

# Sending out your Best Silent Messages

eREPORT



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*"First impressions are lasting impressions."*

*"The first impression is the only impression that counts  
and the only one that lasts."*

*"You only have one chance to make a first impression."*

I'm sure you've heard such sayings, probably starting at an early age. But I would take those a step further and say that you make a statement about yourself even before you open your mouth.

This is your "silent message," and it can include everything from your posture to your positiveness. In short, it's the way you carry yourself, physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Such quiet signals profoundly affect people's initial perception, or image, of you.

Of course, image isn't everything – but it *is* important. As you know by now, doing well in life doesn't hinge solely on merit and hard work. Image, especially when backed up by strong performance, is a powerful force. And a negative first impression – saying the wrong thing, wearing the wrong clothes, coming across as uncaring or inept – creates roadblocks that can cut off relationships before they get started.

The truth is, we each carry around a bundle of opinions about what we like or don't like in others. If you hear a stranger laughing uproariously at the other end of a room, you'll probably make a quick calculation about that person. Maybe it's positive, maybe it's negative. But you do judge how their behavior fits the situation – even though you don't know them, haven't spoken to them, and may not even know what's being discussed.

We're all influenced by images. Researchers in Texas, for ex-

ample, had a thirty-one-year-old man break the law by crossing the street against the traffic light. When the jaywalker wore a freshly pressed suit and tie, about three-and-a-half times as many people followed him across the intersection than did when he wore a work shirt and trousers. So an acceptable uniform – in this case, business attire – made such a good first impression that it encouraged people to trust a stranger even to the point of breaking the law.

*To sharpen your streetsmarts, please see Street Smarts - 75-page PDF eBook.*

## A Crucial First Step

If a person matches our sense of acceptability, he or she has a head start in influencing us positively. When we meet people we immediately like, we tend to put a positive spin – at least, initially – on everything they say or do. Some call this favorable first impression *presence*. Others liken it to *energy*, or *aura*. (The latter sounds too much like a halo for me to believe I have one, but some people prefer that word!)

The point is, whichever term you use, people with a presence, energy, or aura are able to maintain an excitement about themselves that starts with – but usually lasts far beyond – a favorable first impression. Thus, we admire them before we even know much about them.

Because they win our admiration so quickly and effortlessly, they possess an enormous advantage in establishing a bond with people. And building that bond, forging those relationships, is what helps give you charisma.

*For more on charisma, order Charisma - 35-page PDF eReport.*

# Quick Quiz: Your Silent Message

I'm going to ask you to respond to a series of statements. Take your time. It's important that you be utterly honest. You're the only one who'll see the answers – and you're the one with the most to gain by assessing your strengths accurately.

Don't try to guess the "right" response. There is no right answer; only *your* answer. Thinking about the response is as important as the response itself. Reply to each statement to the best of your ability, even if you're not sure. Don't worry about consistency among your responses; the pairs of statements aren't necessarily mutually exclusive.

For each pair of statements below, distribute three points between the two alternatives (A and B), depending on how characteristic of you the statement is. Although some pairs of statements may seem equally true for you, assign more points to the alternative that is more representative of your behavior *most* of the time.

Examples:

- If A is very characteristic of you and B is very uncharacteristic, write "3" next to A and "0" next to B.
  - If A is more characteristic of you than B, write "2" next to A and "1" next to B.
  - If B is very characteristic of you and A is very uncharacteristic, write "3" next to B and "0" next to A.
- .... and so on.

1A\_\_I usually have enormous physical energy and feel my regular program of physical fitness enhances what I do.

1B\_\_Though I make efforts at keeping fit, I don't always stick to the program and so sometimes feel tired or rundown.

2A\_\_I seldom say anything I regret.

2B\_\_I find myself sometimes apologizing for outbursts and things I wish I hadn't said.

3A\_\_When others follow my instructions, they do so because my approach was nonthreatening and helped them understand the value to them and to the organization.

3B\_\_When others follow my instructions, they do so because they are more concerned about how I will evaluate

them rather than because they think the task is necessarily the right thing to do.

4A\_\_I almost always view a new project as an exciting challenge.

4B\_\_I sometimes face a new project with thoughts such as: "I could never ..." Or, "I'm terrible at ..."

5A\_\_I am able to discuss my accomplishments and my shortcomings honestly as well as to give and receive compliments readily.

5B\_\_I sometimes get a bit defensive about criticism and, being essentially modest, I am also sometimes uncomfortable even with compliments.

6A\_\_People comment that, for my age, I look pretty good. And they often comment on my smile, too.

6B\_\_People rarely comment on my appearance or smile.

7A\_\_When I ask a person with less authority (e.g., maid, child, employee, bank teller, grocery bagger) to do something, I almost always say "please" or am otherwise courteous to them.

7B\_\_When I ask such a person to do something, I expect him or her to do the job, or fulfill the role, without much coaxing, just as I would do if I were in their shoes.

8A\_\_I like the give-and-take of meeting people outside my normal range of experience. So I rarely feel out of place at a party of strangers.

8B\_\_I often have difficulty carrying on a conversation with someone who works in a different field or lives in a distant city or has hobbies or interests different from mine. Thus, I'm often uncomfortable at parties with strangers.

9A\_\_When I speak to someone who may have acted improperly, I tend to ask questions of him or her before stating my views.

9B\_\_When I speak to someone who may have acted improperly, I believe in being honest by first stating my view of the behavior, then listening to his or her explanation, if any.

10A\_\_I read at least one newspaper daily, subscribe to a news magazine, and otherwise try to keep abreast of current events.

10B\_\_My busy schedule precludes my keeping up with the news on any but an irregular basis, usually via local TV.

## SCORING:

Please add point totals under "A" and enter here: \_\_\_\_\_

Please add point totals under "B" and enter here: \_\_\_\_\_

Now let's take a look at how you scored on this segment. If your "A" score is significantly greater than your "B" score, (and if you were truly honest!), you are fairly strong in this aspect of charisma. The more lopsided your "A" score, the stronger your silent message is. If your "A" score exceeds your "B" by, say, a 2-to-1 margin, your image "glass" is far fuller than most.

Conversely, if your "B" score approximates your "A" score, you may have identified an improvement opportunity. And if the "B" score is higher than your "A," that's an indication that you need lots of work in this area.

*To further explore the topic of charisma, see 10 Qualities of Charismatic People - CD Version.*

## Your Rainbow Self

Maybe it'll help to think about your silent message this way: Imagine an invisible rainbow surrounding you. The "colors" of this energy rainbow are the different aspects of who you are. There are five hues in this particular rainbow, some brighter than others.

There is your

- emotional self,
- psychological self,
- intellectual self,
- spiritual self,
- physical self.

Together, they comprise the silent message you send out to the world. I'll be talking about each of these and, at the end of the chapter, suggesting ways you can jump-start your silent message.

In nature, some rainbows, of course, show off certain colors more than others. It's the same with people. They emit different kinds of energy to differing degrees. But I think we'd all agree that the best rainbows, whether natural or personal, are the ones where you can see as many colors as possible and in as vibrant hues as possible.

## 1. Emotional

Emotional energy has many components, but, for our purposes, the most important are a *positive attitude, enthusiasm, and self-control*.

### The Power of the Positive

Our mental attitude colors and shapes reality for us. Colin Powell, the son of Jamaican immigrants, rose from the streets of the Bronx to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and one of the most admired men in America. In his best-selling book, *An American Journey*, he gives thirteen "rules" he's come to live by. Many of them embody the basic value of optimism, including:

- It ain't as bad as you think. It will look better in the morning.
- It can be done!
- Don't let adverse facts stand in the way of a good decision.
- Don't take counsel of your fears or naysayers.
- Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.

Optimists like Powell generally believe that power or control comes from within them. They feel they're ultimately responsible for their own successes. They view most problems as solvable, and thus, are willing to assume risks that might deter more fearful people.

Question: Would you rather invest money in a project with an 80 percent chance of success or in one with a 20 percent likelihood of failure? In one study, participants were asked that exact question. Without exception, they picked the former statement, though, of course, the two descriptions reflect exactly the same degree of risk. But aggressively optimistic people convert fear into challenge.

Do you tend to see a cloud behind every silver lining? If so, you're missing out on a lot of things, and probably the best you can hope for is to remain stuck where you are.

In truth, it's an immutable principle of life that whatever we focus on multiplies. Think gloom; you'll find gloominess

all around. But think positively, and you'll be surrounded by opportunities.

We're not slaves to circumstance, but free to interpret life in our own way. Academy Award-winning actress Geena Davis, for example, left a New England mill town to pursue a film career in New York. Not able to find any movie jobs, she tried modeling. Not able to find any modeling jobs, she supported herself as a waitress, then as a department-store salesgirl. Repeatedly she was told she was too old (at age twenty-three) to succeed at modeling.

But she persisted, and eventually director Sidney Pollack saw her in a Victoria's Secret catalog and gave her a small movie role. "When I think about it now," she said, "it almost seems like naïveté, this unshakable blind faith that this was supposed to happen to me. I never considered giving up and going home. I always thought, 'Oh, it's just around the corner.'"

*For more on seeing the broader picture, check out **Expanding Your Vision and Ideas** - 14-page PDF eReport.*

## The Elixir of Enthusiasm

You generally wear your positiveness "inside." But your enthusiasm is how you show it to the world by your face, your voice, and your gestures. Sometimes we *feel* enthusiastic about our ideas but we're afraid to show it. But I think the people who influence us the most are those who are able to express on the outside what they're feeling on the inside.

A friend of mine remembers touring a client's office and seeing "cute" signs with negative messages plastered everywhere: "It's hard to soar like an eagle when you're surrounded by turkeys," "Even a bad day on vacation is better than a good day at work," and the like. Every message that every employee saw every day was negative. No wonder, my friend later concluded, morale there was so low.

Most people like to be around those who radiate joy and interest, whether at work or at play. What's more, enthusiasm is infectious. It spreads. But so does the lack of it. The choice is yours.

We've probably all worked with people who were negative about the job, the firm, their colleagues, the environment, the world itself, and then were further upset when – surprise! – they didn't get the big promotion. They chose to be problems, not problem-solvers. So was it any wonder that the boss would pick someone who was more positive and enthusiastic?

The response you receive from the world is in large measure a reflection of your own attitude. From the beginning to the end of every meeting with another person, you are on stage; You're being evaluated by that other person, consciously or subconsciously. While I'm not suggesting you put on a phony happy-face, I am reminding you to be aware that your every word, gesture, expression, and impression is being watched – especially in initial encounters – and will either help or hinder you in fostering honest, open, and trusting communications.

If your overall approach is cheerful, hopeful, and tolerant of differences, you send out a positive message. On the other hand, if you're critical, pessimistic, and intolerant of anything unfamiliar, you convey a negative outlook. Guess which attitude gets better results when you're trying to influence people?

*If you like this topic, you'll love **How to Gain Power and Influence with People** - MP3s.*

## An Almost-Mesmerizing Bond

No one ever used the principle of positiveness more effectively than Franklin D. Roosevelt. An adult polio survivor, Roosevelt would neither accept pity nor allow others to feel discomfort for him. Instead, recounts historian Garry Wills, the president, even while painfully "walking" by shifting his weight on locked braces, "would be smiling, keeping up pleasant banter, pretending to enjoy himself. It was an excruciating ordeal turned into a pleasant stroll." And if he fell, he got even more ebullient, despite the fact that it could take several strong men to raise him to his feet again.

His flow of jokes and chatter disguised his own suffering, which, some say, gave him an empathy with Depression-battered, then war-weary Americans. Before the crippling

disease struck him at age thirty-nine, Roosevelt had been a child of privilege and was considered something of a political lightweight. But after polio withered his legs, he decided not to let the handicap get him down – and in so doing, he built an almost mesmerizing bond with vast segments of the American people.

## Self-Control: Fostering “Pausitiveness”

For a sustained good image, you also must master emotional self-control. “Those who command themselves,” goes an old saying, “command others.” That’s true, and it means being disciplined enough to put your personal feelings on hold even when tempted to blow your stack.

If you otherwise make a great first impression, yet allow yourself to be pushed over the edge, to rant and rave, and to say and do things that you later regret, *that’s* the “you” that will be remembered. Your hard-won image of positiveness or enthusiasm can be shattered in an instant. It will take a lot of damage control to undo even one such outburst.

One executive, whom I’ll call Harry, seeks in normal times to project himself as fair, sensitive, highly knowledgeable, a good listener, and, above all, tranquil under fire. But his volcanic temper is never far from exploding. And when it does erupt in an outpouring of vitriol, no one is safe. And, later, no one looks him squarely in the eye for quite some time as he tries to resume his role as good ol’ Harry, the wise, imperturbable leader.

What Harry needs is what I call *pausitiveness*: the ability to pause and refrain from giving immediate feedback. Many an argument can be avoided if one side refuses to be defensive. That’s because feedback, while generally a good idea, can be like throwing gasoline on a fire if you misunderstand the intent of the other person’s message.

Another example: I was once at the home of some friends and was chatting with the wife when her husband, who was running a little late, burst into the room in an apparent huff. Pointing at his shirt collar, he demanded loudly, harshly, “Where did you get this shirt cleaned?” Many spouses, fear-

ing a rebuke, might have counterattacked. But this woman, in a calm voice without disturbing body language, just named the dry cleaner and said evenly, “Why do you ask?” The husband said it was the first time any cleaner had done his shirt properly and he’d like all his shirts done there from now on.

So, clearly, there are times when it’s best just to pause, bite your tongue, and restrain your body language and gestures in the face of an implied threat or criticism until the smoke has cleared. Maybe, as it sometimes turns out, there is no crisis at all, or perhaps you wrongly inferred that the other person was being critical. In any event, by remaining calm you may defuse the situation and, at the very worst, you won’t aggravate it.

Remember: People will always believe that what you say in your worst moments is closer to your true beliefs than what you more carefully tailor for their consumption in calmer times.

*To improve your communication skills, see [The Art of Communicating at Work: Making Sure with Feedback eReport](#).*

## 2. Psychological

Another aspect of your image rainbow is your psychological self. There’s a big overlap between the emotional and the psychological. But, for our purposes, the emotional is how you *feel* about yourself and your goals, and the psychological is how you *think* about them. Do you think of your goals as achievable? Do you think of yourself as a can-do person?

It’s pretty easy to see that how you think about yourself directly affects your ability to exercise charisma. Not long ago, self-esteem expert and motivational speaker Jack Canfield co-edited (with Mark Victor Hansen) a book of inspirational stories called *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. Thirty publishers turned it down, and his agent gave up.

Yet Canfield persisted, walking from booth to booth at the American Booksellers Association convention and repeatedly receiving a thumbs-down. “The secret to persevering is building your self-esteem so you can take rejection and

move on to the next opportunity," he says. "Self-esteem is critical. I'm living proof of the idea's validity."

Indeed, he finally found a publisher. And Canfield had been correct all along – it was a book America wanted. *Chicken Soup for the Soul* sold 1.5 million copies in its first 18 months. Almost overnight, Canfield went from owing almost \$50,000 on his credit card to grossing more than \$1 million from the book he'd been told wouldn't sell.

*To discover how other geniuses think, check out *Secrets of Ten Great Geniuses - CD Version*.*

## **Accentuating the Positive**

It's been estimated that we each have upwards of 50,000 thoughts per day. How many of yours are negative? Sometimes you have to do a mental spring cleaning to get rid of those negative ones that have become ingrained attitudes. Stopping self-destructive thoughts is like stopping any other bad habit – it takes time and effort.

Among the most effective ways to do this are visualization and affirmations. Affirmations are positive statements about yourself that you repeat over and over in your head until they're programmed into your subconscious. Visualization, or "imagineering" as Walt Disney called it, is mentally picturing yourself the way you want to be.

You've heard the old saying, "I'll believe it when I see it" before? Well, the reverse is also true: "I'll see it when I believe it!" Affirmations and visualizations may not *feel* true at first. They may not even *be* true! But they can become so.

Consider what happens when you tell yourself over and over, "I'm lousy at remembering names." There will never be any improvement there. So if you catch yourself saying, "I'm terrible at remembering names," stop and immediately say to yourself, "I'm good at remembering names."

Or consider the effect of telling yourself, "I'm feeling pretty good today." Or "I *can* lose ten pounds." Or "I *am* good at getting people to see things my way." Anything you say to yourself over and over will actually influence your reality.

Writing down your affirmations in some handy place – above your desk, on your bathroom mirror, on the dashboard of your car – will help keep them in mind as well as in sight. Use affirmations and visualizations to project what success will feel like and look like. Imagine, in as much detail as you possibly can, how you feel as the boss singles you out for exceeding your quota, or how the audience hangs on your every word during your speech, or how your confident presence causes heads to turn everywhere you go.

*To learn how to improve communication skills, see *Mastering Your Message MP3s*.*

## **Everything to Gain**

You have everything to gain by talking to yourself positively. Canfield, for example, said, "When we were writing the book, I was always telling people, 'We're writing a best-seller.' I was saying it before it happened." That's an affirmation.

But he did more than that. He also took a copy of the *New York Times* best-seller list and physically inserted the name of his book in an identical typeface, then framed the hoped-for list and hung it on the wall. He also imagined himself being interviewed about the book on a talk show.

Those are visualizations. And Canfield kept affirming and visualizing his success until it actually occurred. Lots of people know about affirmations, and even believe that they could work. But few make the effort to follow through with this method. There are many fine books and audio programs on how to develop a more positive psychological self. The tools are there when you need them.

## **3. Intellectual**

The third aspect of your personal image comes from how well you've developed what's inside your skull. This is your intellectual self. I'm not talking about a high IQ or your ability to win at Trivial Pursuit. I'm referring to the depth and breadth of your knowledge, your *mental* fitness. Most of us were given plenty of basic intelligence. We alone decide whether we'll use it to capacity or let it get flabby or stiff from disuse.

Can your mind lift abstract concepts from *The Wall Street Journal* or from the professional journal in your field? Can you grasp the intricacies of a problem explained by someone in a field completely different from your own?

Can you see an issue from a perspective that's 180 degrees from your own feelings? Can you entertain ideas that come from a different culture, or from people you don't like? Can you hang in there when it's going to take a lot of convincing to get people to see things your way, or when it's going to mean clearing seven committees *and* the CEO?

Training your mind to take on longer-term and more demanding tasks gives you the stamina you need when mental marathons come up. Other ways to strengthen your mind might include:

- Taking some classes in a subject you've always wondered about – say, art history, acting, or geology – but never studied.
- Learning to play a musical instrument. Or, if you prefer, learning to scuba dive.
- Committing to teaching yourself a new and difficult skill: celestial navigation perhaps, or gourmet cooking, or origami, or wine-making.
- Joining a foreign-affairs group or an investment club or a reading circle where new issues and speakers abound.
- Buying an expensive subscription to a weighty series of books or musical performances. Paying so much, you'll probably feel compelled to get your money's worth.
- Here's a real test of mental discipline: Listening to a daytime TV talk show without making judgments about the intelligence of the participants!

Another intellect-strengthening exercise is to get in the habit of not assigning labels to people. When you're at a party and another guest is introduced to you as "a life-insurance salesperson," don't you, mentally at least, take a couple steps backward? Ditto, perhaps, for "IRS auditor," "debutante," "parole officer," or "yachtsman," depending on your mind-set.

Thus, the hidden assumptions of language can control your behavior. Your preconceived notions of accountants, say, as bland and boring, or of professors as tweedy and reserved, probably do you and them a disservice and may prematurely

kill off what could be a valuable relationship.

To maximize your charisma, attempt to get past the labels. Don't overlook, for instance, the opinions of a mere "clerk" while perhaps overvaluing those of a "consultant." It takes intellectual strength to avoid the trap of confusing the specific for the general. But if you can get into the habit of appreciating people's unique, human side and not judging them generically, you'll win their respect – and you may learn something, too.

*To explore this topic further, please see PeopleSmart mp3s.*

## **Seek Depth of Knowledge**

Contrary to the old saying, what you don't know *can* hurt you. And depth of knowledge means, in short, how well you understand your area of expertise. The more you know about your subject, the more power and influence you'll have.

Let's say you're a salesperson, and one of the first sentences out of your mouth badly misstates the customer's situation. Instead of thinking "This person is sharp and can help me. I'd better listen up!" – the customer will be wondering if you got your training via a correspondence course. He also may be busy figuring out how quickly he can ease you out the door and get a new account rep. In short, the depth of your knowledge wouldn't project credibility.

Charismatic people, on the other hand, often make good first impressions not because they're smarter than others but because they prepare better. When it's all said and done, some wit once noted, more is said than done. Acquiring depth of knowledge can help make you an exception to that cynical rule. And in some cases, it may even help overcome an initially bad impression.

For instance, a journalist named Dave was seeking a job in the foreign country to which he'd just moved. He made a bad first impression when, confronting a prospective employer, he nervously bobbled an easy question about the political history of his adopted nation. The publisher, who had been testing Dave for just such deficiencies, threw him out.

Dave spent the entire next day in the library undergoing a

self-administered crash course in his new nation's history. Then he tracked down the same publisher, and before he could be ejected again, Dave disgorged tons of data about the nation's politics, past and present. He mentioned every politician of the last half-century, their parties, their triumphs, their defeats, their personal lives – everything!

The publisher, at first irritated to see Dave again, mellowed with admiration as he heard Dave recite his new knowledge. Impressed, he referred Dave to someone who did hire him, and Dave is now very successful in his overseas reporting career. Dave's depth of knowledge, though belated, saved his skin – and changed his life.

*To learn how to communicate and work with different personalities, check out Alessandra on Platinum Rule - MP3.*

## Breadth of Knowledge

If depth of knowledge alone were enough to make a good impression, chemists would have good initial rapport with other chemists, cops with other cops, and taxidermists with other taxidermists. But what about the rest of the world?

Breadth of knowledge is what enables you to engage in meaningful small talk, and small talk, as O. Henry once said, is akin to putting "a few raisins into the tasteless dough of existence." In short, there's nothing small about small talk; it's a social lubricant that looms large in all human exchanges.

Thus, being informed on a wide range of topics outside your area of expertise can be immensely helpful in building social bridges. Research has shown that the more people feel they have in common, the better they like each other. So by increasing your breadth of knowledge, you'll be able to project a favorable image more easily with more people.

A young navy officer, recently engaged to be married, was taken to meet some relatives of the bride-to-be. They were the first of her large, impressive family he would meet, and he was understandably nervous. Imagine his surprise when the patriarch of the clan, a college president, said hello and then asked a series of informed questions about naval weaponry. Suddenly, the social distance and apprehension shrank as the young lieutenant was immersed in a stimulating con-

versation with a civilian stranger who *knew*, actually knew, something about naval ordnance.

The lieutenant never forgot how comfortable the older man had made him feel. And he never learned how a college president came to know so much about the relative muzzle velocity and rounds-per-minute of three-inch guns versus five-inch guns. Whether the older man was just uncommonly well – versed in this area or made a special effort to seek information that would put the young officer at ease, the fact remains that he built instant, lasting rapport.

How do you increase your breadth of knowledge? You're literally surrounded by opportunities! If there's one thing we don't lack in our culture, it's access to information. You can read books and magazines. Explore the Internet. Take classes. Go to plays and movies. Attend workshops. You name it! All of these things – reading, doing, watching, and listening – will increase your ability to build a bond with others and, thus, increase your charisma.

*To improve your listening skills, check out Alessandra on The Power of Listening - MP3.*

## 4. Spiritual

Your spiritual self, the fourth aspect of your charisma rainbow, has nothing to do with how often you go to church. Instead, by "spiritual," I mean the dynamic between you and those you're seeking to influence positively: the bond of trust you're able to create, the level of caring and the attitude of service you convey, and the sense of higher purpose or greater good that you communicate. It's the opposite of self-centeredness.

I was struck not long ago by the tributes that followed the death of industrialist David Packard. He was, of course, eulogized as a can-do genius who, started from an empty Palo Alto garage and just \$538, to build Hewlett-Packard into a \$31 billion firm and, after IBM, the second-largest computer maker in America. He was widely cited as "one of the most influential figures" in U.S. business history.

But amid the stories of his savvy management and pro-

gressive thinking, there were many anecdotes about David Packard, the man. An enemy of pomposity and immodesty, he was remembered for his generosity, his friendliness, his attentiveness to and trust in his employees (who called him Dave). He was as strongly devoted to people, many said, as he was to technology and sound business practices.

One friend remembered almost twenty years earlier when he was a middle manager preparing to give an important speech and, by chance, he met Packard in the parking lot. Packard asked him if he was prepared for his speech. The young manager said yes, but admitted he was very nervous. Packard, one of the richest, most powerful men in America, draped an arm around the manager's shoulder and said that was only natural.

Then he suggested the manager might find it easier if during his talk he imagined he was having a heart-to-heart conversation with his best friend. "Here was this really human guy who had immediate empathy with my concerns," recalled the then-manager, who now heads another electronics firm.

## Leading by Example

Another executive remembered an incident after a day of seminars. Packard, who had spoken that day, said goodbye to the dignitaries, then went over and helped put away the folding chairs. "He was holding three in each hand and carrying them down into the basement. I stopped and thought, 'This is a man who leads by example.'"

In short, Packard never forgot that character and kindness never go out of style. His charisma, enormous by any calculation, was made greater still by his humanity. And in the final analysis, that, as well as his company and his philanthropy, is his legacy. In short, he *cared*. That's the essence of this spiritual dimension that influences people.

So, to be as charismatic as you can, to send out the best silent message you can, you need be alert to the emotional states of others. That takes a well-tuned antenna. But such sensitivity is a definite spur to your charisma as well as a sign of character and decency.

If you need help with listening, order *Dynamics of Effective Listen-*

tening MP3s.

## 5. Physical

I have saved this piece of the rainbow puzzle for last because I haven't wanted to imply that all you need to succeed is to be a sharp-looking smooth talker. That's like saying the applicant with the best-looking résumé – professionally typeset on the fanciest paper – should always get the job. Obviously, it's the person behind the résumé – the experience, the accomplishments, the integrity – who should count most.

But ask yourself this: What if the résumé is badly crinkled or soup-stained, contains obvious misspellings or grammatical errors, or presents the job-seeker's credentials in a confusing, illogical way? Regardless of how stellar the education or brilliant the career, that applicant probably would be dead meat if he or she couldn't produce a résumé that didn't meet at least minimal standards of acceptability.

So it is with physical image. Few people are going to be fooled over the long run by someone who merely has a nice wardrobe and a good sense of grooming, a pleasant smile and a firm handshake, and a smattering of knowledge, enthusiasm, and sincerity. But failure to attain those could easily undercut all your other skills and virtues.

## Physical First Impressions

"Clothes don't make the man or woman. They make the message about the man or woman," writes master motivator Frank Pacetta in his book *Don't Fire Them, Fire Them Up*. "The message may be accurate or absolutely misleading – but it's a message nonetheless. We're not so civilized or sophisticated that we don't notice the limp handshake, the shifty eyes, and the unpolished shoes."

As I said, we all carry around with us a bundle of opinions about what we like and expect – and what we don't like or expect – about others' appearance. If that appearance is out of sync with our opinion, it will create "noise," or distractions in the communication process, making it difficult for the other person to hear what you're saying because they're distracted by, say, your bad toupee or ill-matched clothes.

A purchasing agent once told me how he was approached by a salesman who, at first glance, appeared impeccable: nicely coiffed hair, well-tailored suit, stylish shoes, leather briefcase, expensive pen, the works. Then the salesman crossed his legs, revealing white socks that starkly clashed with his blank pants and shoes.

The purchasing agent was so astonished at this incongruity that he totally lost track of anything the salesman said. And, of course, no sale was made. Whether the salesman had a skin condition that required that kind of socks or whether he just didn't know any better, I don't know. But the effect was to torpedo his physical first impression. He never got a chance to make a second one.

*For more on this, check out **New Relationship Strategies -- CD version.***

## Easy to Change

Fortunately, visual image is one of the easiest things to change. I've experienced that firsthand. When I began my public-speaking career, I wore very conservative suits that made me look like a banker. But then I got some valuable advice from Bill Gove, the first president of the National Speakers Association and a legend in the speaking world. He said to me, "Tony, you're trying to present an image of someone you're not. You're trying to talk and look like someone you're not. You're trying to come across too polished and conservative. Think about it: You're a New York Italian. You'll be much more successful if you find a style that's right for you."

I began to loosen up my speaking style, and I allowed some of the faster-paced New York banter to slip into my speeches. After I gained some confidence, I began to wear Italian double-breasted suits, and I felt more "like myself," more confident and more at ease. Now I feel that my clothes match my actions and reflect more of who I am. An added benefit: Audiences also reacted much more positively to the changes.

## What's Your Proper Image?

More important than specific clothing tips from me or anyone else is that you think about what image you want

to project, and how it fits in the culture of your organization or industry. For example, one corporation that had gone through a traumatic downsizing decided, as a morale booster, to designate Fridays as "dress-down" day. Employees were encouraged to create a relaxed, end-of-the-week atmosphere by wearing casual clothes.

But one manager, widely viewed as uptight and compulsive, came to work that first Friday in a brand-new western outfit: pressed jeans and a belt with a large, gleaming silver buckle, starched shirt with a new bandanna knotted at his throat, and expensive, highly polished boots that had never seen a scuff mark, let alone a horse. He looked like he'd just come from a casting call for the musical *Oklahoma!* Thus, his "casual" dress did little to moderate his image as an out-of-touch authoritarian who couldn't learn to relax even if he took lessons.

The point is: Appearance counts, and you've got to look the part if you want to be credible. There aren't hard-and-fast rules about what you should wear, but there are general guidelines. The key question is: Do my clothes reinforce or detract from the impression I want to make?

As author Marcia Grad wrote: "Our appearance is an advertisement to the world." President John F. Kennedy once reportedly spent fifteen minutes combing his hair before stepping off *Air Force One* to greet a welcoming crowd in Berlin. "It's not Jack Kennedy but the United States that's going to walk off this plane," he explained. So it is for us all – it's not just us that people see but also the statement we choose to make about ourselves.

*For tips on versatility, see **Versatility - 27-page PDF e-Report.***

## Looking Healthy

I don't need to convince you that if you're physically fit, you're going to come across better to others. We're all attracted by healthy-looking people. That's one of the joys of watching the Olympics, isn't it?

There are shelves of books and dozens of experts in your community to point you in the right direction. What you'll find, over the intermediate to long term, is that as your body gets used to the greater demands of exercise, you'll look bet-

ter and feel better. You'll have more energy. Your self-esteem and self-confidence will also likely improve.

In short, you'll be more full of life. People will notice the difference, and your renewed energy and aura will have a positive effect not only on you but on those around you.

## **Tomorrow: The First Day of the Rest of Your Diet**

Obviously, what you eat also affects how you look. Again, there are lots of books and classes that can tell you more about nutrition than I can here. And, of course, your doctor is your best resource. But I do have one piece of nutritional advice: Know thyself.

We're all different in how we respond to different foods. Pay attention to how your body reacts. For example, many people get hyper after eating chocolate. For me, it's just the reverse: I feel sluggish.

Similarly, some of my friends on the professional speaking circuit always abstain from a big meal before an important talk, fearing it will cause them to lose their edge. Me, I eat a full meal. Or exercise strenuously. Either way, I feel sharp. But if I starved myself or sat around doing nothing for hours before a speech, the results wouldn't be nearly as energetic.

In short, find out what works for you. Consider keeping a log of what you eat and how you feel afterwards. Then experiment with different foods at different times. You'll add to your energy and, thus, to your charisma.

## **Other Physical Signs**

Besides clothes, fitness, and diet, other aspects of personal appearance can make or break first impressions. Your handshake, as Pacetta says, should be strong and firm. But be careful not to overdo its strength or duration.

A more subtle element is eye contact. Think for a moment about what a powerful force it is in our culture. We summon a taxi driver or a maître d' by "catching their eye." We flirt through eye contact. Or, by withholding eye contact, we signal others that we lack interest in, or even disbelieve, what they're saying.

Thus, eye contact can be a potent tool for building a bond, or for damaging one. So if you're shy, or if you process information more through sound and touch than through sight, you may forget to look the other person straight in the eyes. Yet eye contact is vital – and not just the first time you say hello, but all through the conversation.

Posture is important, too. Influential people convey confidence and enthusiasm by carrying themselves, as Grad writes, "proudly but not pompously." This means standing tall with head and shoulders back, but with muscles relaxed. If you've spent years with your shoulders rounded forward or your weight on one hip, it'll take some practice to straighten yourself out. But it's worth it. Not only do you look better if your posture is good, you feel better, too.

*For more on using your environment to your advantage, see [Using Space and Time - 15-page PDF e-Report](#).*

## **Shortest Distance Between Two People**

The final element of a good physical first impression is a smile. Again, like eye contact, a smile is a small gesture with a powerful impact. In American culture, we've come to expect likable, approachable people to smile when we meet them.

Pianist/comedian Victor Borge put it another way when he described a smile as "the shortest distance between two people." Greeting someone with a warm smile is the best way to introduce yourself, and it sets the stage beautifully for any discussion that follows.

But many people think they're smiling when they're barely parting their lips. Check your smile in the mirror. As you step toward it, before you see yourself, put on your best smile. Then look at yourself. Is this person smiling or smirking? Is it really a happy smile or a forced smile? And are your eyes smiling? That's the test of a real smile.

If only your lips move, it's not much of a smile. Watch celebrities, politicians, or the hosts on late-night talk shows. The gesture may or may not be genuine, but these people definitely know how to smile.

# Jump-Starting Your Way to a Better Image

Here are some other ideas on projecting a positive image:

**1. A winning image starts with a good self-image.** A good self-image doesn't follow success – it precedes it, as Robert L. Shook says in his book *Winning Images*. Someone saddled with a poor self-image may fool some people some of the time, but eventually he'll fail, unless he comes to grips with his basic self-image.

In her best-selling book, *The Revolution Within*, feminist Gloria Steinem said she was shocked when she first saw herself on television. What she saw was a thin, pretty, blondish woman of medium height who spoke in a boring, though confident, monotone. But what she felt like *inside* as she was doing the interview was a plump brunette from Toledo who was too tall, much too pudding-faced, and cursed with a voice that was constantly on the verge of some unacceptable emotion.

Many of us carry around an image that doesn't really jibe with the facts. You could be holding a negative self-image, like Steinem did, that you subtly communicate to everyone you meet. If you feel that you're too tall, or overweight, or unattractive in some way, you'll lack confidence, and others will catch on.

Or it's possible you could have an overly positive image of yourself. You may think you look terrific, when in fact you're a sloppy dresser who's twenty pounds overweight and badly in need of a haircut or a makeover.

In either case, analysis by yourself – and perhaps by those closest to you – is needed, because, as I've sought to show in this chapter, your image *is* important, and you *can* do something about it! To find out how others see you, get some photographs or videotapes taken of yourself when you feel you're looking your best. Specify close-ups and then study them carefully. What do you see that you like, or don't like?

Then ask your best friends for their candid opinions on not only how you look, but how you carry yourself, how you come across verbally, and what your car or house or briefcase or other material goods say about you. Promise you won't take offense – and don't! – then ask them to also tell you about your image in terms of knowledge and enthusiasm as well as sincerity and integrity.

**2. Make your wardrobe work for you.** Often we acquire our clothes haphazardly – a sale item or an impulse buy here, a Christmas gift there – without much thought as to how they fit our image, or even if they match each other. In fact, you've probably seen folks who've expanded their wardrobe only to hobble themselves by wearing a plaid shirt with a striped tie, or to go overboard with jewelry that clatters and clangs when they walk. In other words, unless you know how to put it all together, you can improve your wardrobe but still project a poor image. So make sure your colors, patterns, and accessories are complementary, not clashing.

Most of us have at least one or two outfits that make us feel especially good when we're wearing them. We tend to save those for special occasions. But why not try to increase that number to three, four, or more such outfits and, thus, try to make a particularly good impression every day?

If you're vague about what you look best in, consult a friend or co-worker whose taste you admire, or go to a wardrobe consultant. They often spot things that you'd look good in but probably wouldn't consider trying on.

A wardrobe consultant may sound like a costly luxury. But many times their advice is free if you buy clothes from them, and some will even shop for you at an hourly rate, which can save a lot of time. Combine that time savings with greater selection and the likelihood of a superb fit, and it all may add up to a terrific value.

**3. For maximum effect, freshen up.** Men should consider carrying a portable razor and a small stash of toiletries to ward off the worn-out, end-of-a-tough-day look before a business meeting in the late afternoon or early evening. Similarly, women probably should have cosmetics and hair-care items

handy and maybe even an extra pair of earrings or other fashion accessories to give their appearance – and maybe their spirit – a boost.

**4. Avoid annoying or distracting habits or mannerisms.** Rarely do impressive people cover their mouths or noses, scratch their heads, chew on a pencil, twist rubber bands around their fingers, or tear their napkins into shreds while talking. Marcia Grad calls these habits “charisma robbers” and includes among them:

- Tugging at clothing
- Drumming fingers on a table
- Tapping pencils or clicking pens
- Doodling
- Jangling keys or change
- Biting nails
- Cleaning teeth

Not only do these habits make it more difficult for the other person to hear you, they also detract from your image.

**5. Go first-class on professional tools.** Don’t scrimp on image enhancers like business cards, letterheads, pens, and briefcases. Getting quality stationery and accessories will cost only a few pennies more in the long run while making you look and feel more professional.

**6. Seek winners, spurn losers.** Attitudes are contagious! So nurture your emotional well-being by choosing friends who genuinely want you to succeed and who encourage you. Also, ask yourself about your surroundings: How’s my house or apartment decorated? What about my office? Is it drab, or energizing?

Read some inspirational and motivational books. Or listen to happy music. (Have you ever heard a mournful banjo tune?) Or make it a point to go to funny movies or watch a TV sitcom that makes you laugh.

Consciously reduce your exposure to the negative, whether it’s gossip from co-workers, violence in the media, or pessimism in your own thoughts.

**7. Practice treating everyone – from the janitor on up – as if he or she is the most important person you’ll meet that day.** This will mean seeking to replace arrogance with empathy – not an easy task for a lot of people. However, it’s a real test of character, and every once in a while, you’ll learn a big lesson from that “little” person.

In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey repeats a wonderful story about a captain who spied a light coming through the fog toward his battleship. The captain ordered a signal sent by flashing light: “We are on a collision course, advise you change course 20 degrees.”

Back came the signal: “Advisable for you to change course 20 degrees.”

The captain messaged back: “I’m a captain. You had better change course 20 degrees.”

“I’m a seaman second class,” came the reply. “You had better change course 20 degrees.”

Now furious, the captain spat out the message: “I’m a battleship. Change course 20 degrees.”

Back came the flashing light: “I’m a lighthouse.” The captain changed course.

**8. Give sincere compliments.** Sometimes people don’t tell themselves – or maybe don’t fully believe it – when they do a good job. So they’ll appreciate you mentioning it.

Even the most hardened person, despite saying otherwise, *does* care what others think. “I can live for months on a good compliment,” said Mark Twain, who was as accomplished a writer and wit as any man of his day.

**9. Don’t just say it, do it!** Words, while important, are cheap. Credibility is gained by backing up those words with action. Especially if you’re in a leadership position, be very aware that you set the style, both in appearance and integrity. Cultivate a do-as-I-do, not a do-as-I-say, philosophy.

You can show your sincerity by practicing what you preach on a daily basis. One manager, for instance, demanded his subordinates be pillars of strength when it came to refusing gifts from clients who might then expect special treatment. A day of reckoning came when the manager, known for his insatiable sweet tooth, received a gift of two chocolate pies

from a local pastry shop. It's said there was a tear in his eye – and probably a pang in his stomach – as he had the pies returned with a gracious note. Everyone in the office had been watching to see if he would be true to his own credo, and he knew it.

**10. Make fitness a lifestyle, not a chore.** You don't need an expensive club membership or a cross-country ski machine to maintain a body that exudes vitality. Forget the spandex, stopwatches, and ankle warmers, for instance, and just:

- Walk up and down the stairs to your high-rise office or apartment.
- Ride a bike to the neighborhood convenience store to pick up that quart of nonfat milk.
- Skip the cart and get some real exercise while golfing.
- Take a nature hike instead of watching a nature film on television.
- Got a friend you meet with regularly to shoot the breeze? Get in your chat while walking around the neighborhood instead of over a cup of coffee or a beer. You'll both be better off.



## **Tony Alessandra, PhD, CSP, CPAE**

**Building Customers, Relationships, and the Bottom Line**

Dr. Tony Alessandra helps companies build customers, relationships, and the bottom line. Companies learn how to achieve market dominance through specific strategies designed to out market, outsell, and out service the competition.

Dr. Alessandra has a street-wise, college-smart perspective on business, having fought his way out of NYC to eventually realize success as a graduate professor of marketing, an entrepreneur, a business author, and a keynote speaker. He earned his MBA from the University of Connecticut and his PhD in marketing from Georgia State University.

Dr. Alessandra is president of **Online Assessments** ([www.OnlineAC.com](http://www.OnlineAC.com)), a company that offers online assessments and tests; co-founder of **MentorU.com**, an online e-Learning company; and Chairman of the Board of **BrainX**, a company that offers online digital accelerated learning programs.

Dr. Alessandra is a widely published author with 14 books translated into 17 foreign languages, including **Charisma** (Warner Books, 1998); **The Platinum Rule** (Warner Books, 1996); **Collaborative Selling** (John Wiley & Sons, 1993); and **Communicating at Work** (Fireside/Simon & Schuster, 1993). He is featured in over 50 audio/video programs and films, including **Relationship Strategies** (American Media); **The Dynamics of Effective Listening** (Nightingale-Conant); and **Non-Manipulative Selling** (Walt Disney). He is also the originator of the internationally-recognized behavioral style assessment tool **The Platinum Rule™** ([www.PlatinumRule.com](http://www.PlatinumRule.com)).

Recognized by *Meetings & Conventions Magazine* as “one of America’s most electrifying speakers,” Dr. Alessandra was inducted into the Speakers Hall of Fame in 1985. He is also a member of the Speakers Roundtable, a group of 20 of the world’s top professional speakers. Tony’s polished style, powerful message, and proven ability as a consummate business strategist consistently earns rave reviews.

To learn more about Dr. Alessandra and his services, visit [www.Alessandra.com](http://www.Alessandra.com).