make sure it's upbeat and positive. No one wants to be around a downer. One of the most important things to do to have a powerful first impression is to get the other person to talk about him/herself. People generally enjoy talking about their interests.

Depending on the situation, think in advance about the types of questions you would like to ask. Here are some sample questions you might want to consider asking when networking with customers, peers and managers or when you are trying to find a mentor:

- How did you get started in the \_\_\_\_\_ business?
- What do you enjoy most about your position/career?
- What separates your organization (or you) from the competition?
- What one thing would you do in your career if you knew you couldn't fail?
- What has been your greatest career challenge?
- What advice would you give to someone new in the field?

Keep in mind it is important to always speak to communicate not to impress. By becoming sincerely interested in others, often you will build great rapport and will be remembered.

*Acceptance.* Suspend judgment and withhold assumptions. Make the other person feel as if she or he is the most important person you will meet today. Along with acceptance, look for ways to show....

*Consideration.* Strive to have others feel better after they interact with you.

*Trust.* Listen to the other person to develop trust. The mirroring technique from NeuroLinguistics Programming (see other articles I've written on this technique) is an excellent strategy to help you develop a subconscious level of trust with people you know and with those you have just met.

Susan Bixler who wrote the book, The Professional Image, summarized it well when she said, "Although people should be judged by their innate worth, it is often a first impression that determines whether someone will stick around long enough to let them reveal it."

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