

5 Ways to Impress the People you Need to Impress

How best to impress in love or work when the stakes are high

Published on May 10, 2014 by [Susan Krauss Whitbourne, Ph.D.](#) in [Fulfillment at Any Age](#)

There are definite rules of engagement when it comes to making a great [first impression](#). You're probably familiar with many of them- [dress for the part](#), [watch your body language](#), and, especially if [you're an introvert](#), keep your anxiety levels in check. However, great impressions go beyond great [first impressions](#). If you're going to get people on your side, whether at work, in your romantic life, or just among your friends and colleagues in general, you're going to need to have a great follow-up act.

It's incredibly hard to distill all the advice about impression [management](#) into digestible form, but I've narrowed the field of important pointers down to the minimum number that can work toward your benefit in a variety of situations. They share the feature of intended to help you show off the skills you have, not cover up for your deficits. In fact, the more you put these into practice, the more you can actually expand your skill set and increase your ability to impress, and more importantly- perform.

According to a September 2013 study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* conducted by Chinese management professor Guo-hua Huang and associates, when employees worried about losing their jobs put on extra effort to impress their supervisors, not only did the supervisors rate them higher, but the employees actually felt less anxious. There are practical and emotional benefits to using the right kind of impression management strategies at the right time.

With this in mind, let's take a look at each of the 5 key strategies for managing the impressions you create in similar clutch situations:

1. Be enthusiastic (or at least seem to be)

Whether it's extra work you're going to have to perform or just more to put in more time and energy than you bargained for, what's your first reaction? Do you complain, say why you can't possibly do it, or passive aggressively try to sabotage the situation? Think about what you might do in your job when your boss says you're going to need to finish a project several days before the initial deadline. The request strikes you as not only unrealistic but unfair, and it is definitely inconvenient. You had your next few evenings of watching TV or going out all planned and now you'd have to give that up.

Apart from situations in which a boss is outright exploitative, and assuming that this is a one-time or at least rare request, coming back with the list of reasons why this isn't going to work for you is not the best strategy. Practically speaking, you'll probably end up having to concede to the request anyhow, so your protestations won't have their intended effect.

In terms of impressions, you're going to look like a whiner if your first reaction is to balk. If your plans are truly unchangeable, hold off before you outright refuse. You can still decline, but if you phrase your refusal as true regret instead of outrage, your boss will be more accepting of your response. If you end up having to do the work anyhow, then your complaining will only have sown the seeds of annoyance in your supervisor and you'll experience a net loss of brownie points.

Similarly, if your romantic partner suggests that you spend an afternoon at the ball game when you really and truly hate [sports](#) (and your partner doesn't realize this completely), your first reaction might be to scream "No way" or, perhaps less obviously indicate your displeasure. However, if the chances are good that you'll end up going anyhow, that initial reaction would only have made you look unsympathetic and uncaring. According to equity theory, partners attempt to establish a balance between what each one gives and gets out of the relationship. By going along with your partner's request on this occasion, you'll not only make a better impression, but also increase the chances that your wishes will be reciprocated another time.

2. Show respect

Without our realizing it, we communicate to the other people in our lives just how much we value them. Whether it's the words you speak or the tone of voice in which you speak them, you're constantly providing cues about how much you value your relationship partners. At work, you show respect to your co-workers by listening to their ideas and honoring their desire for privacy and dignity (as well as their right to have their food in the communal refrigerator left untouched). At home or with your romantic partners, you similarly show respect by listening to their end of the conversation and allowing them to express their preferences about what you do as a couple or family.

At work, being disrespectful to anyone, even if it's the person who services your coffee machine, can get you in trouble. Your boss will not enjoy hearing, time and time again, about how rude and insensitive you were to your co-workers. At home or in your close relationships, even the people who love you will feel frustrated and annoyed if you continue to put their needs second-most to your own. Respect is a basic building block not only of impression management, but of all good relationships.

3. Be open to new ideas

Being willing to entertain someone else's point of view, even if it's diametrically opposed to your own, helps create the impression that you're a person who is fair, even-minded, and mature. Two-year-olds really hate it when someone crosses their will. We allow them to indulge in a certain degree of tantrum-throwing only because we know they don't have the emotional capacity to cope with being thwarted in their [goals](#). We expect adults to be able to see that someone else besides them might be right on a given occasion.

A co-worker, teammate, or romantic partner might come up with a completely ridiculous idea which you instantly see as unworkable. Someone wants to go out to eat on the spur of the moment to a restaurant that requires reservations and it's a restaurant that you really don't think you'll like at all. Now, it's possible that the restaurant is a lot better than you expect (which is why it's always crowded), but instead of just refusing to consider it, you could go along for the ride and let fate take its course. Chances are you'll be unable to eat there anyhow, but if for some reason there's an opening, perhaps you'll find that the online reviews were wrong and the food is really terrific. By saying no right away, however, you'll be likely to come off as closed minded, and you might even miss out on an opportunity to be pleasantly surprised.

4. Make every effort to be positive

As you've learned already, being a naysayer carries with it a number of risks. Turning this around, this next tip makes explicit the importance of being someone who smiles more than frowns. Having a pleasant look on your face instead of a growl communicates to the outside world that you're a nice person. This, in turn, makes you seem more approachable to others, adding to your positive impression quotient. Over time, a pleasant facial expression can pay off in your having fewer frown lines. As Coco Chanel once said, "Nature gives you the face you have at twenty; it is up to you to merit the face you have at fifty."

Of course there are times when a serious expression, or even a frown, is appropriate for the occasion. You can't go around with a huge smile on your face at all times or people will think you're flaky or insincere. However, there's a big difference between a frown that conveys a critical message to the outside world and one that expresses *gravitas*.

Apart from your facial expression, being positive means that you cheer them people on when they do well, and stay away from creating judgment zones wherever you go. By looking for the silver lining, even in a glum situation, you'll become a reinforcing presence in the life of others and they will, of course, want to have you around.

5. Realize that it's not all about you

We all have a [healthy dose of narcissism](#) in which we look at the world from our own point of view. However, people who are constantly focusing on their inner states instead of the needs of others run the risk of seeming (and being) selfish and self-centered. Something might be bothering you about a situation that you feel you must share, but the other people in that situation are busy focusing on the task at hand. Unless it's a fire that only you can put out, let them get the job done, and then share your feelings at a more appropriate time.

Not all narcissists become disliked. University of Munster psychologist Albrecht Küfner and his colleagues (2013) found that people high in [narcissistic personality](#) tendencies who came across as [assertive](#) were liked more by others than narcissists who projected a confrontational and aggressive stance. In this research, the assertive, and liked, people were expressive and dominant, but the aggressive and disliked were arrogant and combative. Returning to the above points about the importance of being positive, this study suggests that as long as you can temper your narcissism with a generally can-do attitude, you'll manage to get your own way and have others like you in the process.

Making yourself the center of a situation that involves many others with their own needs and points of view can become counter-productive. You'll be less, not more, likely to have others feel good about you and therefore less likely to accomplish your desired goals.

In summary, although there are many complexities involved in making a positive impression, by following these 5 tips, you'll be on your way to having others like you more, further boosting your [self-esteem](#) and ultimately, your overall fulfillment.

Copyright Susan Krauss Whitbourne, Ph.D. 2014

References:

Huang, G., Zhao, H., Niu, X., Ashford, S. J., & Lee, C. (2013). Reducing job insecurity and increasing performance ratings: Does impression management matter?. *Journal Of Applied Psychology*, 98(5), 852-862. doi:10.1037/a0033151

Küfner, A. P., Nestler, S., & Back, M. D. (2013). The two pathways to being an (un-)popular narcissist. *Journal Of Personality*, 81(2), 184-195. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6494.2012.00795.x

Inserted from <<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201405/5-ways-impress-the-people-you-need-impress>>