

Thank you for viewing Stephen F. Austin State University Career Services “First Impressions and Personal Branding” presentation. I am a student career advocate and will be guiding you through the basics of creating a positive first impression as well as how to build your own personal brand. Make sure to grab a pen and paper because we’re going to talk about a lot.

But first, what are your thoughts when you first see this individual?

Alright, what are your thoughts when you first see these individuals?

Well, here is the honest truth. The picture of the well-dressed individual on the far right is Walt Disney. He hated high school so much that he sent a letter to his principal telling him how “disgusted” he was by it. He left school by the age of 16 and never went back. The picture of the underdressed individual on the left is Ken Jeong. He graduated from Duke University and went on to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he graduated in 1995 as a Medical Doctor. He practiced medicine for a number of years and is a licensed physician in the state California. Were you able to guess this information simply from these pictures? Probably not, but this instills the idea that first impressions are more important than most people realize.

Within the first one tenth of a second, individuals make a judgment of your appearance and facial features. These judgments can include attractiveness, likability, trustworthiness, competence, and aggressiveness. In fact, impressions tend to trump undeniable facts about a person, even with prior knowledge of that individual. Even though quick first impressions are a natural cognitive response, they tend to lead to stereotyping. According to research, once these first impressions are made, they are very difficult to change.

So what are some ways to make a positive first impression?

- Be on time! Seems very self-explanatory, but it’s best to live by the motto “to be early is to be on time; to be on time is to be late; and to be late is not an option”.
- Dress and groom appropriately. There are various differences for men and women when it comes to attire. As a woman, try to avoid overt makeup and hair styles. Keep your jewelry to a minimum and clothing in a clean, conservative manner. Try to avoid tight, short skirts or dresses. For males, make sure your clothing is in good condition, and that everything fits properly.
- Eye contact. Maintaining eye contact indicates your level of confidence. A lack of appropriate eye contact, could signal a lack of respect and/or deception. Find your balance because too much eye contact can be a bit overwhelming.
- Solid handshake. Again, there can be a delicate balance with this as well, so practice with a friend or professor to see how your handshake holds up. A solid and firm handshake is the way to go; No bone crushers or wimpy handshakes.
- Avoid having a frozen face! We know that you might find yourself in situations that can be intimidating, but do your best to smile! Smiling makes you much more personable and approachable.
- Be conscious of your body language. Your posture, how you carry yourself, the angling of your body; it all comes together to create an overall tone. Remember a straight posture shows confidence and worth.

- Confident verbal communication. Speak clearly and audibly and at an appropriate pace. Avoid “mumble mouth” or using an overly advanced vocabulary when it’s not fitting. You appear to be much more at ease and much more approachable if you display clear and confident verbal communication.
- Work on your elevator pitch. What is an elevator pitch? An elevator pitch typically includes your name, where you went to school, what you majored in and what drew you to the event. It is a 30 second story that highlights your achievements, values and accolades. Don’t overwhelm them with details because attention span of your listener may be short, so try to focus on your biggest selling points.

Once you make a bad first impression, it is very difficult to change it. Remember that before you accidentally spill coffee all over your potential employer, or make the mistake of wearing a shirt with a derogatory comment on it.

But more than that...

Remember you aren’t perfect and that’s okay! but strive for continued progress! Employers understand that you are human and you are not perfect. Being honest and allowing your personality to shine makes you much more relatable!

Personal branding is the practice of people marketing themselves and their careers as a “brand”. Use this marketing ability to express and communicate your skills, your personality, and your values. The goal of building a strong personal brand is develop your reputation and help you to grow your network in a way that interests others. Your network, or people that you know, will then seek you out for your knowledge and expertise because you are recognized by these skills. So what does your personal brand need to be? It needs to be compelling to your audience because this is what is going to “sell you best” and increase the chances of them “buying into your brand”. This is the image that is going to let them know what you are all about.

We would like you to take the time to identify what these items are.

30 second pause

Now, let’s identify what these items really are.

1. Cotton Swab
2. Bandage
3. Insulated container
4. Tissues
5. Insulated cup holder

All of the names you may have originally thought about were all BRANDS, not the actual product themselves. That is what BRANDING is!

What are some ways to build your personal brand? Whether you know it or not, you are already doing it! Attitudes, actions, and opinions that you have today are already sending the message of what your brand is made of. So what can you do to adjust or grow your brand?

- Define your brand. What are your passions, your values, and morals? Reflect on these areas when developing your brand. Rethink the way you view your career. You aren’t simply an employee at your company. Think about what other values you bring to the position.

- Be authentic. Be honest about who you are and what you are aiming for.
- Be consistent. Make sure the message and brand are always the same from company to company, person to person, and manager to manager. Build and manage your marketing network. In collaboration with being consistent, make sure your friends, family, customers, and clients are all speaking of you in the manner that is congruent with what you are trying to portray. Learn to influence in a positive manner. Use your personal power, your role, and network to positively impact everyone you come in contact with.
- Seek feedback. Always look for constructive criticism. We must seek ways to improve to continue to learn.
- Reassess. Again, we reiterate, without learning, there can be no growth. Always reassess and reevaluate where you are at and what you are portraying to the world.

Branding tends to be easier for individuals that have a very extroverted, outgoing personality. But what about those who are a little quieter and more reserved? We have a few tips and tricks for you!

- Utilize social media. This actually tends to be the downfall to those that are extroverted. As an introvert though, one can take the time to blog in a positive manner and to thrive on quiet time to contemplate. You can take your time to formulate thoughts and engage in real dialogue.
- Connecting, one person at a time. Make a commitment to meet one person, once a week from a different department or organization. This way, you meet many new individuals, but without the overwhelming social anxiety. This is the key to an introvert building a robust network!
- Using subtle cues. Research shows the use of certification or degrees placed strategically on your walls helps to reinforce your expertise and they can be used as a great conversation starter.
- Finally, using your downtime strategically. Reading industry journals and thinking about your company can give you a leg up in the competition. Sure, your extroverted colleagues may be out schmoozing industry executives, but you will be able to hold a solid conversation with them about the future of the company.

Let us, Career Services, arm you with the **confidence, knowledge & skills** that will propel your personal career development and prepare you to find the career that is right for you! By providing services such as career coaching, resume assistance, and mock interviews, we offer you the opportunity to develop skills necessary for the position you wish to obtain. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, "You don't have to see the whole journey, you just have to take the first step" by visiting us in the Rusk Bldg. on the 3rd floor. Thank you for watching our presentation!