

First Impressions Count

or:

How to Make People Like You in 90 Seconds or Less

*People decide if they like you within seconds of meeting you.
Here are some hints how to make sure your first impression is a good one:*

- **Smile.**

If you are worried that your smile doesn't look natural, try standing six inches from a mirror and saying the word "great" in funny voices. This will almost certainly make you smile. The next time you meet someone, think *great*. A natural smile will form.

- **Notice eye color.**

This ensures that you are meeting the other person's gaze. Poor eye contact suggests you have something to hide or are not confident. But don't stare - it may make him/her uncomfortable. Oddly enough, occasionally looking at your hands conveys the impression of active listening.

- **Use "open" body language.**

Keep your arms uncrossed and hands unclenched. If you are unsure of what to do with your hands, put them in your back pockets or at your sides. Point your heart toward the heart of the other person.

- **Mirror the other person's gestures and body language.**

People take an instant liking to those who are similar to themselves. If you meet someone who is loud and talks with his hands, be equally loud and use the same gestures. If the person laughs a lot, do the same. This technique can even defuse a hostile situation.

Helpful: After a few moments of matching, change your movements. If the other person follows suit, he/she feels in sync with you. If not, continue matching movements and try again. If you are dealing with an angry person, gradually lower your voice and open your body language. If you are speaking with someone who seems bored, lean forward and see if he/she becomes more animated.

- **Ask open-ended questions.**

Who, what, where, when, why and how questions are conversation starters. Questions beginning with *Have you...? Are you...?* and *Do you...?* are conversation killers. They can be answered with one word: yes or no.

- **Relax.**

A Princeton University study found that trying too hard to be liked is a big turnoff in first encounters. Before meeting or talking to someone – especially to a group - take a few deep abdominal breaths to relax. When you are nervous, you take shallow breaths. This makes your voice high-pitched and shaky. Deep breaths make your voice richer and more confident.