

How good is YOUR first impression? First impressions can lead to lasting sales results



Have you ever noticed how much more work it can be to do a major home renovation rather than starting from scratch? You need additional time, effort, and money to tear down the old before you can begin to rebuild it with what you want.

The same is true of first impressions. Making the wrong first impression — and having to rebuild a new one — is very costly. It's important to do it right the first time.

Dr. Heather Johnson of the Klassen Performance Group notes that a first impression often is made quickly and is based on emotions. Generally, people decide if they like someone within 10 seconds. Within four minutes that impression has been cemented. Because a first impression so strongly influences future opportunity, agents need to consciously think about that first impression.

“First impressions are absolutely critical,” says Dr. Johnson, who trains people on how to make strong and positive first impressions. “If you don't make a good connection right away, you may never get another opportunity. Research suggests that it takes up to eight additional meetings to ‘rebuild’ a negative first impression. It's unlikely you'll get that chance. If you are a sales person, often you're out of luck.”

A strong first impression leads to a faster, easier sales cycle

“The faster you can establish credibility, the faster the sales cycle,” Dr. Johnson says. “A good first impression won't make the sale, but it's a giant step in the right direction. It opens the prospect to a discussion with you.”

Dr. Johnson experienced the power of a first impression on a recent business trip. She met another business traveler on a shuttle bus from the airport to the hotel and they talked while checking in. At the end of the conversation, he asked for her card. She discovered when he called two weeks later that he was the VP

of a Fortune 100 company. He visited her web site and wanted to know more about how she could help develop his team. He said he didn't typically follow up like that, but felt compelled because her first impression was so strong. That first impression led to a new client.

How you can make a good first impression

You never know who your next big client might be. Everybody you meet is experiencing your first impression. Will the next person you meet want to talk with you further? Dr. Johnson names four things to focus on to make sure the answer is “Yes!”:

1 Keep a professional appearance

This is critically important and is the easiest to control. It's a fact that people base their first impressions on what they see. Scuffed shoes or a rumpled shirt may project sloppiness. A prospect might assume that not attending to personal details will extend into managing their account. So:

- Shine your shoes
- Iron your clothes
- Keep your wardrobe up to date
- Look healthy

These visual details help you present an image of being a knowledgeable, competent and trustworthy professional. One other tip: Whenever you can, match your level of dress to that of your prospect.

2 Make a connection

In order to make a great first impression you must connect on an emotional level. Your prospect should leave the interaction feeling good about talking with you. If they think they are being sold or that you are insincere, it will produce negative feelings and their defenses will be up. However, when your intent is to get to know someone and their company, your manner changes and connecting is much easier. Here are things to remember:



- Keep eye contact. Don't look around.
- Be genuine and sincere. It's pretty easy for a prospect to detect if you're truly interested.

③ Keep the focus on the prospect

Talk about them and their business. Discover their concerns. The best product in the world is the one that solves a prospect's needs. Ask thoughtful and thought-provoking questions. And, very importantly, listen—don't interrupt. See the November 2006 issue of *TrueBlue* for Dr. Johnson's article about developing listening skills. If you are sincere in your interest, you'll stand out from your competitors.

④ Be confident, but not arrogant

Our confidence, or lack of it, is reflected in our body language and tone. So, maintain good posture. Smile. Offer a firm handshake and have a strong, friendly speaking tone. Sometimes, we have nervous habits like fidgeting or using filler words between thoughts. If you aren't aware if you have distracting behavior, ask a fellow employee or friend!

One final word of advice from Dr. Johnson: "Let these behaviors become part of you, a natural extension of

yourself. You don't want to become so distracted by thinking about what you need to do to make a first impression that you fail to pay attention to the prospect. Be yourself and you'll be rewarded."

For more information on how to make a positive first impression, contact Dr. Heather Johnson of the Klassen Performance Group at (651) 322-7821.

How are first impressions formed?

- 55% of the impression is based on how we appear
- 38% is based on how we sound
- 7% is based on what we say

If words and body language are not consistent, most people rely on body language to form their impression.