

## The First Impressions Workbook

You never get a second chance to make a great first impression. Within a few seconds, with just a glance, people have judged your social and economic level, your level of education, and even your level of success. Within minutes, they've also decided your level of intelligence, trustworthiness, competence, friendliness, and confidence. Although these evaluations happen in an instant, they can last for years: first impressions are often indelible. Why do split-second impressions, which may have been made on a bad hair day, last for so long?

One reason is that, because “faced with the choice between changing one’s mind and proving there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy on the proof,” said economist John Kenneth Galbraith. Behavioral research has since proven him right: once we’ve made a judgment about someone, we spend the rest of our acquaintanceship seeking to prove ourselves correct. Everything we see and hear gets filtered through this initial opinion.

Make a favorable impression when first meeting someone, and the rest of your working relationship will be colored by it, thereby tipping the scales in your favor. On the other hand, an unfavorable first impression can prove impossible to overcome, often deciding the outcome of a meeting even if the rest of the interaction was impeccable. Litigators know just how much their client’s first impression on a jury can affect the outcome of the trial and often spend hours preparing them for this first moment.

So how do first impressions happen, anyway? The Harvard team realized that first impressions are generated in the most primitive area of the brain. Within one-twentieth of a second, our

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spindle cells fire with information about how we feel about this person. This information is based on primal instinct, rather than rational thought.

So, why did the human race develop this deeply ingrained trust in the accuracy of first impressions? In our primal times, humans often only had a split second to determine whether the shape coming into their field of vision was animate or inanimate, human or non-human, friend or foe—in other words “fight, flight, or relax?” Those who could make these split-second decisions accurately survived, thrived, and multiplied. Those who couldn’t, ended up as somebody else’s dinner.

Today, we’re basically still operating on hunter-gatherer instincts. Let’s go through what happens when we first meeting someone. Our first instinctive reaction is: *fight or flight?* To make this choice, the brain first to determine which of you would win in a fight. Clues to this evaluation can include height and size, age, gender, etc. Then, the second question arises: *friend or foe?* Here, you’ll look to the clues that were so useful in tribal times: ethnicity, clothing, and demeanor, including facial expressions and body language. Recent research found that there’s a subset of mirror neurons whose only job is to detect people’s smiles and laughter.

It’s only afterwards that the content of what we say and how we say it (choice of words, accent, etc.) comes into play. No wonder studies show that words carry less than 20% of our communication!

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***The Golden Rule***

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So how can you make a fantastic first impression? The “golden rule” is actually quite simple: *People like people who are like them.* During the vast majority of our history, from which our primal instincts are drawn, people lived in tribes. In such an environment, being able to accurately recognize—through clothing, speech, etc.—whether or not someone was of your tribe could have life-or-death implications. If you can make these primal instinctive responses work in your favor, half the battle is won.

When people are similar in terms of dress styles, appearance, demeanor, and speech, they automatically assume they are equally similar in social background, education, and even values. They feel part of the same tribe—or, as Rudyard Kipling wrote in *The Jungle Book*, “We are of one blood, you and I.”

Some things you have little control over; but others—such as clothing—are entirely your choice. How much can you adjust to the people you are meeting? You wouldn’t wear a Hawaiian shirt in an investment bank, nor would you wear a three-piece suit in a startup. Even within the same industry, dress codes vary widely—a tax lawyer might not wear the same suit as an entertainment lawyer. It’s all a question of adapting to *their* comfort zone. It’s worth doing your research: if you’re going to a party, call the host; if you’re going to a job interview, go by the office a few days before to see what the people coming in and out of it are wearing.

Another crucial element in this regard is the amount of space you give people. Have you ever felt uncomfortable with someone who got too close to you? In the same manner that animals define and defend their territories, we humans develop a sense of “ownership” of the space around us.

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This territory, even if it's just a few inches, is nonetheless our "personal space zone" and we react strongly if it is invaded.

The size of the personal space varies by culture and by density of population. For instance, the American zone is far bigger than its French counterpart. The German requirement for personal space is notoriously large, extending even to their car. Personal space tends to be smaller in Latin countries, but not quite as small as in the Middle East, where a proverb declares one must smell the breath of a man to know if he is to be trusted.

For North Americans, anything greater than ten feet out tends to be *public space*. Between ten feet and an arm's length is your *social space*; from the arm's length to about a foot is your *personal space*. Anything closer than a foot, watch out—you've just invaded their *private space*.

I realized just how ingrained our sense of personal space is by trying to overrule my own instincts while standing on a crowded subway. When the doors opened and people poured out, creating lots of empty pockets of space, I resisted the urge to move away from my nearest neighbor. Instead, I made myself stay in the same spot and same position, as close as we'd been when the crowd pushed us together.

To my own amusement, I realized this felt physically uncomfortable, to the point of being nearly painful! And despite my best efforts to stay in place, I realized too late my body had gotten away from me: though I would not move my feet, the rest of my body was leaning away as much as balance and gravity allowed...

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Our bodies are indeed one of the key ways we interact with people; far more in fact than we realize and far more than our words do. The Harvard Business Review recently detailed research showing that the delivery of a message is far more important than the message itself. A negative performance review accompanied by positive body language was received much better than a positive review accompanied by negative body language.

As one University of Pennsylvania study put it, your body is a continuous transmitter, revealing your feelings even as they change from moment to moment. Everything about you, from the angle at which you hold your head to the position of your feet, is broadcasting information to everyone within sight at the rate of several thousand signals per second.

Unfortunately, you control very little of this flow consciously. Just like your breath and your heartbeat, it is one of the millions of bodily functions controlled by your subconscious mind. Should you then give up hope of having any sway over this mass of signals you broadcast? Not quite yet, because there's one particular limitation of the subconscious mind that will actually work in your favor: its inability to distinguish between imagination and reality.

Why can't the subconscious mind tell them apart? Perhaps because the brain has no direct connection to reality. Instead, it relies on chemical signals from the body's sensory organs to decide what's happening out there. In fact, all the brain does is *create images* of what the other organs tell it is happening—literally *image-ination*. And this is precisely what makes it so susceptible to suggestion.

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Have you ever felt your heart pounding and your blood curdling during a scary movie? Consciously, you know it's just a movie. The actors are delighted to look like they're being murdered in exchange for a few million dollars. Yet your mind sees blood on the screen, and it reacts accordingly, sending you straight into fight-or-flight mode with adrenaline rushing through your system.

On a physical level, Harvard's Prof. Cohen showed that imagining oneself performing an activity fires the same neurotransmitters and the same pathways as actually performing the activity! This is the reason techniques such as visualization work so well.

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### ***Visualization: Olympians' secret to success***

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In sports, visualization has been considered an essential tool for decades. Professional athletes will spend hours visualizing their victory, telling their mind just what they want their body to achieve. Golfer Jack Nicklaus said that he never hit a shot, even during practice, without visualizing it first. Formula 1 racer Michael Schumacher has also used visualization training throughout his career. "Mental practice can actually improve real-world performance" explains neuroscientist Ian Robertson in his book *Mind Sculpture*.

You, too, can use visualization, for example to broadcast exactly the message of warm confidence you want to convey when first meeting someone. Just by re-experiencing a moment of triumph, your subconscious mind will send a remarkable chain reaction of confident signals cascading through your body. These confidence signals will be picked up by the people you meet, and they'll subconsciously assume you have something to be confident about...

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So how does it work? All it takes is just a few seconds—you could even do it on the elevator just before a meeting, or in the reception area as you're waiting for an interview. Relax, and close your eyes—you'll need your full powers of concentration. Now focus, and make it real. Guided imagery must be precise, vivid, and detailed to be effective, says Harvard-trained specialist Stephen Krauss. When visualization was used with the 1976 Olympic ski team, precision and detail were crucial to the process. Skiers visualized themselves careening through the entire course, feeling the muscles tensing, experiencing each bump and turn in their minds. In fact, visualization can be so real as to be physically exhausting!

To make your imagery most effective, involve all five senses. Hear, see, smell, feel whatever it is you felt when you were living that experience. Above all, experience all the warm confident emotions and sensations rising.

When you perform this visualization exercise, even for just a minute, thousands of friendly signals—from the softening of your eyebrows to the dilation of your pupils—will come pouring out of you, thus broadcasting a message of trust and liking to the world. You'll instinctively smile, and there's a good chance it'll be not a forced, "social" smile but a real, warm smile (called a "Duchenne" smile) that will melt anyone. Better still, you'll internally feel more relaxed and confident—after all, you're going to meet a friend!

Why does it work this way? Because smiling activates at least 14 muscles in your face, sending electrical impulses to your brain stimulating the all-important serotonin release, which gives you a

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warm feeling of well-being. And if they smile back, as they most likely will (their mirror neurons activating), they'll get the warm serotonin effect, too.

When can you use this trick? Of course, you can use it when meeting someone for the first time, when you obviously want to make a great impression. In fact, any time you want to feel confident and comfortable—for instance, when walking into a room full of strangers at an event, or walking on stage to give a presentation. Perhaps most important of all, try it just before walking into the office of someone whom you know is difficult. Just imagine: Instead of approaching this prickly pear with a closed and defensive body language as everybody else probably does, you're going to be pouring out warmth and friendliness, in thousands of signals per minute. They'll melt!

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### ***Donald Trump Knows The Art of The Deal—But Does He Know The Art of the Handshake?***

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A Fortune 500 CEO once said that when he had to choose between two candidates with similar qualifications, he gave the position to the candidate with the better handshake.

Is his reaction extreme? Perhaps, but management experts at the University of Iowa analyzing interactions in job interviews declared handshakes “more important than agreeableness, conscientiousness or emotional stability.” Other studies concluded, “a handshake improves the quality of the interaction, thereby producing a higher degree of intimacy and trust within a matter of seconds.”

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Though it may seem inconsequential, a handshake is in indeed a serious step in intimacy. The physical contact involved in a handshake requires that the personal space barrier be suspended, if only for a moment. It therefore requires trust; if the trust is validated (the handshake goes well) the first step in a relationship is made.

The first commonly known depiction of a handshake was found in Egyptian frescoes, around 2800 B.C. Since then, across cultures, across hemispheres, the handshake has been surprisingly similar—always with the right hand. This last point is what explains the handshake's entire *raison d'être*. Think about it—why the right? For most people, the right hand and arm were the ones used for wielding weapons. Certain sociologists postulate that this historical fact may be the reason that the handshake has conventionally been more of a male tradition: Women were simply less likely to carry weapons.

In Roman times, the handshake was in fact an arm clasp. One man would reach out his weapon hand and clasp just below the elbow of the other. This gesture afforded a better opportunity to feel for daggers hidden in one's sleeves. Medieval knights took precautions a step further, by adding a shake to the clasp to dislodge any hidden weapons.

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### ***Dead Fish and Knuckle Crunchers***

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There are, unfortunately, as many types of bad handshakes as there are people. So rather than irk you with an exhaustive list, I'll mention just a few of the worst offenders. Let's start with the well-known *knuckle cruncher*. Yes, it may be a demonstration of machismo, but it could also be

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the result of a person genuinely unaware of his (or her) strength. Alternatively, it might be the result of misguided teachings—some women have been taught that the tougher their shake, the more seriously they will be taken. Hence, they conclude that they should crush their handshake partner's palm as if their life depended on it.

A strong contender for the best-known baddie is the *dead fish*, where a limp, lifeless hand is extended and just barely shaken. It gets even worse when the hand is cold and clammy. This is, perhaps, the worst of all delinquents. The cruncher at least communicates something, whereas the message sent by the dead fish is completely apathetic. This handshake can ruin a meeting before it even begins. If you suspect you have any tendency toward dead fish shakes, you will need to act fast. Just like dead fish, the longer they're ignored, the more they stink.

Another great classic is the *finger squeeze*, which—sadly—certain women believe to be “more feminine” and hence “more appropriate.” But this type of handshake can also be the result of confusion, bad timing, or over-eagerness (wanting to squeeze too soon).

Now we get into the lesser celebrities. The *pull-in* can start with a good shake, but its ending (directing you toward a certain direction) will ruin any good feelings that were initially created. What's worse, the person being reeled in can feel somewhat manipulated.

More direct is the *dominant* handshake, which is characterized by the hand being extended, palm down. This (characteristically more male, sorry!) hand position symbolizes, perhaps, the intention to “have the upper hand” in the equation. A nasty variation of this shake would be the

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*twisting dominant*, where the hand is extended innocently straight outward, but twists once the shake is initiated to gain the upper hand. If you receive this kind of handshake, watch out! It tells you a thing or two about how this person intends to conduct the relation.

We'll close this woeful list with the classic *two-handed handshake*. In this case, you'll also feel the left hand at work, closing in on your hand, wrist, arm, shoulder, or neck. It's also known as the "*politician's handshake*".... Enough said!

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### ***The Perfect Handshake***

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So what, then, are the ingredients of a perfect handshake? I'm so glad you asked. First things first: Make sure your right hand is free. Shift anything it may be holding—briefcase, purse, etc.—to your left hand, well in advance. You don't want to have to scramble at the last minute.

Avoid holding a drink in your right hand, especially if it's a cold drink; the condensation will make your hand feel cold and clammy, thus producing the dreaded *dead fish*. If you tend to have clammy hands naturally, just give them a spray of antiperspirant before you leave the house.

Before shaking someone's hand, rise if you're seated, no matter whether you are a man or a woman. And even if you have nothing in your hands, keep them out of your pockets. Showing your palms, being openhanded, makes you look more open and honest.

Make sure to use plenty of eye contact, and smile warmly but briefly—too much, and you'll appear overeager. For the same reason, make sure your arm is fully extended. An arm too close

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to the body looks insecure. Keep your head straight, without tilting it in any way, and face the person “heart to heart” to ensure full frontal facing.

You’ll want to keep your hand perfectly perpendicular, neither dominant (palm down) nor submissive (palm up). If you’re in doubt, focus on keeping your thumb pointing straight to the ceiling.

Here are the two most important points to remember when engaging in a handshake: First, open wide the space between your thumb and index finger to make sure you get contact between the webs of your thumbs. Second, ensure contact between the palms of your hands by keeping your palm flat—not cupped—and by draping your hand across your handshake partner’s in a diagonal. Try to “wrap” your fingers around your counterpart’s hand, scaling your fingers one by one as if you were giving a hug with your hand. It’s as if you were trying to engulf their hand in yours, embracing their hand. You almost have your index finger on their pulse (almost, but not quite).

Once full contact is made, put your thumb down, lock thumbs, and squeeze about as much as your counterpart did—firmly, but no more than they. Shake from the elbow (not the wrist), linger for a moment if you want to convey particular warmth, and step back.

Voilà!

So, you’ve made a fantastic first impression. You’ve given the world’s best handshake. Now what? Conversation...

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In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, William Gladstone was running against archrival Benjamin Disraeli to be Prime Minister of the British Empire. One young lady happened to dine with each of them, and the press asked her what impressions the rivals had made upon her. She said, “After dining with Mr. Gladstone, I thought he was the cleverest person in England. But after dining with Mr. Disraeli, I thought *I* was the cleverest person in England.” Guess who won the election?

Disraeli’s genius was in making whomever he was speaking with feel intelligent and fascinating.

Bill Clinton is said to make everyone he’s speaking to feel as if they’re the most important person in the room. Charisma is not a question of wit, wisdom, or wordplay. In fact, it comes down to one thing: your attitude. Simply decide that whomever you’re facing is the most interesting person you’ve ever met. As Dale Carnegie said, “You can make more friends in two months by becoming truly interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you”.

So don’t try to impress them—let them impress you, and they will love you for it. People obviously love to feel impressive. And thanks to the *Pavlovian Reflex*, they’ll associate you with these feelings.

Nobel-prize-winning Dr Pavlov realized back in 1904 that if he rang a bell every time he fed the laboratory dogs, they soon came to associate the sound with the food, and as soon as he rang the bell, they’d start drooling.

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It's called *classic conditioning*, and we humans work exactly the same way. Are there certain songs that make you feel energized? How about one that makes you feel or nostalgic and misty-eyed? That's classic conditioning.

Let's say that you witness a deadly traffic collision on a certain street corner. From now on, what are you going to think of whenever you pass that corner? Of course, the accident. People associate certain feelings to specific places, but also to specific experiences, and of course to specific people.

Have you ever heard of the phrase "to shoot the messenger?" Back in ancient Persia, a messenger would be dispatched to the king with tidings of either victory, or defeat. If the tidings were of victory, he was treated to a feast. But if he came bearing news of defeat, he was immediately executed. It's still valid today: people will associate you to whatever feelings you produce in them on a consistent basis. So how are you making people feel?

You really want to be careful of how you're making people feel, both about you, and about themselves: we often cause negative conditioning without even realizing it. Here's an example: do you have a hard time accepting compliments? When someone tells you that you look particularly good or accomplished something impressive, do you instinctively tend to downplay it? Unfortunately, you've essentially told your complimenter that they were wrong to admire something. So they probably feel rather foolish. Pretty

soon, they'll stop trying. If, on the other hand, you make them feel good for complimenting you, for instance by telling them they "made your day," they'll feel good about themselves, and thus want to do it again.

One of the easiest ways to make people feel good around you is to focus the conversation on them. "*Talk to a man about himself, and he will listen for hours,*" said Disraeli. Keep the spotlight on them for as long as possible—it's the one subject most people find the most fascinating of all. And the longer you keep *them* talking, the more captivating they'll find you.

To keep people talking, simply ask upbeat and open-ended questions. You want your queries open-ended because closed questions, once answered by yes or no, land you right back where you started—and you'll then have to think of another question to keep the conversation going. That your questions be upbeat is also important because, remember, people will associate you with whatever feelings your conversation generates.

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### ***Getting them talking***

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One good conversation starter is to notice something about the person and offer a compliment. You can then continue with an open-ended question such as "What's the story behind it?" After all, if they chose to wear this item it must be because they like it and have positive feelings and neuro-associations to it. In addition, the word "story" has a very strong emotional effect on most people—it sends them straight into storytelling mode, which instantly changes the rapport

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between you. You're also sending out the very flattering signal that they seem interesting to you, and that you'd like to hear more about them.

A good question in this vein is: "Where are you from?" No matter what the answer, it will provide fodder for further questioning. Whether they answer New York, Nantucket or New Delhi, if you're not from that area, you can follow up the response with "What was it like growing up there?" The smaller the town of origin, the more delighted they will be that you have expressed any interest in it. And if you happen to be from their area of birth, rejoice! You now have much in common to talk about.

Any question about their past, distant or recent, is thus the simplest way to get people to take a stroll along memory lane. If you're in a social setting, you can ask them about their last vacation. If their answers are a bit short, if they need prodding, if they're a bit shy, you can use the "echo" technique—simply repeat their last words back to them with an interrogative tone of voice.

For instance, if someone said, "I went white-water rafting," reply, "White-water rafting?" When you do so, make sure both your facial expression and your tone of voice convey your interest. This technique has the same effect as a follow-up question, such as "Really?"

You can also keep them talking thanks to the "bounce back" technique: Answer the question with a fact, add some personal coloring, and redirect the question to them. For instance:

"So where are you moving to?"

“To Chelsea—we fell in love with the parks and the bakeries. What do you think of the neighborhood?”

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### *Effective Listening*

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Even if they're doing all the talking, you can't just let them talk and zone out, nor can you be focused on what you're going to say next, just waiting for your turn to speak. Listening—effective listening—is, in fact, quite a skill.

Indeed, effective listening means behaving in a way that makes whomever you're speaking with feel truly understood. Your most important tool here eye contact—the importance of which you've no doubt heard about ad nauseam, and for good reason. The impact of profound eye contact cannot be overstated.

Why are the eyes called "windows to the soul"? Because they are the most mobile part of the entire face—and thus, the most expressive. Picture someone who's wearing sunglasses. On a gut level, wouldn't you find it harder to read them? This is why poker players wear sunglasses.

The Wellens study showed that, when you stare with intensity at your conversational partners, it speeds their heart rate and sends a hormone called *phenylethylamine*, or PEA, coursing through their blood stream. At the subconscious level, PEA transmits feelings of empathy. Profound eye contact also connotes trust, knowledge, and intelligence...

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As it turns out, our brains are hardwired to experience “separation distress” whenever someone with whom we have meaningful eye contact turns their gaze away. The circuitry of our brains reacts instantly and tells us to either:

- Move to reconnect with them using the social skills of our higher brain (cortex),
- Disconnect from them in the fight-or-flight mode of our mid-brain (amygdala),
- Shut down and freeze in the mode of our lower survival brain (brainstem).

One good way to avoid this is to keep eye contact for three full seconds at the end of your interaction with people (it may sound short, but it’ll feel long!) With just this, they’ll feel you were truly paying attention to them.

Not only must you ensure eye contact—for trusting rapport, it must also be the right *kind* of eye contact. Imagine a gangster in a movie—the shady, suspicious character. What would his eyes look like? Narrow, tense, suspicious. That’s an untrustworthy eye appearance. Now, think of the opposite—the image of innocence, the eyes of a little child. Think of what those would look like—soft, open eyes — there’s a reason it’s called “wide-eyed innocence.”

So, to create rapport, appear trustworthy, and give people a feeling of comfort and trust around you, relax your eyes. Make sure there’s not a hint of tension in the muscles controlling them. Not only will it give you the right expression, it’ll also give you the right feeling: Les Fehmi, a neuroscientist specializing in this matter, found that when our eyes are in “sharp focus”, our stress responses increase. As soon as we relax our eyes, the rest of our body follows.

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***Limbic Synchrony***

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Your second crucial tool to create trust and comfort is your body language. As mentioned, we feel most comfortable with those of our tribe, who are just like us. One way to give people this feeling of *self-similarity* is to synchronize your posture with theirs. It's called *limbic synchrony*, and it's hard-wired into the human brain.

This tendency is due to another class of neurons called *oscillators*, which coordinate people physically by regulating how and when their bodies move together. Daniel Goleman (author of both *Emotional Intelligence* and *Social Intelligence*) demonstrated in the Harvard business review what happens when two cellists play together. Not only do they hit their notes in unison, but thanks to oscillators, the two cellists' right brain hemispheres are more closely coordinated to one another than they are to the left hemispheres of their own brains.

Several studies across the world, from Duke University in the US to universities in the Netherlands, found that synchronizing your body language with your conversation partners' can get them to pick up your dropped items, support your causes, buy your product....

We all do this naturally with those of our tribe. Have you ever noticed that people who've been married forever often end up looking like each other? It's actually a well-studied fact: As we spend time together, we tend to adapt to each other's body language, including our facial expressions. The latter end up shaping our faces in similar ways by using the same facial muscles repeatedly.

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Goleman once analyzed a video of Herb Kelleher, cofounder and former CEO of southwest airline, strolling through the corridors of the airline's hub. He said "we could practically see him activate the mirror neurons, oscillators, and other social circuitry in each person he encountered."

You can synchronize your overall posture or such specific gestures as head tilts, facial expressions, and weight shifts. But you want to mirror, not match—if they move their left hand, you move your right. Just like in a mirror, this ensures the *impression* of a faithful rendition. Your voice is one of the most important things to synchronize. When doing so, try to match the other person's speed, pitch, and intonation.

Because people focus primarily on themselves while interacting, they won't notice that you're synchronizing unless you're being exceedingly obvious about it. Here are some other tools to increase subtlety:

- Be selective: pick the gestures that feel natural to you. (Some postures are gender-specific...)
- Use variations in amplitude (if they made a small gesture, make a big one.)
- Use lag time: let two to five seconds elapse before you mirror.

Not only will synchronization make them like you and trust you; it's also one of the most powerful ways for you to understand exactly what emotions they're feeling— because our physiology affects our psychology. You know, of course, that your emotions affect your body language. But did you know the process also works in reverse? Emotions and body language are so linked that adopting a certain posture will, in fact, create the corresponding feelings in your mind. As Edgar Allan Poe described it, "When I wish to find out [what a man thinks] I fashion

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the expression of my face in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind.” In plain English: when you move like they move, you feel what they feel.

Recent research on the behavioral science of leadership published in the Harvard business Review found that when people exhibit empathy and become attuned to others’ moods, they affect both their own brain chemistry and that of others. Indeed, researchers have found that the leader-follower dynamic is not a case of independent brains reacting consciously or unconsciously to each other. Rather, the individual minds become, said the study, “fused into a single system.” Leading effectively is, in other words, less about mastering situations—or even mastering social skill sets—than about developing a genuine interest in and talent for fostering positive feelings in the people whose cooperation and support you need. These interpersonal competencies, they explained, are built on specific sets of neural circuits and related endocrine systems that inspire others.

When you’re “in synch” with someone, you’ll *feel* the difference. Just try moving in and out of synch during your next few conversations. When you’re in synch, you’ll feel a kind of understanding with the person you’re speaking to.

Synchronization is one of the few things that can help you recover from a bad first impression; restoring comfort and trust. It’s well worth mastering!

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Will it feel odd at first? Well, it may. But then, so did brushing your teeth when you first learned how. Now, on the other hand, it's (hopefully) become such a habit you don't even have to think about it. A new habit is said to take twenty-one days to take hold, so if you practice often enough, in three weeks it'll be second nature.

Another powerful tool to use in building rapport is "incidental touching," as N. Boothman calls it. He synthesized vast amounts of research all describing the persuasive power of touch. In one experiment at a library, a slight brush of the hand when people handed over their library cards was enough to improve the person's opinion of the library as a whole. An experiment conducted at a restaurant showed that waiters could increase their tips by an average of 15% just by briefly touching patrons before they signed the check.

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### *Speaking*

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Of course, you're going to do some speaking, too. But even when you're speaking, the one word that should pop up most often in your conversation is not *I*, but rather *you*. Instead of saying "I read a great article on that subject in the New York Times" try "You might enjoy the recent New York Times article on the subject." Or simply insert, "You know, ..." before any sentence to make them instantly perk up and pay attention.

You can even go a step further and synchronize your spoken language, as well as your body language, with theirs. Simply adjust your choice of words, your breadth and depth of vocabulary, and your expressions to suit your audience: focus on their field of interest, and choose metaphors

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from those domains. If they're into golf, and you want to talk about success, speak of hitting a hole-in-one. If they sail, a catastrophe becomes a shipwreck.

In fact, you want to paint as many pictures as possible, because the brain thinks visually. Ask yourself: Do you have pillows on your bed? Yes? No? Either way, how did you know? Your mind flashed the image of your bed, and you saw whether there were pillows on it.

Business guru Alan Weiss gives a dramatic example: if you were told the number of deaths caused by smoking every year, would you remember that exact figure three months from now? Probably not. But what if you were told that this figure was equal to three fully loaded Boeing 747 planes crashing into the earth every day for a year, with no survivors! Would you remember *that* for a while?

This tendency of the brain to think visually can also lead to dangerous situations; because there's no such thing as a non-image. Here's what I mean: if I entreat you NOT to think of a white elephant—don't picture a white elephant, at all, please—what's the first think your brain serves up? Right. Saying “no white elephants” lead to seeing elephants. So what happens when you tell someone “no problem” or “don't worry”? Their brain thinks “problem” or “worry.” Instead, use positive images: “We'll take care of it.” You can easily replace “Don't hesitate to call” with “Please feel free to call anytime.” (If, that is, you want them to.)

One of the easiest ways to make people feel intelligent, interesting, and even impressive is simply to pause before you answer. Master pianist Arthur Rubenstein once said “The notes I

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handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes—ah, that is where the art resides.”

Knowing how and when to pause is also an art in conversation: when someone has spoken, see if you can let your facial expression react first; showing that you’re absorbing what they’ve just said and giving their brilliant statement the consideration it deserves. Only then (after about two seconds) do you answer.

And, of course, never, ever interrupt— even if the impulse to do so comes from excitement about something they’ve just said. On the other hand, if they interrupt you, let them. Even if they’re wrong to do so, they still feel that what they have to say is just so much more important—and that’s a battle that simply isn’t worth the fight! In fact, make sure you keep your sentences short, leaving frequent pauses so they can jump in.

Whatever happens, don’t waste a thought worrying about what you’ve just said, what you wish you hadn’t said, or what you are going to say next. In the final analysis, what people will remember is not what was said—after all, less than 20% of information is transmitted through words. Rather, it is how it *felt* to be talking to you—the emotional imprint of the conversation—that remains etched in their minds. As long as you keep the spotlight on your audience and make them feel like stars, the emotional imprint of your conversation will be simply splendid.