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Pay attention to what your body language conveys

In my last column, I discussed how to improve appearance and present a more polished image with little or no out-of-pocket expense. Continuing on that theme, this column will focus on how to have a more professional image by using powerful body language and organizing our workspace.

Whenever we speak, our body supplements what we say with small gestures such as facial expressions, eye movement, and posture. Our nonverbal communication is often our most potent means of communicating, and others use our body language to read us like a book.

People like to be around confident, successful people and one of the easiest ways for us to communicate confidence is to have powerful body language. Sometimes we feel confident and sometimes we don't. But by raising awareness on how to project confidence, we can actually make ourselves more confident. I like to say "fake it 'til you make it." So how can we "fake it 'til we make it"?

First, make sure you stand up straight. A strong posture conveys that you have confidence and that you are a valuable asset to your company.

Walking with your head down and shoulders slumped signals that maybe you don't believe in yourself. Even if you don't feel as confident as you'd like, by standing up straight and walking taller, you will begin to feel more confident. In response, people will treat you in a more respectful manner. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Smile. You know, "turn that frown upside down." Smiling increases our face value and once again sends the message of confidence, and it is infectious. It creates natural warmth and can defuse tense situations.

As the Enquirer reported a few weeks ago, people who surround themselves with happy people tend to be happier. There are energy givers and energy suckers in the world and if you choose to be an energy giver, success is easier to come by because you are promoting a positive image, and others feed off of it.

Make eye contact. When we look people directly in the eye, we appear more knowledgeable, trustworthy, and powerful. All of which are necessary attributes for a professional image, and for creating personal credibility. For some of us, it is more challenging to look people in the eye. It takes some work. In our culture it is appropriate and expected that we maintain eye contact at least 70 percent of the time while interacting with others. It is a great way to connect with the colleagues and customers, and help build the professional relationship.

What about our organizational and time management skills and their relationship to image? Our workspace is a reflection of us, just as our appearance and our body language are. What can we do to improve this area? A few simple changes can have a profound impact.

Organize your personal space. Remove unnecessary items from your desk or cubicle that account for useless clutter. Family photos are fine but a little cute; Tchotchkes are not appropriate at work. Also, a well-organized briefcase certainly makes for a more presentable image when meeting with colleagues or clients. Clean out and reorganize those files. Endless piles of paper detract from your ability to do your job and send the unwanted message of a disorganized employee. What is your perception of those you know who work in a pigsty?

Be respectful of others' time by being punctual. Your credibility can really be undermined if you consistently are late. Remember, success begets success.

Projecting a polished and professional image that represents your best attributes is not as difficult as you may think. Yes, much of it is common sense, but as with so many things in life, it takes focus and attention to make sure we've not drifted from the image we want to project to the world. A confident image influences perception and sends the message that we are knowledgeable, capable, promotable, and ready for more responsibility. And this can lead to fulfillment of your personal and professional goals and aspirations.

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