

The background of the book cover is a dense pattern of black umbrellas, viewed from above. In the center-left area, one umbrella is a bright yellow, standing out from the rest. The author's name is printed in orange at the top, and the title is in yellow in the middle. A quote from a previous work is in white on the right side, and the subtitle is in white at the bottom.

DIANNA
BOOHER

Bestselling author of
*Communicate
with Confidence!*[®]

CREATING
PERSONAL
PRESENCE

Look, Talk, Think, and Act
Like a Leader

An Excerpt From

***Creating Personal Presence:
Look, Talk, Think, and Act Like a Leader***

by Dianna Booher
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PERSONAL PRESENCE

Most
Observable

LOOK

- Physical appearance, including body language, dress, accessories, grooming
- Energy, passion, spirit
- Surroundings such as personal work space

Least
Important

TALK

- Speaking patterns and vocal quality
- Tone of voice that reveals attitude
- Word choices and use of language
- Ability to carry on a conversation
- Emotional reactions and outbursts

THINK

- Capacity to think strategically, to cut through the clutter, to summarize well
- Ability to organize ideas coherently
- Ability to think visually and communicate with stories, analogies, metaphors, and sound bites to make messages clear and memorable
- Ability to think on your feet under pressure

ACT

- Acting consistently with integrity
- Demonstrating a willingness to listen to others' ideas
- Engaging with others; being approachable
- Being genuine
- Demonstrating thoughtfulness and good manners out of a sense of humility rather than arrogance
- Having a sense of humor
- Being competent and accountable for results

Least
Observable

Most
Important

Your character serves as the foundation of the funnel. But your appearance is typically what others observe first about you. As you develop your presence in all four areas, you will increase your impact.

Specifically, you'll learn to:

- Think on your feet under pressure as you state opinions and answer questions.
- Cut through the clutter and communicate issues clearly in ways that engage others both intellectually and emotionally.
- Win others' trust by identifying specific steps to demonstrate your integrity and goodwill.
- Use your body language to build rapport and connect with an audience, an executive team, your staff, a prospective employer, and your clients.
- Eliminate body language that undermines your credibility and sabotages your success.
- Use your voice and language to demonstrate competence and calm rather than incompetence and stress.
- Position yourself as a thought leader with a strategic perspective.

No matter where each of us is on the continuum of personal presence, we can all improve. Personal presence is about developing your communication skills, thinking skills, and character to influence others for good and help you achieve your goals in life.

Most
Observable



Least
Observable

LOOK

- Physical appearance, including body language, dress, accessories, grooming
- Energy, passion, spirit
- Surroundings such as personal work space

TALK

THINK

ACT

Least
Important



Most
Important

PART 1: HOW YOU LOOK

Consider First Impressions Like First Loves

*If people turn to look at you on the street,
you are not well dressed.*

—BEAU BRUMMEL

The operations manager handed me two files to conduct the third and final round of interviews for a marketing specialist. “In my opinion, both are equally qualified,” she said.

Caitlin’s interview was scheduled first. Dressed attractively in a business suit, she walked into my office with an air of confidence well beyond her thirty years. She shook hands firmly, maintained great eye contact, smiled often, answered my questions clearly and crisply, and asked for the job before she left.

But I was predisposed to hire my second interviewee of the day, Rachel, because she came highly recommended through a colleague. She walked into my office without introducing herself and without extending her hand for the typical handshake. Disappointed, I let it pass, assuming she felt we already “knew it each other” because of the colleague’s personal introduction. Younger than her competitor, she immediately gave me reason to believe that those years might make a huge difference. Although pleasant enough in her demeanor, she folded into herself. As she answered my questions about her career goals and past job, she spoke

softly and sounded tentative, like a high schooler responding to the principal.

Rachel had a marketing degree and the trusted colleague had described her as “hard working, smart, and dependable.” But I hired Caitlin.

Big mistake.

As it turned out, Caitlin couldn’t learn the database software, had no grasp of grammar when writing email, and sported a poor customer service attitude. A few weeks later, I called Rachel back and offered her the position. Even so, I again had second thoughts when talking with her on the phone (especially when I learned that she’d been looking for work for more than a year). We immediately put her through the training programs we offer to our clients. Then because she was such a quick study and took the initiative to observe the speakers and sales professionals in and out of our offices weekly, she learned fast. Her body language changed. Her voice took on an air of authority. Within a few months she took on the role of fielding calls with major clients, speaker bureaus, and distributors. Compliments came our way almost weekly from those who spoke with her on the phone, and because of the confidence and poise she developed, literally no one would have ever guessed her age: 23. For the next several years and until she moved away, she did a great job for us.

But my point in the comparison is not Caitlin’s initial confidence and Rachel’s reticence. Rather, it’s the critical assessment of personal presence on first meeting.

Such perceptions dictate decisions and actions every day in the world around us. Buyers make purchases based on the personal presence and persuasiveness of the salesperson. Negotiators with the strongest personal presence, not necessarily the strongest argument, walk away with the best deals.¹ People often start—or decline—a dating relationship based on first impressions. Organizations and nations often elect their leaders based on the power of personal presence as conveyed through the media.

People size you up quickly, and change their minds slowly. Researchers tell us that somewhere between eleven milliseconds

and five minutes, people make judgments that do not differ from impressions made after much longer periods. So instead of resisting that fact, understand how to make it work for you rather than against you.

Yes, you can increase your presence just as Rachel did, and people *do* change their opinions of you. But the sooner you learn these skills and develop these attributes, the better. Changing impressions is not as easy as tossing away old business cards and creating a new image with different ones.

Decide what first impressions you want to last and start there.

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Changing impressions is not as easy as tossing away old business cards and creating a new image with different ones.
.....

Take Notice of the Tangibles

You don't have to be good-looking, but that perception helps. What's good-looking? Forget movie-star looks. Here's what most cultures consider attractive: a symmetrical face, a proportionately sized body, clear skin, healthy hair, and straight teeth.²

Packaging and preparation can pay off handsomely. Consider the difference packaging makes in how much you're willing to pay for an item, say, software—whether the program comes on a disk with a simple black-and-white label inside a clear plastic sleeve versus the program inside a colorful well-designed package, accompanied by a brochure, instructions, and online support.

Physical attractiveness results in a fatter paycheck. Particularly, taller people earn more money than shorter people. For both men and women, a 1-inch increase brings a 1.4–2.9 percent higher paycheck. For men, a 4-inch differential in height amounts to a 9.2 percent increase in earnings.³ According to Arianne Cohen, in *The Tall Book*, tall people earn \$789 more per inch per year.⁴

Robert Cialdini also has reported significant studies in this same area: At-

.....
Packaging and preparation can pay off handsomely.
.....

tractive political candidates get more votes. Attractive criminals get lighter sentences. Attractive students get more teacher attention.⁵

But wait a moment before you head off to the plastic surgeon. Although the correlation between looks and earnings has been evident for years, recent studies get to the heart of the matter: It's not *just* that beautiful people bias their bosses. Instead, the increase in wages can be attributed to three things: (1) Attractive people are more confident (about 20 percent of the cases). (2) Attractive people are considered more competent by employers—although a wrong assumption (about 30 percent of the cases). (3) Attractive people have certain skills such as communication skills and social skills that enable them to interact well (about 50 percent of the cases).⁶

All that's good news. You don't need a plastic surgeon to build confidence, teach communication, or improve your social interactions. (Besides, we'll be covering all those secrets in the following pages.)

And obviously, you can't increase your height. Presence has much to do with perception. To be perceived taller, stand tall, walk tall, and sit tall by adjusting your posture and using large gestures. Wear solid colors so you're not "cut in two" at the waist. Women, if you're wearing a jacket in a contrasting color, make sure the blouse or shell underneath matches your pants so that when the jacket hangs open, you still have the solid color from neck to ankle that elongates your appearance. Men, wear pinstripes for an elongated appearance.

As the cliché goes, attractiveness or beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Package your appearance to best advantage: good grooming; clothing styles and colors to compliment your body build, eyes, skin, hair coloring; hair styles to compliment your facial shape; makeup to compliment your natural coloring.

Know what works—and what doesn't. Here are several suggestions for help:

- Visit a good tailor. Have a good suit made and walk in with a list of questions while you're selecting fabrics and being fitted. Tailors love to share their knowledge. Let them tell you what styles work best for your body type. Ask for their recommendations about fabric and color, explaining your activities, job, and industry (travel or not, conservative or not, active or sitting all day). Ask how you can tell a quality suit from cheap imitations, and let them give you shopping pointers for accessories.
- Browse in upscale clothing stores where they have personal shoppers to assist you as you try on selections—even if you do not buy there. Ask about fit, style, and best colors for your skin tone and hair.
- Consider seeking help from an image consultant—an hour or a few hours of consulting time can do wonders. Three excellent examples are image consultants Sandy Dumont, Janice Hurley Trailor, and Valerie Sokolosky. To understand the difference clothing makes, visit a few websites for photos of this type of “makeover” (www.expertwardrobeconsultant.com for photos posted by Sandy Dumont, and www.JaniceHurleyTrailor.com for more photos). Their results are extraordinary. Several resources on both sites offer great tips on everything from ties to wingtips to nail tips. You'll also find well-qualified image consultants in your local area as well.
- Ask a trusted friend or colleague who always dresses well for their secrets and advice on your wardrobe. You probably know someone who always looks expensively dressed and well accessorized, and receives frequent compliments from colleagues. Tell them that you admire their taste and would like to know their “rules” and “taboos” for shopping and clothing selection. I guarantee they have some, and my hunch is they'll be flattered to share them with you.

Dress for Decisions

Dress for the part you want to play. Some people seem surprised to discover how much clothing counts toward the assessment of their personal competence. But think of your reaction to service repair people—those who come to your door in uniform versus those who show up in their scruffies to work on your plumbing. Anyone who has traveled extensively on an airline or stayed at a quality hotel can tell you the difference in the service they receive when they travel in expensive-looking attire versus casual clothes.

From almost two decades of coaching executives and interviewing them about their direct reports, I can tell you what diminishes their confidence in specific individuals regarding dress:

- “He wears his tie too loosely, with the collar unbuttoned underneath. And his hair feathers down on his forehead in front. He looks disheveled.”
- “His fourth button on his sleeves is never buttoned. It’s about attention to detail.”
- “Open-toed shoes. We’re a resort hotel, and I know it’s hot. But she’s the manager of the hotel! She knows that’s not acceptable for an executive.”
- “She has a very solid background. Has three hundred people reporting to her. Well-liked. But she wears wild prints at elegant affairs—rather than more classic, classy styles. She needs help with executive dress.”
- “If one of my sales guys shows up in a polo, that’s unacceptable. I don’t care if it’s a casual event at a tradeshow—I’ll send him back to his hotel room for a change. If it happens a second time, he’s fired.”

Dress matters. Consider con artists’ games. Most involve dress, a uniform of some sort that conveys authority. A police uniform. A security guard uniform. A military uniform. A business suit and all the accessories of a globe-trotting mogul. These con artists prey on the elderly, the young, and the innocent, using dress to convey credibility as they pose as some authority. A common scheme is posing

as a wealthy investor looking for partners or a bank examiner asking for a confidential account number or password, sometimes even asking the victim to withdraw money from their accounts for them to help “catch the suspect.” The uniform often does the trick.

In addition to dress, consider all the accessories that complete the picture: handbag, jewelry, writing instruments, briefcases. Bulging briefcases say, “I do all the work.” Slim briefcases say, “I assign the work.”

Gilda Radner facetiously quipped, “I base my fashion sense on what doesn’t itch.” You can argue that Gucci or the Gap, makeup or no makeup, hair styled or haywire, wrinkled or pressed, shined or scuffed, jeans or suits shouldn’t matter. But they do.

If you’re billionaire Bill Gates or Warren Buffett, you can wear what you darn well please. But until you have their stature in the business world, start the game by playing by the rules.

“But I want to be comfortable,” people confide. No problem. Comfort and credibility are not mutually exclusive. In fact, those who feel uncomfortable will look uncomfortable and fidgety, losing credibility in the process. Make it your goal to dress both well and comfortably.

Research proves the importance of dress and grooming to your personal clout and credibility. Ignore it or benefit from the facts—your choice. But like it or not, people make important decisions based on your dress.

Consider the Context of Small Acts of Service

At lunch during a coaching session with Catherine, a vice president of a large aerospace manufacturer, I asked her about her rise in the organization. As we sat in her private conference room eating our salads, she related a powerful lesson learned in a male-dominated firm. The setting was the first luncheon event she’d been invited to after joining the company. She and seven male colleagues were seated around a table in a large auditorium. After the meal ended, she got up and started toward a side counter, carrying her plate.

An older waitress grabbed the plate out of Catherine’s hand. “Don’t you ever do that again.”

“Do what?” Catherine asked her.

“Bus your own table. Doesn’t look good.”

At that point, as Catherine tells it, she looked around and noticed that all seven of her male colleagues had simply gotten up and walked away from the table empty-handed. Early on, she’d learned the importance of context to set image.

But there is power in serving as well as in being served—just as Catherine demonstrated in serving me lunch in her conference room that day. Image comes from just such intangible signs of personal presence. Small acts of confidence, comfort, and courtesy. Doing and saying the right thing at the appropriate moment.

Personal presence involves knowing when to serve and when to let others serve you. Service isn’t about status, as the waitress wrongly assumed. But it is about courtesy, graciousness, attitude, goals, and time.

Check Your Surroundings

Personal presence extends from your workspace. When someone walks into your area and looks around, does it say, “A competent, confident person works here”? Or, does it scream, “The person working here is overwhelmed, disorganized, and incapable”?

Consider each item in your space: Coffee cups, business cards, marketing materials, reception area, walls, photos, furniture (desk, chair, rugs, pictures, lamps). High-backed chairs convey status, yet they can swallow a small person. Swivel chairs with arms give you more presence than stationary ones.

Think of it like this: You call a plumber for repairs and you expect him to have the right tools in his truck to do the job. When that’s not the case, you suspect that he doesn’t stay too busy and that maybe you’ve called the wrong guy for the job. People make the same assessments about your competence as they look at your tools and workspace.

Set the Stage to Engage

Consider how to control perceptions as you move, sit, stand, or make presentations in your workspace and in your typical meet-

ing rooms. Research shows that where people sit in a room affects whether the listeners tune in or tune out those speaking. The farther away from the speaker, the more negative, the more confrontational, and the less recall listeners have. The closer they are to the speaker, the more engaged they become.⁷

To take advantage of this dynamic, we use the “horseshoe” seating arrangement in all Booher training programs because we want to encourage participants to interact and engage with each other as well as the facilitator. If we’re going to the effort to conduct a seminar, the seating arrangement is by far the easiest thing to control for maximum impact.

Height increases presence, and you can set the stage before the discussion begins.

If you’re a short person among tall colleagues, don’t feel compelled to stay seated during a “sit-down” presentation. Find a reason to stand up. Wander toward the wall and adjust the thermostat. Walk to the white board and write a key word. Project a slide and point to something on the screen for a moment. Then as you return to the table, remain standing as you finish your recommendations.

In the middle of a discussion, simply stand and you’ll be surprised how others will give the floor back to you because you have the height advantage. If a more aggressive colleague tends to intimidate you, make sure you offer him the lower seat on the couch and take the higher stool yourself.

If you want to increase presence in a meeting, take the seat at either end of a table. Second best seats in the house are on the left or the right of the end-of-table positions. Sitting at right angles from another person or team (rather than across the table) provides two advantages: presence and approachability. There’s no barrier between you, and you’re close enough to look eyeball to eyeball to increase rapport or to push back to gain more authority.

Increase Exposures to Change Opinions

You may be asking, “How can I change a first impression? That is, how can I increase my personal presence with those who already know me?”

Answer: Play the numbers.

Let me explain other interesting data from various studies on first impressions: Once people make up their mind about you, they rarely change their opinion—even when later presented with new, contradictory information.

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Consider first impressions like first loves—you rarely forget them.

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Consider first impressions like first loves—you rarely forget them. That said, take them seriously. If you know first meetings will be important (as in the case of job interviews, sales calls, potential partnership discussions, key networking events), make them count. Prepare.

And if that “first love” has gone sour and you need to reestablish yourself and increase your presence in an organization, that means you need to increase exposures. Create *more* “first impressions” with new people, and create *additional* “first impressions” in new settings with your current colleagues. Let them see you in different environments, handling new projects, with increased presence. They need more time and new situations to get a different perspective.

Whenever you walk into a room, you assess the scene. Expect others to do the same. When people size you up, welcome the look-see. The goal is not calculated behavior and manipulation but rather awareness of the importance of presenting your best self. Set the stage to your best advantage, and then present yourself in the best light with multiple snapshots.

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