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I don't know about you, but I think spring is my favorite season. We get to put the cold winter in our rear view mirror and enjoy the first warm rays of sunshine. I sit on our front porch and watch the birds flit from here to there. It's an emerging sense of optimism that makes all things possible. I hope you too are caught up in "spring fever!"

Kristin

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS: LITTLE DETAILS MAKE OR BREAK A CAREER by Joseph Sherren

On a flight this past week, I noticed two men in their 20's sitting in the row in front of me. One was dressed in jeans that were baggy and hanging low on his behind with a baseball cap on backward. The other young man was in jeans that fit properly with a pressed shirt and a dark sports coat.

It was fascinating to observe how the flight attendants communicated with each of them. Right from the beginning, they paid more attention to the more neatly dressed one and often ignored the other.

We could argue — is this right? Is it fair? Shouldn't people be judged for their character and behavior rather than how they look? This may be true, yet that is not the way life is. Often, it is the little things that can make a significant difference in a person's life forever.

Many years ago, as a corporate executive, I had to select an individual to lead a significant project. The selection of who it would be finally came down to two candidates: Two young men, about the same age, similar experiences, similar academic standings, similar in looks, and even dressed in a similar fashion. As well, I knew they each had great potential and either one would do an excellent job. But, there was only room for one.

After struggling with this decision, I finally asked each of them to come to my office for one more discussion. I was still struggling. During this final interview, I happened to look down and one candidate was wearing scuffed-up, slip-on shoes while the other had freshly shined, laced, wing-tips. I opted for the candidate with the polished shoes.

That young man eventually went on to significant success and earned a high

position in the senior executive ranks. Later, when people asked him, “How did you achieve such great success in the company?” He would jokingly reply, “Because I shined my shoes.”

Yes, this little detail helped him get a great start on his pathway to success. Yet these two stories cause me to wonder how much opportunity do people miss out on because they fail to take care of those little details? First impressions do count.

It has been reported that people who wear “more professional” clothes such as suits, blazers, pressed clothing, and polished shoes are considered more intelligent.

It is sad that we are not teaching young people, starting in the schools, the importance of how grooming and image can make a big difference in the outcome of life. The subconscious thought in a manager’s head is — if they do not care about themselves, how could I trust them to care about my customers?

That positive first impression can create what is called a “halo-effect” and make future dealings with them more naturally positive. I have even spoken with teachers who admit they are more lenient with students who are well groomed.

Here is a more scary thought — It takes less than one second for a new person to make an impression. A 2006 study from the [department of psychology at Princeton University](#) claims that we make our minds up about people’s attractiveness, likability, trustworthiness, competence, and aggressiveness within one-tenth of a second of seeing their faces.

I will end with these few factoids:

- 33 percent of managers know within the first 90 seconds of an interview whether they will hire that person.
- When meeting new people, 55 percent of the impact comes from the way the person dresses, acts, and walks through the door.
- 65 percent of recruiters indicate that clothes are a deciding factor between two similar candidates.

We have all heard the Will Rogers expression, “You only get one chance to make a good first impression.” So, why not go out of your way to make an outstanding one?

USE AN EMPTY CHAIR AT YOUR NEXT MEETING

Lots of business leaders like to say, “The customer is always right.” Or, “We are a customer-centric company.” But how does that manifest into a daily habit or ritual so that all employees unabashedly KNOW that your company is obsessed with delighting the customer?

Take a page from [Jeff Bezo’s](#) playbook. At [Amazon](#), many meetings have an “empty chair.”

According to a 2012 [Fortune](#) article, “Bezos periodically leaves one seat open at a conference table and informs all attendees that they should consider that seat occupied by their customer, ‘the most important person in the room.’”

Now we’re talking!

At any time, you can lean over to that empty chair and ask, “So, do you care? Would you be willing to pay for this? Would this make a difference in your buying decision?” Or, you can simply ask, “Whatcha think?”

And this holds true for other organizations: For associations, the empty chair represents their members. For government, it represents the citizens.

Try using the empty chair at your next meeting. It can be your own cultural litmus test: If people consult the empty chair a few times, you know that you have a customer-focused team. If they ignore the chair altogether, you might have a bit of work to do!

SEVEN TYPICAL TASKS IN A PANEL DISCUSSION

The typical panel discussion consists of seven specific tasks:

SEVEN
TYPICAL TASKS IN A PANEL DISCUSSION

THE TYPICAL PANEL CONSISTS OF SEVEN SPECIFIC TASKS:

- WELCOME**
Moderator welcomes the audience.
- INTRODUCTIONS**
Panelists are introduced to the audience.
- PRESENTATIONS**
All panelists provide an overview or specific description of the topic.
- QUESTIONS**
Moderator directs curated questions to the panelists.
- Q&A**
Questions are taken from the audience and directed to a panelist(s).
- SUMMARY**
The conversation is summarized for take-away value.
- THANK YOU**
All are congratulated and sent on their way to the next event.

The panel moderator may opt to do all seven tasks, omit some or design another unique format. No format is perfect, just make sure it meets the stated objectives that add value to the audience.

For more information about how to moderate a panel discussion check out www.PowerfulPanels.com

1. **Welcome.** The panel moderator welcomes the audience. Tees up the topic and explains why it is a timely and important topic to discuss in this format (whatever format that might be!).
2. **Introductions.** The panelists are introduced to the audience – either the moderator introduces them or they introduce themselves.
3. **Presentations.** All panelists provide an overview or specific description of the topic. This can range from a quick statement or paragraph to a full-blown formal presentation. (Although Harry Overstreet, the “father” of the panel discussion would be rolling over in his grave if he only knew a panelist was rising to give a presentation!)
4. **Questions.** The panel moderator directs curated questions to the panelists or asks questions solicited from the audience.
5. **Q&A.** Questions are taken from the audience and directed to a panelist(s).
6. **Summary.** The conversation is summarized for take-away value either by the panel moderator, the panelists or the audience.
7. **Thank you.** The panel moderator congratulates all and sends the audience on their way to the next event.

The panel moderator may opt to do all seven tasks, omit some or design another unique format. No panel discussion format is perfect, just make sure it meets the stated objectives that add value to the audience.

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: THE ENERGY BUS – 10 RULES TO FUEL YOUR LIFE, WORK AND TEAM WITH POSITIVE ENERGY by Jon Gordon

One of my clients has a monthly book club where every employee has to read the assigned book and then provide a book report (either written or verbal) to their boss. This month’s book is [Jon Gordon’s “The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel Your Life, Work, and Team with Positive Energy”](#) - and the General Manager decided to give me a copy. (No, that wasn’t a hint that he thought I needed some energy. His comment was, “This is a great little book!”)

Not only does it have a bright orange/yellow book cover (that makes me happy!) but it is a quick-to-read business parable about a middle-aged guy who takes stock of his life after his car breaks down on the way to work. Over the course of the next few weeks, he learns ten life lessons while riding the bus to and from work (while waiting for his car to get fixed).

In true parable style (think Ken Blanchard and Patrick Lencioni), the storyline is a bit schmaltzy and simplistic. But hey, sometimes, that’s all you need to give yourself a quick kick in the pants, take stock of your own life, and make a few course corrections - just in time for spring!

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