

Making a Good First Impression

In his book "Blink", Malcolm Gladwell examines the phenomenon of speed dating. Basically, each potential couple gets 3 minutes to make up their minds about each other and, in Gladwell's words, "according to the research, that's 2:50 too long." In other words, people could tell within 10 seconds of talking to each other whether or not they were a match (i.e. they selected the same people after 10 seconds as they did after 3 minutes). As one woman said, "He lost me at 'hello'."

Phone Impressions

- Answer the phone with your name, an upbeat style and a smile – the caller can detect disinterest instantly.
- Always put across a helpful, "I can fix it" attitude.
- "Close the loop" – ask the caller if you have helped or, if you are seeking more information, promise to call back with the information when you say.
- Summarise the call at the end, and check with the other person that he/she agrees, in order to reduce the opportunity for any misunderstandings.
- Strive to return voicemail messages in a reasonable target time (say within 5 working hours) - gain a reputation for ringing back.

Meeting Impressions

- Arrive in good time for meetings and use the opportunity to network.
- Make sure people know who you are when you arrive by introducing yourself and smiling.
- Prepare well so you are clear on the meeting objectives and what would represent a successful outcome for you.
- Look the part – keep to business dress as the default.
- Prepare in advance the 3 key questions you would like to ask at the meeting and write them down in your notes/papers.

- If the meeting is not being chaired well try to support the chairperson by asking questions e.g. “Can we agree the timings for this part of the meeting?” or “What decision are we required to make?”
- Make sure you manage expectations of fellow meeting attendees by letting everyone know, at the start of the meeting, if you need to leave the meeting before the official finishing time.

Networking

- Have about 5 open questions ready to ask to help you start conversations with people you have not met before at meetings e.g.
 - What department do you work in?
 - What is your specialist area today?
 - What are you hoping to achieve from today’s meeting?
 - How do you think my department could help you today?
 - Based on responses to the above you could ask “I would like to know more about how your area of expertise fits with my department’s responsibilities
 - could I meet up with you for 30 minutes sometime next?”
- Set up a deliberate contact plan to help increase your knowledge of the business.
- Target to meet up with 3 new contacts per month.

Presentations and Briefings

- Introduce yourself, the purpose and outline of your presentation up front.
- Manage expectations in terms of timings and Questions and Answer Management arrangements.
- Rehearse before the session so you are familiar with the material and timings.
- Preparation is key – try to anticipate questions – you will then be prepared with appropriate answers if you think about them in advance.
- Try to keep your presentations to a maximum of 5 slides with no more than 4 bullet points on each.

These tips were written by [Steve Westall](#). You'll find more ideas about networking in [A Useful Guide to Networking](#).

More tips and tools at 247freetips.com