

## **Creating a positive first impression.**

We have all heard the saying “ never judge a book by its cover.” Guess what, we do it to people all the time and we doing quickly and instinctively.

First impressions are made up of 3 things – what you say, how you say it and how you look. Simplified, it's verbal, vocal and visual. In the first 30 seconds of meeting someone the percentages of a first impression are as follows:

- **Verbal – 7%**
- **Vocal – 38%**
- **Visual – 55%**

Albert Mehrabian (Professor UCLA)

**Verbal** – Deals with your words, and the way you structure your sentences. You should be fluent and easily understood. A good opening line for an interview might be, “Good afternoon, thank you for inviting me in today. I’m really looking forward to this interview.” It is very important to start well and appear confident. So choose your words carefully and practice your opening.

Verbal only 7%? “It’s got to be worth more than that. I’m bright, intelligent and I’ve got a great story to tell.” Not in the first 30 seconds you don’t. You don’t get to say a whole lot. After you have created an initial first impression and the meeting continues, yes, your verbal percentage will go up as you get the chance to tell your story.

**Vocal** – Relates to the way your words are delivered. Do you sound confident, clear and in control? Is there passion and enthusiasm in your voice? If you’re shy, have an accent or don’t like to talk about yourself, you need to overcome these issues and sound relaxed and confident. Use the **5P’s + Practice!**

If you do nothing else with the information in this book except improve your communication skills, you will have made a major impact on your future. Your aim is to use your voice and vocal signals to make people feel comfortable and identify with you.

Remember – people who communicate effectively are perceived to be more intelligent.

**Visual** – There are two parts to the visual - your appearance and your body language. Both are really important in making a positive first impression.

- **Appearance** – Pay close attention to the way you dress and the style of clothing that you wear to an interview. Clothes cover up to 80% of your body, so make sure that they are sending out the right message. Even if low necklines are the fashion, ladies need to consider what’s appropriate not to embarrass their interviewers. Your clothes should be smart, clean, in good condition and fit properly. Don’t forget to polish your shoes and pay particular attention to personal grooming such as your hair, nails, teeth and breath. Remove hats and don’t hide behind your hair or play with it.

- **Body language** - To appear confident physically, you need to walk tall and straight, look people in the eye and give a positive handshake. Sit up straight during the interview and don't fidget or display nervous mannerisms. Good posture is important at all times.

Yes, I know it sounds like the army, but it's really important. Interviewers see too many people sending out negative signals by shuffling into their office, slouching in the chair, staring at their feet or hiding behind hair.

- **Eye contact** – Always maintain positive eye contact in an interview without staring people down. If you don't, they are likely to think that you are hiding something. Remember when you were a kid and had been caught out, your parent would say "Look me in the eye and tell me the truth." Positive eye contact implies trustworthiness, respect and a good open communication style.
- **Handshakes** – When doing this with a group I get to see all sorts of handshakes, such as bone-crushers, role-em over power shakes, sweaty hands, limp hands, dipping the fingers, or two handed shakes. They all send out the wrong message. There's a whole study into the physiology of positive handshakes.

**N.B.** A good handshake is a positive thumb web to web, grip and shake. (You know that, but loads of people get it wrong and create a negative first impression.)

Remember you don't get a second chance to create a first impression!

Good luck in your next interview, James E Lynch