

# **Influence How Others See, Hear, and Possibly Judge You**

**by Ruth Schimel, PhD, Career & Life Management Consultant**

**Three handy opportunities.** Though you can't control your inherited genes or others' opinions of you, visual and aural impressions can be as influential as your words. This action-oriented guide is designed to help you expand and improve your repertoire for influencing how others see, hear, and possibly judge you.

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 could 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, including smiling appropriately

Balanced eating and drinking, adequate sleep, appropriate medical and dental monitoring combined with consistent exercise over time all support this appearance of vitality. Not surprisingly, 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 put on your body. For women as well as men, that includes clothes, jewelry, hair style, and cosmetics (yes, men are using them at times). Together, healthy appearance and such appropriate presentation contribute to self-confidence and presence. They may also reflect many other strengths such as:

- good taste and judgment
- imagination and resourcefulness
- responsibility
- self-management and 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 can diminish your vitality confidence, distracting you from making progress. To enjoy putting yourself together well, consider:

- How flattering, authentic, and appropriate your dress is.

- Are your clothes comfortable and well-fitted 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, using colors, fabrics, styles, textures, and designs that 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?

To look your best, you don't have to spend a fortune or become vain. Nor are superior features required. What counts is what you do with what you have. This may take time at first, but you'll feel better about yourself as you make that investment. Your sense of well-founded pride and positive messages you send can make effective self-presentation flow more easily, especially over time. 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, proportion, fabrics, textures, and colors that are flattering

Depending on your resources, time, and interest, these questions may assist you:

- 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 other information you provide 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. For 20 minutes of guidance: [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 positive, negative, or dramatic.

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? Imagine how your emotions appear to others.

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 physically?

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

- clarity of pronunciation and rapidity of speech
- musicality and pitch
- variation in tone and loudness

Based on what you've noticed in others' non-verbal communication, what would you want to adapt or avoid? Does an accent from another language or location make it difficult for others to clearly understand you?

**Your choices for action.** Using the foregoing information and 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.

- Name three priorities for improvement in your health with one specific action for each.
- Name three priorities for improvement in your material appearance, such as dress, with one specific action for each.
- Name three priorities for improvement in your non-verbal communication with one specific action for each.

Much of the previous suggestions not only strengthen the impressions you give, but also encourage a sense that you are reliable and in control of yourself. In turn, this generates trust. For an informative, digestible TED talk on building (and rebuilding) trust by Frances Frei of the Harvard Business School, I think these 15 minutes will be an effective investment for you. Her talk discusses how authenticity, rigor/logic, and empathy can combine as key to building trust for effective relationships and mutually beneficial results: <https://bit.ly/2rnww2X>

- 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 are the opportunities not already addressed here that will enhance your self-presentation, should you choose to do so?

I believe you will enjoy and benefit from 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 for you). Choose ways to celebrate and notice your improved confidence and relationships, however modest.

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