

A Harvard Psychologist Says This Trait Matters Most: 10 Ways to Make a Great First Impression

Amy Cuddy says people answer one question when they first meet you -- and that answer lays the foundation for a business relationship.

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Say you [meet a new](#) potential customer, a potential employer, or anyone with whom you want to establish a [business relationship](#). Which matters more:

- Showing that you're skilled, experienced, and capable, or
- Showing that you're trustworthy and likable?

Many people assume that skill, expertise, experience, and competence matter most. After all, if you're going to hire me or do business with me, you need to know I have the talent to come through, right? It's natural to assume you should establish your credentials as quickly as possible.

Natural, but wrong.

According to Amy Cuddy, how people initially judge you has little to do with whether you seem skilled or competent. Instead, people subconsciously ask themselves one question when they first meet you:

"Can I trust you?"

According to Cuddy, trustworthiness (meaning warmth and likability) is everything. "From an evolutionary perspective," she writes in her

book *Presence*, "it is more crucial to our survival to know whether a person deserves our trust." Her research shows that.

Of course natural likability can also quickly lose its impact, especially when there's no substance beneath the surface glow. That's where talent comes in: Once you've shown you're trustworthy, then you can prove you're talented.

In short, whip out your CV too soon and you may be wasting your time -- first you need to show that you're someone who can build and maintain great relationships, consistently influence (in a good way) the people around you, and make people feel better about themselves.

Those are the kind of people we all like to be around, and want to be more *like*.

So how do you do that? How do you come across as more likable and trustworthy -- in a genuine and authentic way?

1. Listen a *lot* more than you talk.

Ask questions. Maintain eye contact. Smile. Frown. Nod. Respond -- not so much verbally, but nonverbally. That's all it takes to show the other person he or she is important.

Then when you do speak, don't offer advice unless you're asked. Listening shows you care a lot more than offering advice does, because when you offer advice, in most cases, you make the conversation about you.

Don't believe me? Who is "Here's what I would do ..." about: you or the other person?

Only speak when you have something important to say -- and always define important as what matters to the other person, not to you.

2. Shift the spotlight to others.

No one receives enough praise. No one. So start by telling people what they did well.

Wait, you say you don't know what they did well? Shame on you -- it's your job to know. It's your job to find out ahead of time. Not only will people appreciate your praise, they'll appreciate the fact you care enough to pay attention to what they do.

And then they'll feel a little more accomplished and a lot more important, and they'll love you for making them feel that way.

3. Never practice selective hearing.

Some people -- I guarantee you know people like this -- are incapable of hearing anything said by someone they feel is somehow beneath them.

Sure, you speak to them, but that particular falling tree doesn't make a sound in the forest, because there's no one actually listening.

People who make a great first impression listen closely to everyone, and they make all of us, regardless of our position or social status or "level," feel like we have something in common with them.

Because we do. We're all human.

4. Put your stuff away.

Don't check your phone. Don't glance at your monitor. Don't focus on anything else, even for a moment.

You can never connect with others if you're busy connecting with your stuff, too.

Give the gift of your full attention. That's a gift few people give. That gift alone will make others want to be around you and remember you.

5. Give before you receive -- and assume you will *never* receive.

Never think about what you can get. Focus on what you can provide. Giving is the only way to establish a real connection and relationship.

Focus, even in part and even for a moment, on what you can get out of the other person, and you show that the only person who really matters is you.

6. Don't act self-important ...

The only people who are impressed by your stuffy, pretentious, self-important self are other stuffy, pretentious, self-important people.

The rest of us aren't impressed. We're irritated, put off, and uncomfortable.

And we hate when you walk in the room.

7. ... Because you realize other people are more important.

You already know what *you* know. You know your opinions. You know your perspectives and points of view.

All that isn't important because it's already yours. You can't learn anything from yourself.

But you don't know what other people know, and everyone, no matter who he or she is, knows things you don't know.

That makes other people a lot more important than you -- because you can learn from them.

8. Choose your words.

The words you use impact the attitude of others.

For example, you don't *have* to go to a meeting; you *get* to go meet with other people. You don't *have* to create a presentation for a new client; you *get* to share cool stuff with other people. You don't *have* to go to the gym; you *get* to work out and improve your health and fitness.

You don't *have* to interview job candidates; you *get* to select a great person to join your team.

We all want to associate with happy, enthusiastic, fulfilled people. The words you choose can help other people feel better about themselves -- and make you feel better about yourself, too.

9. Don't discuss the failings of others ...

Granted, we all like hearing a little gossip. We all like hearing a little dirt.

The problem is, we don't necessarily like -- and we definitely don't respect -- the people who dish that dirt.

Don't laugh at other people. When you do, the people around you wonder if you sometimes laugh at them.

10. ... But readily admit your own failings.

Incredibly successful people are often assumed to have charisma simply because they're successful. Their success seems to create a halo effect, almost like a glow.

The key word is *seem*.

You don't have to be incredibly successful to make a great first impression. Scratch the shiny surface, and many successful people have all the charisma of a rock.

But you do have to be incredibly genuine to be remarkably charismatic.

Be humble. Share your screwups. Admit your mistakes. Be the cautionary tale. And laugh at yourself.

While you should never laugh at other people, you should always laugh at yourself.

People won't laugh at you. People will laugh with you.

They'll like you better for it -- and they'll want to be around you a lot more.