

SIGMA

Leadership Series



**Great Leaders
Make a Good
First Impression**



GREAT LEADERS MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION



First impressions are the most lasting.

— Proverb

The first impression you make sets the tone for any new relationship, whether that relationship is with a CEO, an employee, or a client. Leaders often interact with individuals at all levels of the company, as well as customers or clients. They need to prepare to not only meet new people, but to make a positive, lasting impression with these individuals. The first opinion someone holds of you tends to endure, and these opinions are resistant to change. People often rely on their overall impression of an individual to interpret future interactions. Therefore, forming a good impression makes it more likely the individual will see further interactions with you in a positive light. It is critical that as a leader, you put your best foot forward and leave people with a favorable opinion of your character and abilities.

In the workplace, setting a first impression involves the leaders' ability to create a positive impact through social confidence, sincerity, dress, and verbal fluency. First impressions communicate a wealth of information about a leader, from the depth of their knowledge, to their ability to communicate and share information, to their authenticity and openness. Leaders who make a good first impression are those who leave others with the sense that they are competent, confident, and capable.

In assessing the kind of first impression you make, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I seem confident when meeting new people?
- Do I dress appropriately for the situation?
- Am I preparing myself to meet important individuals?
- What message am I sending using body language?
- Am I drawing on my communication skills?
- Do I follow up with people I have met to cement a positive impression?

Improve the First Impression You Make

Be mindful of your attire: Part of appearing confident and competent is to appear professional. One of the most basic ways to do so is through your dress and attire. When meeting new people, dressing appropriately shows respect for the company and for the individual you are

meeting. When in doubt, it is always better to be overdressed than under-dressed. Remember, proper attire is about more than your outfit; hair should be neat, accessories kept minimal and functional, and shoes should be clean. For women, light makeup is appropriate in the workplace. Dressing for the situation can help you feel more comfortable when meeting someone new, and set the right tone for a positive impression.

Context can influence the impression you make: Context may influence first impressions in a number of ways. First, the environment in which you're meeting can make a difference. If you are meeting someone during an especially busy time, organizational change, or other periods of stress, you may be less prepared to appear pleasant or calm when introducing yourself and interacting with someone new. Second, the context of your day can also influence first impressions. If you are feeling overwhelmed, tired, or upset, you may find it difficult to interact with someone new. Before your first meeting, try to take time to de-stress or relax. This will make you appear calm and confident, rather than preoccupied or overwhelmed. If you find yourself meeting someone new unexpectedly, take a deep breath, smile, and offer the individual a handshake. Try your best to leave negative thoughts and emotions for after your meeting.

Follow up where possible: The first impression someone makes of you often encompasses your attitude, behavior, and mannerisms from your entire first encounter. This goes beyond the first conversations you have, and can provide opportunities to improve or strengthen the early impression you make. If you are working on a first task or project with or for another individual, following up on your initial meeting can be a chance to demonstrate your interest and your ability to take change and interact with the new associate. This does not need to be elaborate. A phone call or email updating the status or progress of a shared project is often sufficient. Just remember, this opportunity should be used wisely. Reaching out too soon, too late, or when not appropriate can send the message that you lack experience or are awkward with others.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Make a Better First Impression

The following steps can help you make a positive first impression with others:

1. **Be prepared when possible.** Sometimes, we don't have much warning before meeting an important new contact. During times of change, such as when new employees are coming into a company or unit, you should prepare for the possibility that you will meet someone new. Dress appropriately and be ready to smile and shake hands. When going to meetings or events where you know you will meet new associates or contacts, put together some thoughts on the topic of the meeting or event. Ready yourself with pleasant small talk conversations. Putting yourself in the right mindset can go a long way in helping you to impress others.
2. **Consider your body language.** While too many tips about body language can be distracting, there are a few tips to make you appear more self-assured. Remember to use a firm hand shake when introducing yourself. Make eye contact with the person you are meeting, showing they have your full attention. Even when busy, don't start looking

or angling away from a conversation until it is finished. Otherwise, you may give the impression that you are uninterested or preoccupied. Finally, try to smile when meeting someone new. Being friendly can encourage others to form a positive impression of you.

- 3. Use your communication skills.** Communication is another key leadership skill. The tips and tricks from communication can be used here. When meeting someone new, try to give off the impression of being calm and reasonable. Always avoid seeming demanding, emotional, or irrational. As with good communication, do not attempt to be emotionless. Rather, be positive and upbeat, and avoid expressing frustration on the first meeting. Appropriate information sharing is also a communication skill that can come in handy when meeting new people. Sharing relevant information can make others feel included or appreciated by a leader, whereas overwhelming someone with too much information can be off-putting. Keep your first communications light, but accurate. This shows that you are knowledgeable, both about the information at hand and about how to interact with others.

Resources



[Making a Great First Impression](#)



[How to Make \(and Sustain\) a Good First Impression Every Time](#)



Develop your ability to make a good first impression by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for coaching on developing your skills as a leader.

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