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## Are You Making the Right Impression?

by Lorena Prime

People's perceptions of you determine whether you are hired, get referrals, or even receive a return telephone call. Rusty business skills send the wrong signals.

Professionalism is about the little things. Is your handshake firm? Do you look people in the eye? Does your email signature contain complete information? Professionalism inspires trust, sending the message that you can get the job done. Review the following to ensure you are creating a positive impression.



**Networking/Meetings:** People notice physical appearance first, so make these initial moments count. Always look your best and dress appropriately. Did you roll out of bed five minutes ago? People can tell. Wear clothes that fit and beware of low-rise pants. You do not want to reveal your backside to fellow professionals, and your clients certainly don't want to see it either. Keep your shoes in good condition and leave the flip-flops for the beach. Be prepared and don't "wing it." People will know, and you'll be watching your clients fly to someone else. Practice what you preach and be on time; being late is unprofessional.

**Body Language:** 93% of communication is body language, not words. Do you cross your arms because you are nervous? Act confidently even if you are feeling shaky inside. Facing people when you talk with them shows that you are really listening.

**Phone:** Good phone skills win jobs. Answer the phone enthusiastically, even when the call is an interruption. People can sense when you are hurrying, and it makes them anxious. Rather than rush, ask when you can call them back. Create a professional, warm outgoing message for your voicemail. When leaving a message, repeat your phone number so the other person does not have to replay the message. Keep messages under a minute, since you'll lose your audience beyond that. Stand while talking - you project better and sound more confident. Do not multi-task. You may think you are being productive but your client will think you are being rude. (They can tell when you are distracted.) Return all calls, since you may need your call returned someday. Take notes of important dates, to-do's, or interesting information. Asking about Mary's granddaughter on your next call builds great rapport. And smile. You really can hear a smile.

**Email:** Include your full name, company, telephone number and email address in your signature every time. Make it very easy for people to find you. Every second they hunt for your information, you risk losing the job. Avoid "email gossip" - things happen and emails do get forwarded. Write only what you would say face-to-face. Use "reply all" sparingly. People are easily annoyed when they have to read replies intended for another person.

**Online:** Delete revealing pictures on Facebook that you wouldn't want published on the front page of a newspaper. Every photo reflects upon you and your company. It may not be fair, but the standards are higher for business owners.

Be professional every day and you will make a strong, positive impression. Never forget that you are the CEO of your company and an expert in your field.

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