**The Power of the Perfect Handshake**

“Handshaking is a valuable form of nonverbal communication. It is a form of interactive body language that offers insights into how the other person views the world, him or herself, and you. It is a vital, if usually subconscious, part of creating a first impression and sending a parting message.”

                                          -Robert E. Brown and Dorothea Johnson, “The Power of Handshaking”

The French kiss, the Chinese bow; and yet, when the President of China recently met with the President of France, they shook hands. Do you know why? Because the handshake is the most acceptable greeting worldwide. It transcends cultures.

What impression are you making with your handshake?

Never underestimate the power of the perfect handshake! Since the beginning of time, we have reached out with our hands to say we come in friendship. That is still the meaning of a handshake.

The handshake is the only socially acceptable way in which one can touch another person in business in the Western Culture when meeting them for the first time. A handshake leaves an indelible message upon the other person.

Handshakes reveal one’s inner traits, personality, and the way one feels about the person they are meeting.

A handshake begins a business relationship; and it “seals the deal:” Let’s shake on it. In fact, that was all that was needed at one time between two people who had come to an agreement on a business deal.

The moment we have skin-to-skin touch with someone our bodies produces something called oxytocin. Oxytocin is the connection hormone. When you shake hands with someone your body produces it; and it is the exact hormone you both need to build trust and then a deeper connection.

**Why is a powerful handshake so important?**

Because in less than five seconds, a prospective employer, client or business associate can learn a lot about you – whether you’re trustworthy, confident and competent, and whether you follow through. A good handshake accompanied by direct eye contact and a warm smile signals you are confident and trustworthy—the two most important traits for a business person to possess.

To make a winning first impression, you need a powerful handshake. To stand out from the competition, you need a powerful handshake. To land the job, you need a powerful handshake. Many people have lost job and business opportunities due to a poor handshake. That’s how important a powerful handshake is.

**How to Master the Powerful Handshake**

1. **Always be prepared for a handshake by making sure your right hand is always free to shake hands.** Shift anything you are carrying to your left hand—particularly cold drinks which can make your hands feel cold and clammy.
2. **Never shake hands with your left hand in your pocket.** Both hands should be visible.
3. **Always stand for a handshake—man or woman.**
4. **Make eye contact and smile warmly**. Beware of smiling too much since it will make you appear over-eager. Tip: Make eye contact long enough to note the color of the person’s eyes.
5. **Keep your head straight and face the other person shoulder-to-shoulder, heart-to-heart**. Keep about 18” between you and the other person.
6. **Flex knees**; move right foot 2” ahead of the left as you extend your right hand.
7. **Extend your hand vertically with the thumb up and fingers out**. Avoid palm down (dominant) or palm up (submissive). And don’t extend your hand with the thumb up and fingers curled. Angle your thumb straight to the ceiling.
8. **Don’t begin your handshake until you have connected web-to-web and the palms of your hands are touching.**
9. **Shake from the elbow, not the wrist or shoulder, with two smooth pumps.**
10. **Squeeze until you feel their muscles tighten, and then stop.**Match the other person’s grip.

**Handshakes to Avoid:**

* Bone crusher
* Limp fish
* Glove Handshake

A**lways Shake Hands**:

* When introduced to a person and when you say goodbye.
* When someone comes to your home or office to visit you.
* When introduced to a person and when you say goodbye.
* When someone comes into your home or office to visit you.
* When you meet someone outside your home or office.
* When you enter a room, are greeted by those you know, or are introduced to those you do not know.
* When you leave a gathering attended by friends or business associates.
* When you are congratulating a person who has won an award, or has given a speech.
* With those nearest you, your host, and with whomever you meet as you move around the room.
* After you have signed a contract.
* At the end of a game.

**The Man-Woman Issue**

* Historically, men were not expected to shake hands with a woman, but today, everyone is expected to shake hands with everyone in business. And a man should give a woman the same firm handshake he gives a man. In social situations, however, a man should wait for a woman to extend her hand first. In Europe, a man should wait for a woman to extend her hand in business as well as social situations.
* In general, the person with the higher status—man or woman—will initiate the handshake—in the Western culture. When other people observe the interaction, they perceive the initiator as having more status. When a woman walks up to a man and reaches out her hand to him, initiating the handshake, she is conveying to him, as well as to the rest of the world that she views her status as at least equal to and possibly even greater than his.

**Handshaking Internationally**

Handshakes can vary by culture. For instance, in the Middle East, a handshake is rather limp and lingering. In Japan, a light handshake and a nod of head are appropriate. Do your homework before traveling to another country for business. First impressions are made in seconds; and the first impression begins with your greeting.