### The power of first impressions
Selecting transcript lines in this section will navigate to timestamp in the video
- Hi, I'm Vanessa. I am so happy to have you here. Hi, I'm Vanessa. I'm so happy to have you here. Did you notice a difference in those two openings? Your first impressions matter. From what you say, to how you say it. You need to know the science of making a lasting first impression. My name is Vanessa Van Edwards and I'm Lead Investigator at Science of People, a human behavior research lab. I'm also the author of the best-selling book Captivate, the Science of Succeeding with People. In this LinkedIn Learning course, I'm going to show you how to make a memorable, powerful first impression every time, with everyone you meet. We'll dive into the science of the perfect handshake, the best opening line for any conversation, and even how to sound confident on the phone. Plus, I'll cover the body language you need to be engaging during every interaction. So if you're ready, let's jump into how to create a great first impression.

### How to be more memorable
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- How long does it take to make a powerful first impression? We make our snap judgments of people, both good and bad, within the first few seconds of meeting them. Let me share a fascinating study on the power of first impressions. Researchers at Oregon State University wanted to know if first impressions during a job interview could impact the interviewee's success. Here's what they did. First, they filmed real employment interviews done by two trained evaluators. After each 20-minute interview, two interviewers completed a post-interview questionnaire evaluating the candidate's interview performance, behavior, rapport, and professional skills. Second, the researchers shortened the videos into clips, showing the candidate's first impression. These short clips showed just the candidate entering the room, greeting the evaluators, and taking a seat. These clips were no longer than 20 seconds and didn't include any actual interview questions. Again, they were just capturing the interviewee's first impression. Lastly, they asked random evaluators to watch those short clips and rate the interviewees on the same attributes as the job interviewers: performance, behavior, rapport, and professional skills. So what did they find? The random evaluators who had only seen 20 seconds of a first impression gave the same ratings as the trained evaluators who had done an entire 20-minute interview. In my experience we decide if we like someone, trust someone, or would want to work with someone within the first 20 seconds of meeting them. So the next time you sit down with someone new, think about this. All that effort you put into answering questions or perfecting your pitch might not matter as much as those first few seconds of the interaction.

### The shortcut to a great first impression
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- Here's the big problem most professionals face, we tend to put all of our focus on crafting the perfect elevator pitch. Coming up with clever answers or telling impressive anecdotes in meetings, interviews and while networking. The problem is that none of that matters unless you can nail your first impression. Like a lever, first impressions make all of your interactions easier. No matter how well you answer an interviewer's question, no matter how beautiful your slides are, no matter how many brilliant points you make in a speech, if you have a bad first impression it's almost impossible to recover. Researchers at Cornell University found this is even true after looking at someone's photo. First impressions formed simply from looking at a photograph predicted how someone felt about a person, even after a live interaction. Yep, the old cliche is true. Even after having read the book, one still judges a book by its cover. This isn't just the way we look, or what we wear. It's also how we carry ourselves, our facial expressions, our vocal power, our handshake, and our body language. Don't worry, this is actually good news. Think of it like this, having a strong first impression is like a shortcut to success. Because a great first impression makes it easier to build rapport, pitch yourself, and make effective personal connections. And all you have to do is master those first 20 seconds. In a way, a first impression is a little like a fulcrum and a lever. Remember those high school physics classes? With a small bit of concerted effort we can have a powerful effect. If you master the first 20 seconds of any interaction, it makes the next next 20 minutes easier. Without the first impression you have to work way harder to make a lasting impact.

### How to master your presence
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- Before we can makeover your first impression, let's talk about how you show up right now. Are you happy with your first impression? Do you know what people think of you when they first meet you? I want you to feel confident in your first impression. And gaining confidence is all about being in control of how we come across. Most of us go into our first impressions just hoping we'll be seen as competent or friendly. I don't want you to have to guess. It's time for you to know exactly how you come across. All first impressions can be placed on what I call a first impression model. This has two main components. First, when someone meets you, they're trying to decide how confident you are. Based on your body language, handshake, posture, and vocal power, they're trying to decipher if you're confident or anxious. Why? We like to be around confident people, so we are constantly trying to sniff out someone's confidence levels. Second, we're looking to see how engaging someone is. Are they interesting? Will they be attentive? Would they be fun to talk to or work with? Again, someone looks at your initial nonverbal and verbal cues to decipher how engaging or boring you might be. So obviously you want to land in that upper right quadrant. That's where we really shine. Let's play a game. I'm going to show you a video of three different people and you're going to place them on the first impression model. As you watch, think about how confident this person is and how engaging you think they might be. - Hi, nice to meet you. - Where do you think this person falls in the first impression model? Is he confident? Is he engaging? Most people in our studies placed him here. - Hi, nice to meet you. - How about this gentleman? Where do we think he falls in the first impression model? Is he confident, is he engaging? Most people in our studies placed him here. - Hi, nice to meet you. - How about this woman? Where do you think she falls in the first impression model? Is she confident, is she engaging? Most people in our studies placed her here. Was it easy or hard to quickly assess these folks? Researchers from Tufts University have found that whether we like it or not, everyone makes a snap judgment when we first see someone. The researchers call this judgment a thin slice. I like to play this thin slicing game we just did to show you how easy it is for our brain to make radically different judgements based on only a few cues. In those three videos the verbal content and their clothes were almost exactly the same, but I bet your thin slices of them were incredibly different. The question for you is, where do you think you currently fall on this first impression model? Make a note of where you think you fall. If you have no idea how you come across, that's okay. We're going to get that under control. The next big question is, how do you want to come across? In your ideal situation, on your best day, how would you like to show up? When someone meets you for the first time, what word do you want them to think of in their head? Think of your ideal first impression word, words like authentic, charismatic, captivating, or interesting. Pick your ideal word and keep this front of mind. This should be your focus and goal for every first impression.

### How to look confident
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- Your non-verbal signals are incredibly important for your first impression. No one knows this more than me because I am a recovering awkward person. I used to be plagued by an incredibly boring first impression. I didn't realize I was focusing all of my energy on what to say not how to say it. Once I dove into the research, I realized the power of our non-verbal. We typically judge someone's confidence based on two body language signs, how much space we take up and how we carry ourselves. First, let's talk about space. Researchers from the University of British Columbia found that across cultures, genders, and races, winning athletes all make similar body language poses when they win or lose. Winning athletes take up a lot of space. They expand their body, lift their chest, raise their head to the sky, and sometimes even jump up and down for joy. I call this pride posing. When we feel pride or confidence, we want to take up as much space as possible. We want to claim our territory because we feel good. Losing athletes, on the other hand, shrink down and protect their body. In shame, they hang their head and roll their shoulders in. This is because in defeat we want to take up as little space as possible and not be noticed. We also want to protect ourselves from harm. So we cross our arms over our chest or cover our face. I call this defeat posing. When we first meet someone, we're trying to quickly gage how much space they're taking up. Are they feeling pride and claiming their space, or are they feeling defeat and shrinking down? And this is how we place someone on the confidence line in the first impression model. The second thing we look for to gage someone's confidence is the amount of self-touch. When we're anxious or worried, we tend to do something called self-soothing behavior. This is when we crack our knuckles, play with our jewelry, wring our hands together, or rub our arms. It's almost as if we're telling ourselves, calm down, be okay, calm down, like when our parents rube dour backs or heads as babies. We might also do what's called blocking. This is when we cross our arms, cover our torso, cover our face, or hold something in front of our body like a laptop, purse, or clipboard in order to protect our most vital organs. When we see someone engaged in a lot of self-touch, with blocking or self-soothing gestures, we rank them lower on the confidence scale. Here are a few do's and don'ts for coming across confidently. Do: pride pose, take up space, hold your head high, roll your shoulders back, have an open torso, lift your chest. Don't: defeat pose, self-touch, block, straighten your clothes or jewelry, cross your arms, or crack your knuckles. No matter what room you're walking into, who you're talking to, or what your goals are, always try to show confidence with your non-verbal.

### How to be engaging
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- One of the fastest ways to build rapport is to show someone that you would be an engaging, present, interesting person to talk to, and you are! So how do you show it? The easiest way to be more engaging is not what you might think. It's not about telling amazing stories or thinking of clever anecdotes, although those are great too, but before you even start a conversation you need to show someone you're engaging with strong non-verbal queues. There are two non-verbal queues for engagement. The first two I want to teach you is called fronting. Fronting is when you angle your three Ts, your toes, your torso, and your top, towards the person you want to engage. Ideally, your feet and their feet are on parallel lines. We can do this while standing and chatting with someone at a networking event, or in the break room, you can also do it while walking towards someone as you enter a meeting or boardroom. You can also do it while sitting in an office or around a conference table. Fronting is an incredibly important non-verbal sign of respect. When we angle our body toward someone else, it's like telling them you're on the same page. The second way you can non-verbally enhance engagement is with eye contact. The moment we mutually gaze with someone we feel more connected to them. Eye contact also helps us read their facial expressions and body language. So remember, in the best first impressions you angle your body towards someone, make eye contact, and sustain fronting as you speak.

### The science of a perfect handshake
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- Neuroscience research from the Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience found that strangers form a better first impression of those who offer their hand in greeting. This means it's a great idea to lead with a handshake. However, not all handshakes are created equal. Here are my five steps to giving the perfect handshake. Number one, palm to palm. The first goal of your handshake is to get palm to palm as quickly as possible. You want the palm of your hand to align with theirs. The trick here is never to give someone just your fingertips or stop too short. This will make it so you're finger to palm, which is not good for connection. Number two, vertical. Once you're palm to palm, always keep the handshake vertical. This means keeping your thumb pointed towards the sky and your pinky pointed towards the ground. Never flip someone's hand up or down, and try very hard not to offer your hand facing palm up or palm down. Always offer your hand in the ideal vertical position. This allows you to have an equal handshake. If you flip up or down, it's hard to get a nice reciprocal squeeze. Number three, pump it. Most handshakes have between one and three pumps. Typically, we pump three times on a first meeting. It's as if we have to pump for each word, nice meeting you. When we're in a rush or have met someone before, we typically only do one pump as a quick hello. What's important here is to not over-pump. Have you ever had that awkward moment where someone just won't stop the handshake and it goes on and on forever and ever? Those are the worst. Whatever you do, don't be an over-pumper. Number four, reciprocal. The biggest question I get about handshakes is how firm is too firm and how soft is too soft? The goal here is to have the firmness of your handshake be reciprocal. You want to match the other person. You never want to over-squeeze someone's hand or under-squeeze it. You want to match their level of firmness. This is also a nice way of showing someone else you're respecting their preferences. Special note here, always start with some level of firmness right up front. Don't keep your hand limp at the beginning of a handshake. That's the dreaded dead fish handshake. Number five, dry. This one should go without saying, but, just in case, I want to mention dryness. No one likes a wet or slimy handshake. Be sure you dry your hands fully after washing your hands in the bathroom, and never hold a sweaty drink. Here's an insider tip if you get sweaty palms. I always hold a drink, mug, or coffee cup with a napkin wrapped around it. This way, if you get sweaty palms, the napkin soaks up any moisture before you shake someone's hand. In the next few days, get some feedback on your handshake from a close friend or confidante. You want to make sure you and your handshake come across with confidence.

### How to sound confident
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- Hello, hi, hey there, good morning. Most people don't realize that their first impression has to do with how they say something even more than what they say. We are constantly listening for vocal signs of emotion. When someone picks up a phone to say hello or greets everyone in a meeting, or introduces themselves, listeners are trying to pick up on how confident the speaker is. This is why your vocal power is incredibly important for your first impression. When someone first meets you and you say hello, or hey, or hi, or good morning, how confident do you sound? In my human behavior research lab, The Science of People, we wanted to test different versions of people's hello. Specifically, we wanted to know, can you hear facial expressions? First, we asked participants to record different versions of their hello. We had each person do a neutral hello, how they normally answer the phone, and then a smiling hello, a sadness hello, and an angry hello. We found that the very same person's hello can sound incredibly different based on their facial expression. For example, which one of these do you think is the happy hello? Here's A. - \[Woman\] Hello. - Here's B. - \[Woman\] Hello. - If you guessed B, you would be right. Same person, totally different sounds. Let's try another. Which is the angry hello? Here's A. - \[Man\] Hello. - And here's B. - \[Man\] Hello. - Again, B is the angry hello. Isn't it amazing how you can hear the difference? Here's where our experiment got even more interesting. We took these recordings and asked participants in our lab to rate these hellos on likability. We had participants listen to a hello and answer, I like this person a lot, I like this person a little, or I don't like this person at all. We found that happy hellos got far higher likability ratings than the sadness and anger hellos. This is because we can hear emotion, and we don't like talking to people who are upset or irritable. This means that smiling, even when on the phone, is incredibly important for your vocal first impression, because people can hear the happiness. One study even found that we can identify different types of smiles from voice tone alone. They had participants listen to clips of people speaking with different types of smiles. Specifically, they wanted to know if people could hear a fake versus real smile. If you plaster a fake smile on your face before greeting someone, is that just as good as a real smile? The research was clear. A fake smile can be heard and is not nearly as powerful as a real smile. See if you can hear the difference. This is a clip of a fake smile. - \[Woman\] Hello. - Here's the clip of the real smile. - \[Woman\] Hello. - Can you hear the difference. This means that before you walk into a room, answer the phone, or introduce yourself, you need to actually get yourself into a good mindset so you can really give a genuine smile. So what's the takeaway? Never answer the phone in a bad mood and always trying to give a genuine smile while saying your greeting.

### The single best opening line
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- Nothing is worse than trying to start a conversation and not knowing what to say. Whether you're cold approaching a new group at a networking event, walking up to a colleague during a break, or trying to chat up your boss in the elevator, opening lines can be nerve wracking. But I'm here to tell you that they don't have to be. In fact, your opening lines might be less important than you think. Here's why. When we first meet someone our brains are hard at work trying to make a first impression and the majority of our first impressions are nonverbal. One study from the European Journal of Social Psychology found that our nonverbal signals are 12.5 times more powerful than our words. In this way, our nonverbal confidence is far more important than any opening line. Whew! That should take off some of the pressure of having to come up with the perfect opener. In fact, the perfect opener is one that allows you to casually open a conversation without being overwhelming, distracting, or over the top. Research says the best opening line should stay simple. Here are your options. Number one, direct openers. The most powerful opening lines are direct and simple. The goal with direct openers is to not overwhelm the other person. My favorite is just telling someone my name and saying, hello. Like this, Hi, my name is Vanessa. Nice to meet you. Works wonders. One study from the Journal of Social Psychology found that direct opening lines are better for long term relationships because they aren't trying to hard. Another direct approach is with a question. Something like, Hi, my name's Vanessa. May I join you? This one is great if someone is already seated at a table or standing with a group of people. Number two, transparent openers. If you want to be a little braver, you could also tell someone your goal of meeting them with a little transparency. These are both opening lines and compliments, so they tend to work great. Here's some of my favorites. Hi, I'm trying to meet some new people tonight. Mind if I join you? Hello, I'm Vanessa. What's your name? Hey I don't know anyone here, I was hoping to introduce myself. I'm Vanessa. You can also do this with a group or pair of people that look like they're having a great conversation already. You can easily say, You look like you're having a great conversation, may I join you? I had to come over and introduce myself since it looked like you were all having a great conversation. These transparent openers work wonders because you're not only asking for permission to connect with someone, but you're also being open about your goals to get to know them. Number three, curious openers. The last kind of openers are curious openers. This is when you approach someone hoping to satisfy a curiosity or question. This could be as simple as, do you have the time? Or you could ask about something in your mutually shared environment. If you're both in an interesting venue you could ask, have you been here before? Or, what do you think of the food here? Or if they're drinking an interesting drink you could ask, may I ask what you're drinking? It looks delicious. Or if you're in the break room and haven't met someone before, you could quell your curiosity by asking, I don't think we've met. My name's Vanessa. I wanted to introduce myself. With curiosity openers, the key is to be genuine and simple. Don't make up a curiosity. If you're wearing a watch, someone might be perturbed if you ask them for the time and don't go crazy with a complicated question right off the bat. I would try all three different kinds of openers and pick your favorites. Remember, stick with a line that makes you feel confident because that will come across nonverbally as you use your opener.

### How to become a better conversationalist
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- How many times have you had the same boring, monotonous, mind-numbing conversations at networking events. You know the ones I mean. They go like this. So, how are ya? Good, good. What do you do? Mm-hmm. Where are you from? Great, well, I'm going to get an appetizer. Nice talking to you. Fail. I call this kind of conversation a social script. A social script is when you've been asked the same question and answered the same way hundreds of times before. So basically, you're reading from an internal script. Here's the problem. Social scripts are totally mindless. You could've had them in your sleep, which means you aren't really listening and you sound bored with your own answers. Social scripts are the enemy of being memorable. One of the most important social skills is being able stimulate fascinating conversations with everyone you meet. But being a master conversationalist requires one big talent, the ability to break social scripts. Here's how. Step number one, avoid traps. There are a few social script traps. Typically, they are the questions everyone asks all the time. The most common social script traps are: How are you? This question barely even warrants a real answer. If you ask most people how are you, they can't help but reply, without even thinking, fine, good, even if that's not the case. Boring. The next trap is what do you do. I know, I know. If you're at a professional event, it's hard not to ask this question, but it's so overused, it won't get you a great answer. I have better ones I'll share in a minute. The next trap is where are you from. This question is okay, but it usually produces a very quick, one-word answer that doesn't really go anywhere. I try to avoid it and see if it comes up naturally. My challenge to you in this video is to go on a social script diet. Challenge yourself to not ask how are you, what do you do, or where are you from in the next month to see if you can elevate your conversations. Here's what I would rather have you ask instead. Step number two, trigger excitement. Instead of asking the same boring questions, I encourage you to ask questions that search for some kind of excitement in the other person. This is a great way to break social scripts. In my book, Captivate, I created a concept called big talk to replace small talk. Small talk and social scripts are full of the typical, boring questions. Big talk is when you ask questions that dig a little deeper, that search for emotion, that trigger excitement. So instead of asking what do you do, ask: Working on anything exciting recently? Instead of asking how are you, ask: Anything good happen today? These questions are searching for some kind of good story, exciting news, or positive experience in the other person. Here are some of my favorite other excitement-inducing conversation starters. In fact, I call them conversation sparkers because they spark delight and memorability. Have any vacations coming up? Read anything interesting lately? Working on any personal passion projects? What's the highlight of your week? Have any good shows you're watching? Try all of these in the next few days and see which ones produce the best conversations. Step number three, build on the good. The final step is to build on the positivity you create. If you ask a conversation sparker and get a great answer, be ready with a sparking answer yourself. I encourage you to have your own great answers to all the sparkers I shared above. Why? Just in case you ask someone a question and they need a minute to think of the answer, you can pop in with yours. If you ask someone have any good shows you're watching and they say hmm, let me think, you can say, oh, I've totally been addicted to Handmaid's Tale on Netflix, have you seen it? This then gives them time to think about their answer and talk about yours. Remember, the goal is to stay away from social scripts. Move the conversation towards excitement and new topics to create a memorable first impression.

### Your first impression challenge
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- First impressions set you up for success. The more confident and engaging you are, the easier your entire interaction will be. My final challenge for you is to try out each of the tips I taught you in different interactions coming up. Make a note in your calendar before any big events or meetings. The best way to have a stellar first impression is to practice it until it feels natural. People want to meet you, and having an impactful first impression is the fastest way to put your best self forward. I'm so excited you took this course and grateful for you. If you want more science-backed social skills strategies be sure to visit your website, scienceofpeople.com, and register for our free trainings and a weekly science-backed communication tips. You can also check out my best selling book, Captivate: The Science of Succeeding with People, and feel free to connect with me on LinkedIn or follow me on Twitter. Remember, your first impression is powerful. Be sure to maximize it.