



The Power of Presence

by Marjorie Brody, CSP, PCC, CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame

They say you shouldn't judge a book by its cover.

Easy to say, but we do it every day.

There are some things that obviously can't be changed – your race, gender, age and height. They will work for and against you. Of course, it's best to be proud of who and what you are. It's amazing what confidence will do when meeting others.

There are, however, many things you *can* do to enhance your presence.

The way someone looks, the way a person stands, and the gestures he or she uses, all “speak” volumes.

What does *your* visual “communication” say about you?

Your wardrobe choices, grooming, facial expressions, and body language all influence an audience's impressions – whether it's one person you are talking to (a client or colleague), or the entire company during a sales meeting.

Wardrobe & Grooming

The old adage that “Clothes make the man” or woman, is still valid. The first thing others see is your appearance. Before you get a chance to say a word, some of them will already have judged you based solely on how you look. If you are presenting at a business meeting, proper business dress is called for. If you have been invited to speak at an “off-campus” event, check with the event organizer. You can never be faulted for looking “too professional,” even if the audience is dressed down.

Both men and women should check that their clothing fits well, and that they can move comfortably in it. Check in a full-length mirror before leaving for your presentation. I'll never forget the female speaker who wore a white business suit. She obviously had not checked her appearance before leaving home that morning, because it was all the audience could do to pay attention to her speech instead of looking at the red bikini underwear that showed through her skirt. When participants were later asked what her topic was, most couldn't remember – but they all remembered her red bikini underwear! It didn't matter how polished her presentation was, they couldn't get past her appearance.



Be certain that your outfit and accessories don't detract from your presentation. Avoid anything that makes noise or looks flashy, like jangling bracelets or earrings.

In addition to ensuring that your outfits are beyond reproach, men should have neatly trimmed mustaches or beards (no 5 o'clock shadow), and women and men should make sure their hair looks clean. Bad grooming can ruin an otherwise neat outer "package."

Do Your Facial Expressions Welcome Interaction?

There are different variations on it, but the age-old maxim is true: "Your face speaks a thousand words" or "The look on your face speaks volumes."

Be aware of your facial expressions. If possible, look at a mirror each time you are on the phone – do this for one week. Watch your face when you are talking on the phone.

Be aware of any artificial, unfriendly, or deadpan expressions you may be making. Do you squint, frown, make strange faces? Once you are aware of any expressions you may make, it will be easier to eliminate them. Practice smiling and looking pleasant. That's how you want to look when meeting clients or prospects.

Some facial expression "don'ts" include:

- arching eyebrows – this makes you seem surprised or questioning
- frowning – your moodiness will be the only thing the other person remembers
- grimacing – your prospect will wonder where it hurts

What Does Your Body Language Communicate?

We already established that the way you dress communicates messages, and influences others. But you can wear the most expensive business suit and still not convey confidence, approachability and, perhaps most importantly – sincerity.

Other visual signals like body language can have an impact on the impressions you make.

Often, we are not even aware of what our body language is saying. These signals include posture, gestures, and other factors. An effective salesperson needs to know how to master the subtle cues of body language before he or she can be successful.

Some visual signals can make you appear not to be in control, and will detract from your overall presentation to others, possibly affecting relationships.



Posture is an important part of this presentation. Your objective is to be comfortable and controlled. You want your audience -- the client<s> or prospect<s> -- to see you relaxed and comfortable. This puts them at ease as well.

If you tend to sway or rock while you speak to others (one or many), spread your feet about 6 to 8 inches apart, parallel to each other with toes pointed straight ahead. Flex your knees and put your weight on the balls of your feet. Standing in this position will stop any swaying or rocking motion and reduce distracting heel movements. You can move around and return to this position, just don't pace.

Make sure you are standing up straight and are facing your audience head-on. Keep your posture open with arms relaxed and hanging down at your sides. If your hands are clasped firmly in front of you, your feet are crossed and your body is tight – you are not exactly exuding confidence. Other “don'ts” include:

- hands on hips – you look too condescending or parental
- crossed arms – you are not conveying a look that says, “Let's talk.”
- hands crossed in front of you – otherwise known as the “figleaf” stance, this makes you look weak and timid.
- hands joined behind your back – this stance (the “parade rest”) makes you seem like you have no energy
- leaning back in a chair, if seated – you look like you're ready to pass judgment
- putting your hands in your pockets – this makes you seem nervous and can result in jingling any change or keys that might be there

A person who is seen as open and approachable to communication keeps his or hands open. Holding your chin raised also gives you the aura of being in control.

Gestures are another important part of your visual picture. They are reinforcements of the words and ideas you are trying to convey. Gestures include hand, arm and head movements.

We all know people who “talk with their hands” – in some cultures gesticulating a great deal is the norm.

Two gestures to avoid are:

- using a pointed finger – this makes you look accusatory, even if that wasn't your intent
- fist raising – this is hostile or threatening

The most effective gestures are spontaneous. They come from what you are thinking and feeling, and help your listeners relate to you and what you are telling them.



When giving a formal presentation, make sure you vary your gestures. Don't use the same motion over and over again. Audience members will focus on your repeated gesture and not the content. Use your palms and open them out to your audience when gesturing. Move your arm and hand as a single unit, gesturing up and down. When gesturing, always keep your hands and gestures above your waist.

Eye Contact Critical When Communicating

Any career-related manual or book will agree that one of the most important things that someone interviewing for a new job can do is to make eye contact with his or her interviewer.

The same is true of a salesperson giving a presentation. Even if it's one-on-one, don't be afraid to make eye contact. When you make eye contact, you are relating to your audience, which will help get your message across and possibly close the sale.

If you make eye contact with someone who quickly looks away, try not to directly look into that person's eyes again. In some cultures direct eye contact is inappropriate, and some people just feel uncomfortable. If you are giving a presentation to a group of people, the eye contact should be done in an irregular and unpredictable "Z" formation – looking at one person for three to five seconds and then moving on to next face.

The possible problem area with eye contact is if you over do it, and start to stare. In conjunction with making eye contact, you can nod your head occasionally. This also helps connect with your listener.

Everyone can learn to practice their gestures, posture, eye contact and facial expressions – to improve their power of presence.

Doing so can only help improve your relationships with clients and colleagues.

We encourage you to share this BRODY article with your associates! Permission to reprint/use this article is allowed providing, "Copyright 2010 BRODY Professional Development" is cited. If you reprint/use this article, we also ask that a copy be forwarded to BRODY. For related articles contact BRODY at 215-886-1688 or info@brodypro.com.

Marjorie is an author, Hall of Fame speaker, and coach to Fortune 500 executives. She is CEO of BRODY Professional Development, a business communication and presentation skills company that offers tailored training programs, workshops, keynote presentations, and executive coaching. BRODY serves clients such as Pfizer, Genentech, Johnson & Johnson, JPMorganChase, NBC Universal, Boston Scientific, GlaxoSmithKline, Citi, and many trade associations. For more information on booking Marjorie or a BRODY training program, visit www.brodypro.com. Or, call 215-886-1688.