As you have likely been told time and time again, it takes only ten or 15 seconds to make a first impression and the rest of your life to undo it. With practice, you can learn to present yourself as a polished professional every time you meet someone. Here are some guidelines to get you off on the right foot.

Stand Up: When you are seated and someone approaches you to say "hello" with a handshake, stand up, whether you are a man or woman. By doing so, you show the person you are greeting that they are worth your full attention.

Make Eye Contact: By looking someone directly in the eye, you accomplish three things:

You will project an image of self-confidence and a healthy self-esteem.

You will be perceived as a good listener.

You will probably receive the same courtesy when you speak.

Smile: It sends others a message of acceptance.

Say Your Name: If you are meeting someone for the first time you should introduce yourself using your first and last name.

Shake Hands: Generally speaking, a handshake should last only as long as it takes to greet the person. It should be firm enough to display your sense of confidence without being a bonecrusher.

Sloppy Language: No matter how well you dress, using sloppy language will lessen your credibility with others. For example saying "yeah" instead of "yes", or using profanity, especially around people that would not find it impressive. Most people consider your choice of words a direct reflection on your intelligence.

Giggling: While laughter can be the best medicine for many ills, giggling can be annoying.

Hiding your Hands: Believe it or not, etiquette research has shown that hands above board are more appealing than hands hidden away in pockets. When your hands are not showing, it often sends a signal to someone that you are not telling all or that you are holding something back.

Gum-Chewing: Let there be no doubt about it, you should not chew gum when meeting people. No exceptions.

Throat Clearing: The habit of clearing your throat several times during a conversation can be very distracting.