

## 2. First Impressions: The Power Dynamics of Introductions

First impressions are long-lasting and you never get a second chance at them... Say most social skills guide.

And they're right.

But then, few if any resource dealing with introductions fails to properly address the power dynamics of first impressions.

And that is exactly what this lesson will do for you: review the power dynamics of first impressions.

# Everyone Assesses Power

People look mainly at three factors upon first meeting someone:

1. Is he friend or foe
2. Is he/she a potential mate?
3. Is he a loser or a powerful individual?

Two and three overlap of course, especially in the case of men.

And while you want to be friendly, too many friendly signals, as we've already seen times in this course, can make you come across as submissive.

However, it is very possible to come across as *both* powerful and friendly.

As a matter of fact, as we have seen in the first lesson, we can say that your goal in 95% of your introductions should be exactly that: comes across as a confident, socially powerful and friendly individual.

Look at this example from Brad Pitt:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSM4x6wtMlw>

Confident and powerful, but without being threatening or unfriendly. Quite the opposite: he mixes warmth with power cues to come across *both* friendly and powerful. The nod up we already mentioned, but also the tone of voice, the wait before saying “thanks Charlie” (nervous people would have jumped in quicker) and the silence right after (more nervous people would have felt the pressure to add something)

## **Spotting & Preparing For Power Players**

The first step in coming across as a socially powerful individual is to avoid submitting to others.

And there is a specific class of people out there who will try to dominate you upon first meeting.

So that must be your first focus: avoiding any domination attempts.

The best way to foist a domination attempt is to see it coming. Here are a few ways to recognize someone who is about to pull a power move on you:

1. Stern or angry look
2. Chest puffed out
3. Stoneface without friendly signals (ie.: smile and eyebrows' upward movement)
4. Loud in a crassy way

Just look at how Trump stands right after he shoves another prime minister.

<https://youtu.be/T4rWVOeEI7Y>

Any guy with that attitude and expression is very likely to try to dominate you from the very beginning.

What do you do when you spot someone who's likely going to try to dominate you?

The following:

1. Reduce friendly signals to potentially no friendly signals at all (less smiling, no upward movement of eyebrows, no head nodding, no leaning towards them)
2. Increase dominance signals (stand straight, slightly corrugate eyebrows, piercing gaze, prepare to squeeze his hand harder)
3. Get mentally ready for all the introduction power moves

## 1. Upper Hand

The person who shakes hand with the palm facing down is the most dominant.

The one with the palm up is subservient.

People who are trying to dominate you will try to rotate your hand with the palm up. This is very common during introductions, especially with dominant and driven men.

Allan Pease says that the vast majority of business executives will try to shake hands with an upper hand.

## Countermove

When you notice their hand position in the palm down, do one of the following:

**Avoid shaking his hand**

The moment you see he stuck his hand out with the palm facing down you're already in damage control and it's not easy to come out of it on top. If you can allow yourself to avoid shaking his hand this is the most powerful way of dealing with an upper hand.

You refuse to take his lead and socially snub him, putting the power back on you.

### **High Danger Move: Sterilize it**

This one can look overdominant though, break rapport and risks making an enemy, so you must sterilize it, for example by putting your hand on his back and touching his upper arm, as if to make it seem you wanted to be warmer instead of superior.

### **Don't take his hand but stick yours perfectly vertical**

Instead of taking his hand and following his lead, put your hand out as well, perfectly vertical, and expect him to shake yours.

You can also add "I like fair handshakes", which is a great way of shaming him as you call out his power move aloud.

### **Take his hand and cup it with your other hand**

If you cannot avoid shaking hands, take it with your hand palm up (you in the subservient position), but then pat his hand, as if to say "good boy".

Patting people's hand is a power move Trump does all the times ([see a video + analysis here](#) including how to respond)

### **Give him a piercing gaze**

If after you cup his hand he also puts his other hand on top (ie.: a 4 hands handshake), you are still one down.

What you can do then is to even the scores with a highly piercing and spirited gaze, as if to say “*I know what you’re up to and you picked the wrong guy to play those games*”.

See how Macron did it here:

<https://youtu.be/VOf9FqsLfA8>

### **Comment on his strong handshake**

This is a favorite of mine for when someone puts a lot of strength in their handshake and you didn’t go in prepared for it.

Instead of silently taking and let them have their win, comment on it.

Just say something like “you have a very strong handshake man”. As we have seen, compliments tend to confer power because you are judging others, and that comment might also imply that you thought their handshake was *too* strong.

In any case, they got the physical win, you got the verbal one and now you are even -plus he knows you’re not going to be pushed around-.

### **Look away while you shake his hand** (as a sign of disrespect)

Another way of evening the scores is showing some disrespect during the handshake.

While you normally want to be friendly, being friendly to someone who’s trying to out-dominate you is highly submissive.

Instead, shake hands while looking away, communicating you are not dignifying them of your full attention.

And if you want to go one step further, don’t say anything like “pleasure meeting you”.

Look at Harry doing it in Goodfellas:

<https://youtu.be/DbHFDEH6rm0>

### **PRO Tip: Upper hand in relationships (for men)**

If you're the man in a relationship, I recommend you hold her hand with your right hand while taking the upper hand.

Basically, the back of your hand goes in the direction you're walking towards while your palm faces backward. That's the upper hand while walking.

## **2. Be Warm & Friendly... But Don't Overdo It**

Normally, you want to have friendly signals during introductions.

But you want to avoid it with people who are high in power and potentially testing your mettle from the very first meeting.

If in general you are showing too many friendly signals, then you might want to reduce them when meeting people for the very first time. Then, once you're friends or acquaintances, you can dial up the friendliness again.

These are typical friendly signals during an introduction:

**Smiling**

**Nodding**

**Bowing** (even slightly, it doesn't have to be a full Japanese bow)

**Leaning in towards the person**

**High-pitched voice**

**Talking too much / Filling all silences**

**Making too many compliments**

**Sticking your hand in advance**

**Placing your hand far from your body**

The last two are the most interesting because they're the ones that most people have no conscious awareness of.

When you stick your hand out, it's a sign that you are a friendly person.

But sticking your hand out too far in advance is too friendly and makes you look submissive.

Look at this example for the first 10 seconds.:

<https://youtu.be/EKQIzCeG8ZI>

There are many cues that Castro is the one with the power in that scene, but one of them is that the man with a yellow tie is sticking his hand out way too far in advance.

Look at your own handshake and ask yourself: do you stick your hand out too early on?

If so, hold one for a second longer or more.

Similar to how far in advance you stick your hand out is how far from your body you place it.

On average, extending your arm too much in front of you signals that you are wary of entering their personal space.

It's like communicating "your holiness, I don't deserve to be near you".

Avoid both.

### **3. Don't Look Down**

There are two levels of looking down upon first meeting someone:

#### **3.1. Don't Move Your Gaze Down**

This is the general rule, which you probably already know about.

[You can see here two examples](#) of back-to-back introductions which dramatically show you how different it feels.

### 3.2. Don't Look Down At His Hand

Look at this handshake between Trump and Trudeau at the White House and ask yourself: who looks more dominant?

<https://youtu.be/o2eFzAByfAo>

It's Trump who looks more dominant in spite of the fact he does not have the upper hand.

To begin with, Trudeau is standing on that chair looking too feminine. Second, he clasps Trump's hand very weakly.

But the third reason is a new concept I want you to start paying attention to.

It's the individual who looks down to the other person's hand who often looks more submissive.

People look down for a precise, albeit unconscious reason: to see where the hand is located in space so that they can grab it.

But **when you look down to see where the other person's hand is located it communicates you are following his lead.**

And since looking down is also a sign of submission, it will look submissive even though you might not be submissive at all.

To avoid looking down I recommend two steps:

1. Be the first one to put your hand out, which forces your partner to look down at your hand
2. If you can't put your hand out first, use your peripheral vision to spot their hand and avoid looking down



Let's look at Trudeau shaking hands with Trump again, this time without looking down:

<https://youtu.be/hxUJV89TkWc>

Totally different feel, right?

The only moment when Trudeau looks less powerful indeed is when he lowers his gaze again at the 6 seconds mark.

## 4. Defend Against Handshake Power Moves

Besides the well know and most common “upper hand” there is a number of handshakes that convey dominance and intimidate people.

They include:

### **Pulling you towards them** (ie.: “I own you”)

If you can foresee the move by looking at their behavior, plant your feet or get physically closer to them and put a hand on their arm so they can't take you off balance.

If you can't manage and they knock you off balance you can mock them verbally saying something like “*dude are you trying to take me home or something*”, implying they're gay and into you (I talk about it in [Alpha Male Handshake](#)).

If you feel particularly brave and the situation allows it, you can also say: “*dude, what the fuck are you doing*”.

### **Patting your hand with their free hand** (ie. “good boy”)

This is a staple from Donald Trump and it basically says “you're my boy”.

<https://youtu.be/GWbP8eC-Slw>

## **Patting Your Shoulders**

While they shake your hand with one hand, they tap your shoulder with their other free hand.

If they do it to you, you can simply pat them back as well. If you feel very bold, you can pull a Castro on Obama:

<https://youtu.be/QtLYJXLHBg>

Castro made it a point not to let Obama pat him in any way. That's very dominant, and when he raises Obama's arm in the end, that was an attempt to make it look like he was being friendly. But he was only enforcing his boundaries and make a statement that he's not to be babied and trifled with.

Very powerful.  
You must start noticing these patterns.

## **Avoiding eye contact**

Not looking at you communicates disrespect and superiority, especially if you are looking at them.

If they are not looking at you I recommend you avoid looking at them as well and then move on right away. This way it doesn't look like they were disrespecting but like it was mutual disliking (or you both were minding your own business).

Notice how King Jong Un shakes hands with people without looking at them (but don't mimic him: he's not a good role model for social power).

<https://youtu.be/JIEo99KutbQ>

## 5. “Get My Name Right” Power Move

As soon as you meet someone it's good form trying to get their names right.

However, it's not good form to ask people to have your name perfectly pronounced more than once. That's a very high compliance request for someone you've just met.

That's why you should not comply to someone asking you to get their name right.

They first should prove themselves worthy of that effort.

When they ask you to repeat their names, they are basically saying:

1. Get my name right because it's important
2. You can't manage to get it right -ie.: you're a bit daft or at least culturally ignorant-

If they are more powerful than you are and you don't want to risk offending them, you can say that “you will get it with time” and then move on.

If they are at your same social level or even lower, than screw them, they are the ones who are being out of line.

I recommend you do a De Niro as in Meet the Fockers:

<https://youtu.be/rO9p9GJ65pY>

The equivalent in an introduction would be:

**Him:** *Lucio, with a C, not with an S like in Spanish*

**You:** *Alright, nice meeting you man*

## 6. Can I Call You Bob?

If you have a complex name you will certainly meet someone who wants to butcher your name into something easier for *him*.

And yes, you want to make things easier for people. At least when you need something and at the very beginning.

But *you* should make it easier for them, they should not take the liberty of changing your name.

Changing someone's name communicates cultural superiority and it's slightly disrespectful and demeaning.

The decision is up to you whether you want to accept a nickname or not, and I recommend you don't accept the nickname unless you're really cool with it.

If they ask you if they can call you with a nickname reply something like this:

**Him:** *Can I call you Jim?*

**You:** *Why would you call me with a name that's not my name*

**Him:** *Can I call you Jane?*

**You:** *Of course you could... If my name were Jane. But since it's not, I'd rather you call me with my real name.*

**Him:** *Can I call you Max?*

**You:** *Only if I can call you Max The Second.*

*(pause)*

*Jokes aside man, that's not my name and if you just put a modicum of effort my real name is not really that difficult to get.*

### **What If It's Your Boss?**

An Asian friend working for a western company asked me what to do with a boss who asked her to come up with a westernized name for him to use.

Now not only this guy wasn't even trying to get her name right, but he also tasked her to come up with a westernized name (tasking + cultural dominance).

Of course, you don't wanna offend your boss, but if you're not happy with it, I would still recommend you encourage him to use your real name.

You could say something *"if it's really that difficult for you we can think of something, but it would also mean so much to me if you actually learned my real name"*.

And if he still insists on giving you a nickname, you know you're dealing with an insensitive boss.

### **What If People Get Your Name Wrong?**

If it's you the one who is correcting others, correct them once. And if they show a willingness to learn that's all you need really. Don't get too hung up on names: it's about the overall interaction. If they respect you, then allowing them to make mistakes is a very magnanimous move from your side.

## ***7. "How Can I Help You"***

Watch out for this one.

It's the poison on your sundae.

It looks like he is being friendly and nice, but it subtly frames you as the one who is *asking*. And help rarely comes for free. Especially in the business world.

If you're selling something for example and they tell you "how can I help you" they just framed themselves as "helping you" by buying your product. Now the frame is that you owe them and have to do something for them to get even -like a discount for example-.

I recommend you reply with something like this:

***Him:*** *How can I help you*

***You:*** *Thank you for saying that, maybe we can both be helpful to each other, we will see that (and then do your pitch from a more neutral position)*

Even outside of the business world you might still want to avoid "how can I help you".

It still frames him as the one who is dispensing help, wisdom or favors. So imagine you are walking up to a speaker after a conference:

***Him*** *(turns to you)* *Hi, how can I help you*

***You:*** *Thanks for saying that, more than helping I wanted to congratulate you on an awesome speech. How did you...*

Basically what you are doing here is removing their "mentor/mentee" frame and set yourself up as the one delivering compliments.

Then proceed to ask whatever you wanted to ask, but now from a neutral, "same level" position and not from a lower position.

## ***8. "You Got A Nice Place Here.."***

Imagine that lined delivered at your housewarming party from a guest.

Sure, it's a compliment.

And depending on how it's delivered it can simply be honest admiration and plain niceness.

But from a power dynamics perspective, the person who gives the compliment is the one with power because he is taking a judge position.

The biggest mistake you can do on these occasions is to self-efface and say something like "oh, it's nothing".

Why is it wrong?

First of all, because it breaks rapport.

And second, it gives the complimenter the opportunity to hold the judge frame even more strongly by further insisting on the validity of their judgment "nono, it's really nice, look at the color combination, lovely".

A better move is to say something like:

***Him:*** nice place you got here

***You:*** Thank you, I am glad you like it. Here you can find..

This way you pay a compliment right back, meet him at his level and then keep going.

Whenever I have Airbnb guests who try to play it a bit too dominant when I show them the place, I might use something like this:

***Him:*** Nice place you got here

***You:*** Thank you, I am glad you like it, come in, join the party

The second part can be anything, but the most important point is that you lead right after to make it a point that this is your abode and you're in charge.

You don't necessarily need to move them.

It can also be something simple, like "thank you, I will show you how it works now".

## 9. Aggressive Gambit Openers

A few people will want to test your mettle with a few direct conversation starters.

For example:

1. [Who are you](#)
2. What do you sell
3. What are you looking for
4. What the hell are you wearing

Unless it's a busy conference where everyone is running and saving time is a welcome opportunity, never submit to these small verbal acts of aggression.

By now you should know how *not* to react to these.

That is: you NEVER answer them at face value.

Depending on how friendly or unfriendly you want to be, here are a few ideas:

*(unfriendly option)*

**Him:** *What are you looking for*

**You:** *I look for people with good social skills who know how to start a conversation. It doesn't seem like you fit the bill*

*(then leave)*



N.2 happened to me in one of my last networking conferences:

*(neutral option)*

**Him:** What are you selling

**You:** What makes you think I'm selling anything

**Him:** Everyone is selling something

**You:** What are you selling then

Or alternatively:

*(neutral option)*

**Him:** What are you selling

**You:** Are you still selling man? I built my life so that I didn't need to do any sales

*(slightly demeans him, now you look superior)*

For N.3 and N.4, which are particularly unfriendly, I recommend you either ignore them, cut them out, or address their remark via a third person.

For example:

**Him:** Who are you

**You:** *(introducing yourself to someone else in the group)* Hi, I am Janet, what's your name

**Him:** What the hell are you wearing

**You:** *(looking at someone else in this group)* Why do you hang out with this guy

Of course, keep in mind the nonverbal expressions which are even more important than the verbal ones. One can start a conversation with a very direct opener such as "what are you looking for", but if they have a welcoming smile and if they flash their eyebrows upwards then it's not rude anymore.