

How to make a bad impression

In the past few weeks, I have been flat-out amazed at how some people act in business/networking situations. They've not made a good impression.

Here's how you too can make a bad impression:

1. **Have a limp handshake (bonus points if clammy and sweaty too).** The other day I met the director of a local chamber of commerce. She introduced herself and gave me the limpest handshake I can remember. I wanted to say to her that she needed to work on a firm handshake, instead, I shuddered inwardly. Limp handshakes communicate lack of conviction and being tentative. And also, yuck.

2. **Don't introduce yourself.** I was at a small lunch gathering and a guy joined us late. He sat down and didn't bother to say his name or what his business was. I didn't find out until the end when he gave me his business card. Very few people require no introduction and generally, they don't go to small business gatherings. To me, not introducing yourself shows you are not aware of other people.

3. **Be late.** At the same lunch gathering mentioned above, where I was a first-timer, the organizer showed up more than 15 minutes late. Being late for a meeting you organized is inexcusable. Being late in general just shows a disregard for others.

4. **Don't respond.** Say we met at an event, and we exchange business cards, and we talk about having coffee soon, and then I send you an email (and then another) and I don't hear back from you. Yeah. I get it. You don't want to have coffee. That's OK, but if in the future you change your mind, you've left me with a really bad impression. (This one also applies to social media. Check your @ replies on Twitter. Is someone asking you a question? Perhaps you should answer it).

5. Attack the other person. The other day I met a business owner who is a big fan of the chamber of commerce. I am not since I don't usually find my target audience there. When she asked me if I was a member of her chamber, I explained why I am not. She got defensive and immediately began attacking me. She wasn't polite or constructive. She was just mean and putting me down.

Here's a few more:

- Be disinterested in other people or the topic being discussed.
- Dress inappropriately.
- Be dismissive.
- Don't pay attention and then ask a question that has already been answered.
- Be negative.
- Interrupt. Repeatedly.
- Tell inappropriate (racist, sexist, etc.) jokes or stories. (Oh, it happens. All the time.)

Some people will only try to make a good impression with people they are trying to impress and ignore everyone else. That's a guaranteed way to make a really bad impression (most everyone despises a brown-noser).

If you don't care about how you come across, then you should also not be surprised if you are not doing well in your business. Impressions matter. You only have one chance to make a good first impression, but you have multiple chances to make a bad impression.

Have you dealt with these behaviors? What would you add?

What message are you sending?

OK, so you don't like to blog. You hate tweeting. You refuse to put up a picture on your LinkedIn profile. And yet you have all those social media platforms. Perhaps you should get rid of them.

Here's the thing. If you don't use them—for whatever reason—don't have them. Having an old blog, and old profile or an unused Twitter makes it seem like you are no longer around or worse, that you just don't care.

Last night, I attended a panel presentation where one of the presenters said that potential employers and/or new business connections are checking out your social media profiles prior to meeting with you. Having an outdated social media presence sends a message, and it is not a good one. (As an aside, and kind of weird, I checked the social media presence for some of these panelists and I found a blog that hasn't been updated since 2009 and someone with four LinkedIn profiles with about one connection each. Hmm. That is not a great message is it?)

This is the message I am getting from you:

You say you know how to do social media but you haven't tweeted in two months and you only have 50 followers? I don't believe you.

You are a writer and you say you can help others blog but your website doesn't have a blog? You don't know how to position yourself and what a blog is really for.

You are a communications executive and all you have is a personal Facebook page? You don't get the power of social media to educate and expand your network.

You are sending a message by having an outdated or unused profile and it may not be one that you want to communicate. An

outdated or unused profile could mean that you are not comfortable on social media, that you don't have much to say, that you don't pay attention to social media or even that you experiment but don't follow through. None of it is positive.

Don't miss out! Sign up for the next How to blog workshop, taking place on May 17. Details and registration [here](#).

Are you aiming for quantity or quality (or both)?

On LinkedIn this morning, I saw that one of my connections (whom, by the way, I have never met in person) was asking her network how many connections were they aiming for this year. It got me to thinking whether networking should be a numbers game (quantity).

We've all heard of SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely). In that sense, to have a SMART networking goal, you would indeed have a number, as this would make it measurable.

So say you decide you want to make 25 new connections this year, and you only make 15, have you failed at your goal? What if from those 15 connections, you got valuable advice, a job lead and a new best friend?

Can you measure networking by numbers? I don't think you can, and I don't think you should.

As a business owner, I attend my fair share of networking events. I am not someone who works the room, making sure to shake everybody's hand. Instead, I generally end up talking to

one or two people more in depth. I understand the value in having a wide network, but I would rather get there more slowly.

If people know who I am because we've had several conversations in person, isn't that better than trying to expand a network by sending a bunch of blind invitations "people you may know?"

LinkedIn is a great tool and as such, many people, such as the person I referenced at the beginning of the post, tend to abuse it. Too many people think networking is all about quantity regardless of quality. In fact, successful networking is both a quantity and a quality proposition.

What are your thoughts? What is your networking advice?

How to make networking events a better marketing opportunity

Everybody goes to networking events at one point or another. Some go because they feel they have to and others go because they love to network. The bottom line is that networking is an integral part of marketing, both personal and business. Opportunities always stem from personal relationships and networking is just the path to extend and strengthen your personal relationships.

December is probably the prime networking month as there are all sorts of holiday parties and end of year ceremonies. But if you don't think about your networking, all you will end up doing is wasting time (and money).



Handshake by B.T. Indrelunas on Flickr

The inspiration for this post was a woman I “met” at a party last week. I didn't actually meet her because she was a walking networking don't. She approached me and a friend, greeted us, but didn't introduce herself. She babbled about the holidays (actually told us about her Thanksgiving dinner), and then said she wanted to get food, and turned around and left. Some time later, she sat down next to me and did not even try to make conversation. She wandered around the party aimlessly. Someone told me she was job-hunting. My impression was that she was slightly unhinged, and had no idea of how to connect with people.

Don't be like that woman! You can make networking events a good marketing tool for yourself or your business if you follow some dos and don'ts.

Do this:

Have an objective in mind. You should ask yourself what you

would like to get out of this event.

Work on your introduction. Have a short but complete overview of who you are, something like: Hi, my name is Jane Doe, and I am a graphic designer at XZ agency, an Anytown-based advertising agency that specializes in the tech industry.

Perfect your handshake, smile and body language. A strong but not bone crushing grip, a nice smile and an open stance will help make you more likeable.

Think about your appearance. Match your dress to the occasion. If it's a holiday party, be festive. If it is a morning business meeting, then dress in your business best!

Be interested in the other person. Ask questions and be genuinely interested in the answers.

Have business cards at the ready. Yes, I know people can Google you and phone tap you and whatever, but exchanging business cards is a tangible way to initiate contact.

Follow up. Make sure to send an email to people you have met soon after the event to help establish the connection. You may even suggest going to coffee or lunch and use the opportunity to get to know the person.

But don't do this:

Hand out business cards indiscriminately. Exchange cards with someone only after you have spoken.

Go for quantity. Some people feel they must work the room and meet everyone. I believe that quality is better than quantity, that is, it is better to meet a couple of people who will remember who you are, than a whole bunch of people than can't place you.

Have a bad handshake. This includes the limp handshake, the overly strong handshake, the clammy handshake, and one that I

experienced last week, the calloused, rough skin on the hand shake (use moisturizer!!!).

Be overly self-deprecating. Don't diminish your accomplishments by letting your insecurity shine through.

Act weird. Some people take pride in marching to the beat of a different drummer, and that is fine. But. There is personality and then there is weirdness. Some people (like the woman I mentioned above) don't pick up on social cues. Or then there was the guy who went to the holiday party in a kilt. Using a kilt is limited to the following occasions: when you are a schoolgirl in uniform, at your family's Scottish ancestral ceremony or it is Halloween. You don't want to get attention for the wrong reasons.

Happy networking this holiday season. You may just be a party away from meeting your next employer, project or friend!

What are your networking dos and don'ts?

How you can shine

Lately, I feel that we live in a very mediocre world as it relates to communications and writing. Open up the newspaper most days and you will find a few articles that seem as if they were written by a teenager. Online, I see typos and spelling mistakes galore. On social media, I see a lot of rude behavior, I suppose reflecting the loss of civility evident everywhere.

But, as with all problems, there is an opportunity—an opportunity to shine. Because we are surrounded by mediocrity,

working to be better will make you stand out.

Here are few ways to shine:

Mind your grammar, spelling and typing: Perhaps you need an editor or just a better review of your writing. And, if you aren't really that good at grammar, perhaps take a class or read a book to improve your skills.

Skip the passive voice: There is nothing like reading long passive sentences. It kills your writing. If you don't know what I am talking about then you never had a teacher who corrected your passive voice and made it active.

Avoid the cliches and jargon: Another dead giveaway that screams laziness and even stupidity is the overuse of jargon and cliches. People hide behind these words. For instance, the following excerpts are from a job description (let me know if you understand what this person does for a living):

- Stakeholder relationship management
- Standardizing processes, roles and responsibilities
- Outreach strategy
- Virtual collaboration

Be polite: If someone writes you an email or leaves you a voice mail, respond. If someone comments on your blog, thank him/her. On Twitter, acknowledge re-tweets. Watch your swearing in a public space (yes, social media is a public space).

Think about your audience: If you think about who your audience is, and what information they need, you will be a huge step ahead. Considering your audience will help determine your language, your timing, etc.

Learn how to network effectively: Perhaps we are spending too much time with our gadgets, but it seems more people are less able to interact personally with others. If you go to a networking event, try speaking to other people. It is as easy

as introducing yourself, and asking a simple question (how did you hear about the event, have you been here before, etc.) You may also want to follow up with the people you meet.

Be a LinkedIn rock star: Not a week goes by that I don't get a LinkedIn invitation that is a) not personalized and b) from someone I don't know. Sometimes, I go to somebody's profile, and it is missing information, does not have photograph, and lists an old position where the person is no longer working. So, you have the opportunity to shine on LinkedIn by:

- Completing your profile (include your photo)
- ALWAYS personalizing invitations
- Not connecting with every Tom, Dick and Jane out there.
- Having an updated job description
- Joining (and participating) in groups

How do you shine? Please share what you do to stand out from the crowd.

Bad habits or perception busters?

This morning on Yahoo.com there was an article about habits that can hold you back, which got me thinking about the things people do, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps subconsciously, that affect how they are perceived by others and that hold them back career-wise. Some of these habits are particular pet peeves of mine, which certainly have changed the way I perceive someone.

Not answering direct emails: It makes it seem as though you

don't care enough about the sender to answer. If you work at an agency or for yourself, it is an absolute disaster not to answer client's emails. If you are a client, and you don't answer your email, you are making it very hard for the agency/representative to do its job on your behalf.

Not saying thank you: I have written about this before, but when someone does something for you just say thanks! A few months ago, I took out a couple hours of my day to meet with some people who were looking for advice. I did my best to listen and give suggestions. To this day, I have not received a solitary note of thanks. It makes me think that neither my time nor my input were in anyway valuable to them.

Not doing what you promised: If you say you are going to get something by the end of the day, or that you will take on a project and then not do it, you are failing to keep your promises. This makes you seem unreliable, and uncaring. Last year, while working on a group project, one of the group members offered to complete a good chunk of the project. She never did. And she didn't provide a reason, an excuse or even any further words about it. I would never work with her again. And I made sure that other people knew she dropped the ball.

Being habitually late: The article on Yahoo ([link above](#)) says this is a surefire sign of something going on...you resent having your time held hostage to someone else's schedule. To me, it shows a deep disrespect and makes me perceive you as unreliable. Enough said.

Never following up: This is a mistake that happens frequently. In the past few weeks, I have been getting estimates to get a fence built. So far, I have received four estimates. Guess how many follow up calls I have had to see if I am interested in moving ahead? None. Not one call. And you wonder why people don't get business...they don't even try to get it.

Not remembering/always forgetting: This is a catch-all, but

it covers things such as always forgetting you have met someone before, forgetting to do something, not remembering names, not remembering crucial details, etc. If you have a bad memory, get an aid of some sort like a calendar or a smart phone.

The thing is some of these may just be annoyances and people will overlook them. But do some of them enough and it will affect how you are perceived. The flip side is that these are easy to fix and if you are aware that you are doing them you can change your ways. Have you recently lost a client? Did any of these play a part? Have you been overlooked for a job or a promotion? Are any of these habits yours?

How to make sure nobody likes you

If you have been to any networking or social event, you have met this person: the person nobody likes. Chances are good that this person has not one single solitary clue why nobody seems to be wanting to interact, exchange business cards, or just chat.

Here's what to do if you want to be just like that person:

- Talk endlessly about yourself (and never ever ask the other person anything).
- Use big words or obscure references, forcing whoever you

are interacting to ask you what you mean.

- Brag (I don't mean talk about your accomplishment, but actually brag, like this: Well, when I was on safari last year with Robert Redford, we ran into a pack of rare pink Rhinoceros...).
- Don't maintain eye contact. People just love shifty-eyed people—gives them a vote of confidence.
- Have a clammy or limp handshake (or worse, a clammy AND limp handshake).
- Shift the burden of conversation to the other person.
- Denigrate whatever the other person is saying ("Oh, you think that is a big deal? I got a bigger deal!")
- Live in the past or in another place: you know, things were much better then and there.
- Speak ill of the host, venue, group, etc. I don't mean constructive criticism like "I thought the parking was a bit difficult here," but something like "Jane Doe and her group just don't have a clue! "
- Have poor hygiene or grooming.

Unfortunately, the first impression you make is usually a lasting one. However, you can also not try too hard to be likeable, people see through that too. You have to be who you are, but be aware that what you say and do do affect how other people perceive you.

Next, we'll talk about how this personal behavior is often seen in marketing communications (and especially in social media).

Reputation matters

Several days ago, a blogger on a well-respected site that I

frequently read stated that the gender gap on wages was a myth. He said that if women don't earn as much as men it is because they don't work as much (really, he said this). He used all sorts of manipulated information that failed to address the underlying issues, such as women are usually also responsible for child care. I suspect that he was trying to be contentious to receive more traffic. I called out the post on Twitter, and the author attacked me personally saying I was acting like a victim. I am not making any of this up.

A couple days after the Gender Gap is a Myth post, a woman posted a strong rebuttal on the website, which pointed out some inconsistencies and omissions by the male blogger. In my mind, it made the male blogger look even worse. For me, the end result has been that I will not read anything the male blogger writes anymore because a) I have lost any respect for his assertions and b) I think that he writes to get a rise out of his audience rather than to inform. His reputation is ruined for me, and there is very little he can do to change it (if he even cares).

The bottom line here is that what you publish online (on Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc), how you respond to comments and how you interact with others who disagree with you all influence your reputation. You can create a reputation for being fair, or for being smart, or on the other hand, you could create a reputation for being a raconteur or a complete ass. Your reputation matters. And it will influence what people think of you, what they say about you and whether they continue to read your stuff/subscribe to your blog and so forth.

Reputation can indeed affect your bottom line.

What is your reputation? What do you think people think about you based on what you put out there? Do you think it matters? And if you don't think it matters, why?

How to leave a bad impression

It seems lots of people and companies out there are trying hard to leave a bad impression. If you want to join their ranks, here are a few tips:

- Don't respond to inquiries. If someone calls or emails, free free to ignore.
- Don't say thank you. If someone buys a product from you or gives you a contact or anything, don't bother saying thank you. That would be nice.
- Keep pounding away with the same message. Send the same offer over and over, a couple of times of day if possible.
- Solicit free advice. Ask around for all the free advice you can. After all, it's just advice, right?
- After you get your free advice, feel free to ignore it. Someone's an expert but that doesn't mean he/she knows what she/he is saying.
- Cancel or change plans at the last minute. Your time is more valuable than anybody else's.
- Use foul language. If you are on Twitter, go ahead, drop an f-bomb or two.
- Be crass, self-involved, self-promoting. It's all about you.

My question is: how hard are you trying to leave a bad impression?

How Not to Write a Cover Letter

Being a small business, I don't often get cover letters and resumes, although once I got a perfume-scented resume on blue letterhead that went directly in the trash. Yesterday, I got a cover letter that was truly stunning, and not in a good way. It was stunning because it was such a good example of how NOT to write a letter. I am posting it here, with comments (and with identity removed, of course).

To Whom it May Concern:

No personalization...unforgivable since I am the only person listed on my website.

I would like to be considered for employment with your company, so here is a little background on my education and experiences.

Doesn't mention what type of employment is being sought.

I have a Bachelors of Science in Business Administration from [XXX]University, where I double majored in Marketing and Business Management. I also earned a minor in Professional Communications. I achieved a GPA of 3.49, while also being extremely involved in extra-curricular activities and community service opportunities on campus.

Would have put this down further...or talked about what subjects I learned about, more specifically.

I've gained experience relevant to the business industry

through two internships, one with[xxx]- a marketing firm, and the other with[xxx]. These internships allowed me to utilize the information I had been learning at[the University] and have allowed for me to gain experience in the marketing field.

No specificity: the writer could have given examples of specific tasks or information learned.

Before you ask, I'll go ahead and answer the big questions in your mind. Yes, I am currently in [other state] No, I do not plan to work from here; I'm ready and willing to relocate. And finally, No, I understand that I'm entry-level and do not expect to receive relocation funds.

Geez. Now you are a mind-reader. Don't assume anything.

I have enclosed my resume for your review. Also, my LinkedIn profile can be viewed at[LinkedIn], if that better fits your viewing preferences.

This is nit-picky but you have attached not enclosed your resume, since this is an email.

I would be happy to aid you and your company in future endeavors, if you will please contact me at [telephone and email] I would welcome the chance to discuss openings.

Notice that nearly every paragraph and sentence starts with I. It's all about the writer and nothing about my company.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

I wrote the author of this email back and told her there were no opportunities. I also gave her a couple of tips. She didn't

reply. I am pretty positive this letter will get her nowhere.

Here are my top three tips on how to write an effective cover letter:

1. **Personalize:** Have a name (or at the very least a department or title). Mention the name of the company you are applying to, and why you are interested in working at that company.
2. **Summarize your background, but in relation to the potential job:** In college, you probably took arts classes and sociology, etc. but perhaps you took a really great writing class that would help you be a copywriter, right?
3. **Talk about what you can do for the company:** Can you bring in business, deal with clients, sweep the floor really well? What do you bring to the table?

What are your tips? What are the biggest mistakes you see when you get cover letters?

