

## The Impact of First Impressions

You have exactly one opportunity to make a dynamic first impression. In the first forty-five seconds of meeting you for the first time, people will make up to eleven assumptions about you including your level of expertise, success, education and knowledge. Most people start making these assumptions before you utter a single word. They process the visual information and quickly form judgments. Your attire, appearance, posture, and facial expressions will affect these judgments. And, if your customer forms the wrong opinion of you, you will have to work much harder to establish credibility.

Even though most business people understand the importance of making a great initial impression, many fail to create a positive impact with prospective customers. They forget how critical that first contact is. They may be tired, distracted, frustrated, or not in the proper frame of mind for some reason. The result is a lackluster first impression. Here are some reminders to keep in mind:

Do not smoke in your place of business. My wife recently visited a local cell phone provider. As she entered the store she was hit with the overpowering odor of stale cigarette smoke. It was obvious that the employees either smoked in the store or left the door open while they smoked outside. Regardless, my wife was offended by the smell and immediately left the store. If you do smoke, wash your face and hands immediately after you have a cigarette.

Pay attention to your customer. We used to buy our groceries from a large chain and it was not uncommon to see cashiers speaking to each other while they processed our order. They completely ignored their customers while they talked about their plans for the night or upcoming weekend. I have also had the experience of waiting for an employee to finish a personal phone call before they turned their attention to me.

Avoid clothing that is worn or outdated. We all have a favourite shirt, sweater, dress or jacket. Nevertheless, there comes a point at which even this piece of apparel becomes too worn for appropriate business use. A few years ago I was considering a major furniture purchase. Although the salesperson was dressed in a suit, his clothes looked like they were circa 1975 and his shoes were extremely worn and scuffed. He did not look qualified to sell expensive furniture. On the reverse side, the salespeople who work in the men's store I buy some of my clothes, always look professional and dressed for success.

Maintain good personal grooming habits. Brush your teeth throughout the day if possible. This will help keep your breath fresh, particularly if you drink coffee.

Limit your use of fragrances and colognes. You may love your perfume or cologne but many people are easily offended by perfumes, and some are even allergic to them. If you choose to wear a fragrance, keep it light and use it in moderation. I thoroughly dislike shaking hands with someone and smelling their fragrance on my skin afterwards.

Never chew gum!

Be aware of your body language and facial expressions. Develop a thousand watt smile and learn how to use it. A warm, genuine smile helps to create a dynamic first impression.

Make great eye contact. Good eye contact shows people that you are genuinely interested in them. A powerful technique is to notice the colour of the other person's eyes as you shake their hand or introduce yourself.

Develop a powerful handshake. This doesn't mean you should crush the other person's hand but you should have a firm grip.

Be aware of your tone of voice. If you have had a challenging day, and we all do from time to time, your tone may have a slight edge to it. Inject enthusiasm into your voice to prevent any signs of frustration from creeping into your conversation.

Impressions are also created by the way your telephone is answered, how quickly you and your employees respond to requests for information, the grammar you use in your verbal and written correspondence, and how you speak to your employees. If you have an office or building, pay attention to your signage, the cleanliness of the parking lot and the condition of the exterior of the building. Is the doorway to your office clean? Are the windows clear and spotless? These will affect your customer's impression as will the reception they receive when they enter your business. Finally, if you have a company vehicle ensure that it is kept clean and well maintained.

Virtually everything you do and the manner in which you do it affects your customer's impression of your business. And, this will influence their decision to do business with you. In today's highly competitive business environment, you must do everything you possibly can to give people a reason to do business with you. And your impression is a lasting one!

*Copyright 2004, Kelley Robertson. All rights reserved.*

*Kelley Robertson, President of the Robertson Training Group, works with businesses to help them increase their sales and motivate their employees. He is also the author of "Stop, Ask & Listen – Proven sales techniques to turn browsers into buyers." Visit his website at [www.RobertsonTrainingGroup.com](http://www.RobertsonTrainingGroup.com) and receive a FREE copy of "100 Ways to Increase Your Sales" by subscribing to his 59-Second Tip, a free weekly e-zine.*