

# **Influence How Others See, Hear and Possibly Judge You: Your Choices Can Strengthen Relationships and Improve Results**

**by Ruth M. Schimel, Career & Life Management Consultant**

**Three handy opportunities.** You can't choose your inherited genes or early experiences in life. Nor do you control others' opinions of you based on visual and aural impressions and their filters — all often make stronger impressions than your words. Instead, use this action-oriented guide to expand your repertoire for influencing how others see, hear and possibly judge you, to strengthen your relationships and improve outcomes.

No doubt you've already invested years of effort to increase what you know and can do as well as who you know. To strengthen your chances of getting what you want, here are three areas for your attention to avoid diluting the value of your credentials, experience, and eloquence. All together they may account for about two-thirds of the impression you give.

- Looking healthy
- Dressing appropriately
- Communicating nonverbally

**Your vitality.** The energy and verve reflecting good health show in aspects such as:

- appealing, friendly expression
- rested appearance
- energetic, appropriate movement and responses
- bright, clear eyes and complexion
- optimistic attitude

Balanced eating and drinking, adequate sleep, appropriate medical and dental monitoring, combined with consistent exercise over time, all support this appearance of vitality. As you no doubt already know, the challenge is to be consistent in your everyday actions to sustain such self-care.

**How you display yourself.** Other visual cues relate to what you have on in the broadest sense. For women as well as men, that includes clothes, jewelry, hair style and cosmetics (yes, men are indulging at times). Together, healthy appearance and appropriate adornment contribute to self-confidence and presence. They may also reflect many other strengths such as:

- good taste
- judgment
- imagination
- responsibility
- resourcefulness
- self-management

- self-respect
- respect for others

Starting with material matters, consider your answers to any relevant questions below. Whatever you notice in your responses will help you decide how to strengthen the impression you make. In the process, avoid succumbing to self-criticism which will diminish your vitality and distract from making progress.

- How flattering is your outfit, regardless of the situation or context you're in?
- Does what you put on generally reflect who you are, your authentic, positive identity?
- Are your clothes comfortable for you, but not so casual or informal that you send a message that you are indifferent to or disrespectful of others' possible expectations and norms?
- How deft are you at downplaying aspects of your appearance you don't want to emphasize and highlighting those you do?
- How appropriate is your wardrobe for new or changing situations?
- How well do your clothes fit you now?
- What colors, fabrics, styles, textures, lines and designs enhance your appearance?
- How do your cosmetics and hair style contribute to the impression you want to make?
- What message does your jewelry or total lack thereof send?
- How much pleasure do you get from "putting yourself together" in ways that support your goals and positive sense of self?

To look your best, you don't have to spend a fortune or become vain. Nor are a perfect body and features required. What counts is what you do with what you have; that includes self-care, appropriate enhancement and consistent attention to presenting yourself as well as possible.

Yes, this takes some time, especially at first. But you'll likely feel better about yourself when you make that investment. Your sense of well-founded pride and positive messages you send can make effective self-presentation flow more easily. Why not always be ready to make an impression that serves your interests?

In the process, knowing workmanship and materials of quality as well as sources for appropriate clothing, bags and shoes are helpful. If you're not sure about assessing how you look, get feedback from people whose clothes savvy you trust. Consider these aspects of design to strengthen your look, on your own or with others' guidance:

- level of originality or balance between conventionality and authentic flair
- functionality: ease of movement and care
- effective combinations of patterns, fabrics, textures and colors
- line and proportion flattering to your body

Depending on your capacities and interest, consider any of these questions:

- How well do you choose appealing clothes, bags, shoes, jewelry and hair styles that require minimal upkeep and offer maximum value or impact?
- What sources for identifying and buying good values are known and available?
- How willing are you to let go of no longer beneficial clothes and habits of dress?
- How confident are you about choosing easily mixed and matched clothes, bags, shoes and jewelry to expand existing repertoire?
- How can you stretch and deepen what you know already to enhance your dress, hair, jewelry, cosmetics, shoes and other material means for self-expression?

**Your body language and other non-verbal communication.** Let's turn to the third way you can influence others beyond words. Here, too, your authenticity and self-awareness will help you be true to yourself while avoiding disquieting or distracting others — or just leaving an unmemorable or inaccurate impression.

Non-verbal communication includes eye contact, tone of voice, gestures, facial expression and posture. Communication experts say that most of your message is expressed through such body language, rather than words themselves. See these 20 minutes: [http://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.html)

To get a sense of how you move, notice yourself in mirrors, store windows, photos and videos. Perhaps caring, astute friends and colleagues will give you useful feedback. Be alert to your body language in the moment, especially when your emotions are strong or uncomfortable.

Consider the kind of eye contact you find encouraging, confident and reassuring. How does your own reflect that? Do you have a warm gaze or is it steely and cold? Do you blink or stare a lot? When you are bored, anxious or distracted, do you look into the distance or do your eyes glaze over?

How do your posture and facial expression reflect your mood? Do you smile at appropriate times? Is your face relaxed or merely impassive or unexpressive? Or do you tend to frown, furrow your brow, compress your lips or narrow your eyes, especially when uncomfortable or concentrating? What are you doing with your arms and legs? Are they at ease or defensive (tightly crossed)? Do you generally maintain eye contact? How do you angle your body? How much about a less than positive mood do you express?

The sound of your voice itself sends messages about confidence, sensitivity to others' needs and presence. Elements include:

- clarity of pronunciation
- rate of speech
- musicality and pitch
- variation in tone and loudness
- strong accents from other languages and locations

Based on what you've noticed in others' non-verbal communication, what would you want to adapt? Try out one or two. Be alert for some to avoid.

**Your choices for action.** Using the foregoing information, discussion with yourself and intuition as well as feedback from others, what behavioral shifts or accommodations do you want to make? Keep your commitments manageable. Accent enjoyment, viability and authenticity as you select actions to strengthen your self-presentation.

List below three priorities for improvement in your health with one specific action for each:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List below three priorities for improvement in your material appearance, such as dress, with one specific action for each:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List below three priorities for improvement in your non-verbal communication with one specific action for each:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

***To maintain momentum, choose and schedule one action for follow up each week. What and when is your first act, starting within a day or two?***

Who will be your collaborators in progress? Name two people with whom you'll speak within the next week or two, preferably agreeing on mutually beneficial support and feedback.

How will you acknowledge and reward yourself for each small step as well as show appreciation to people who assist you?

What one or two opportunities not already addressed here will improve your self-presentation?

I believe you will enjoy any progress you make. To appreciate what you do, note each accomplishment, in writing preferably, in one location (computer folder, small notebook or whatever works). Choose ways to acknowledge and celebrate your improved self-presentation and confidence.

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202.659.1772 [www.ruthschimel.com](http://www.ruthschimel.com) [ruth@ruthschimel.com](mailto:ruth@ruthschimel.com)