



Making a winning first impression is vital whether you are going for a job interview, selling something, working at a reception desk or meeting work colleagues for the first time. There is an old saying that "you don't get a second chance to make a first impression".

Why are first impressions so powerful? They are important because one of the common traits of human beings is they want to know who they are dealing with. They want to be able to quickly understand a situation that they are presented with. So, when presented with a person for the first time, people want to make some judgment about them and they want to do it quickly. This judgment is usually formed on the basis of very superficial information - how

they look, what they say, how they are dressed, how they behave. But this is a very powerful psychological principle and anyone who ignores it does so at their peril.

Research indicates that in a job interview situation, interviewers tend to reach a final decision about an applicant within the first three or four minutes of the interview. The rest of the interview is usually an exercise in selective perception where the interviewer sees what he or she wants to see, to support the decision that has already been made.

So, how do you create a winning first impression so that people who you are dealing with make a positive judgment about you and about the organisation that you represent?

CREATING A WINNING FIRST IMPRESSION

Basically there are five elements to creating a winning first impression:

1. Be Positive

Creating a positive first impression involves looking at the person, smiling, not being distracted, showing interest and concern for the other person. It is mainly a matter of body language as this is a very powerful form of communication.

2. Be Helpful

There are many situations, when dealing with customers, team members or others, when you can be helpful. You do not have to wait for the other person to express a problem that they may have. You can anticipate concerns and offer assistance or help. This can contribute to creating a very positive first impression.

3. Be Professional

It's very tempting in many situations, particularly if you are having a bad day, to let the other person know the difficulties you are having. You may tell them about problems you are having or complain about things that seem

to be going wrong. This does not create a professional first impression.

Being professional means not complaining about problems that you are having but rather creating an impression that all is under control and being taken care of. This is not only important for frontline customer service staff, but supervisors, managers, team leaders....and all staff.

4. Be Organised

A very easy way of getting a first impression about somebody is to see how organised or disorganised they are. If someone visits you and your office and desk are a mess, what might they conclude? A neat, organised, professional image always goes a long way. If you are going for a job interview, have all your references, resumes and other paperwork organised and ready to show the interviewers. If you go into a job interview not knowing what you have or not being organised, this immediately creates an impression that you are disorganised. In such a situation, any interviewer will have doubts about your ability to do the job.

5. Be Special

Being special involves finding some way in which you can do something or say something that will be surprising to the person you are dealing with. It usually means offering them something that they will want before they even realise that they want it.

In a job interview it might be bringing in samples of your work or bringing in additional written references, or showing that you have researched details about the company. In a team situation, this might mean offering to help

in a new and challenging situation. In a customer service situation, being special might involve anticipating a need that a customer has and then satisfying it. (In a restaurant this might mean bringing in a jug of water before the customer has asked for it. In a shop it might involve showing the customers some examples of merchandise that they have not actually asked for but that they might be interested in).

Being special means thinking ahead and thinking of some way of really grabbing the person's attention.

REFERENCE

Winning First Impressions, a video training package produced by Ash.Quarry Productions and distributed by Seven Dimensions Pty Ltd, ph: +61 3 9686 9677.

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