

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 to so 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).

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?

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Social cues

Although I think many people who march to the beat of their own drummer are interesting, some folks are just plain clueless. This past weekend I went on an organized hike. Most hikers were dressed in hiking clothes of one stripe or another, except for someone my friend dubbed “Disco Dan.” “Disco Dan” was attired in short shorts made of corduroy and of a peach hue, to match his multicolored button down shirt. Furthermore, “Disco Dan” was wearing non-hiking shoes. To say the least, “Disco Dan” stood out, and not in a good way.

Although “Disco Dan” was harmless and mildly amusing, it made me think about how people act in a societal context. Most people are adept enough to fit in. Some people, like Dan, either don’t get it or don’t care to get it, and still others are avant-garde, doing today what most of us won’t do for months or years.

How is this a marketing issue? First, responding to social cues is important in personal marketing. If you are trying to get people to buy you, the product, you can’t be out of touch with what is socially acceptable. For instance, if you are interviewing at a law firm and you show up in jeans and a t-shirt, you are saying with your clothing choice that you don’t understand the law firm ethos, or that you are going to do what you are going to do, no matter what.

Secondly, observing and listening to understand what is socially acceptable and what is not, is essential when marketing. I would say that if you have trouble with social cues you are not going to be able to create great ad copy or be in public relations or in event planning. Say you are tasked with writing copy directed at senior citizens. You use the terms that GenY appreciates but that seniors don’t understand. You are being tone-deaf to the needs of your audience. Or a more common occurrence, you go for the

intentionally hip or what you think is really funny, but that your audience just doesn't get.

Unfortunately, as more people lose the ability to interact directly with other people due to the over reliance on electronic gadgets like smart phones and gps, the less they are able to pick up on social cues. It is common to see people with headphones on walking around in their own personal bubble, and when they are looking for something, instead of asking a live person nearby they go to Twitter or Facebook and ask there.

The bottom line is that we live together in a society, where some things are more acceptable than others. When you want to be like Disco Dan and wear what you want because you want to, you are only communicating to the world that you don't care or that you don't get it. Either way, it creates a degree of alienation.

What are your thoughts? Have you noticed an increase in people who don't react to social cues?



Appearance matters

If you work in any aspect of marketing, you know that appearance matters. We look at various marketing materials and we judge whether they look professional, or home-made, cutting-edge or stuck in time. We advise our clients to re-do logos, update brochures, set up Facebook pages. Our goal is to make sure that their appearance is up to par with the expectations in the marketplace.

Recently, I wrote a post saying that you CAN judge a book by its cover. After all, designers spend a lot of time designing that cover to entice you to read it. Perhaps the book won't be up to your literary standards, but as a marketing piece you know the book accomplished its mission (getting you to buy it if not to read it).

In personal marketing, appearance matters even more. Again, I have written about this before, but I want to revisit it. If you are in the market for a job, say, then you are ALWAYS job hunting. If you are going to a networking meeting, you must look professional. If you look sloppy or like you just rolled out of bed then you will be perceived as someone who doesn't care.

Last Friday, I was indulging a guilty pleasure and watching What Not to Wear on TLC. The episode was about a 38-year old professor of non-verbal communication who dressed frumpily. She actually looked at least 20 years older than her age. Stacy and Clinton (the show's hosts, in case you haven't seen it) kept telling her that she was communicating to her students that she just didn't care about her appearance, and thus did not care about herself. She had a hard time understanding that what she wore, how she wore it, indeed her appearance, was undermining her message that we send out all sorts of nonverbal cues. It was fascinating to watch because here is a case of someone who understands that everything you put out there (clothing, etc.) is communication. In the end, she came around and by the end of the show she looked much closer to her age than when she started. She also looked far more professional and modern.

It is hard to judge how we appear. We see ourselves day after day and we lose perspective. Same can be said for our marketing materials. This is why we often need to get a third-party opinion. And we need to listen carefully to that third-party. Perhaps they are saying something we don't want to hear. For your graphics and marketing pieces, an expert can do

wonders. Sometimes an update makes the difference. For personal appearance, start with trusted friends or associates, and if you are very serious, hire an image consultant.

We are judged by our appearance. And our appearance contributes to how people perceive us. Take control of your appearance. Make sure people perceive you the way you want to be perceived.



Personal marketing goals for 2010

Although I am not a fan of New Year's resolutions, I think January is a great time to set goals for oneself. You have a whole year ahead of you to meet those goals. And goals are tangible. You either meet them or not, whereas resolutions like "I want to be healthier" are vague.

Here are some personal marketing goals:

- Upload a headshot to LinkedIn
- Answer at least one question a month on LinkedIn
- Refine your LinkedIn headline
- Increase your LinkedIn contacts by 25% (minimum)
- Get business cards if you don't have them
- Update and polish your elevator speech and then practice it!

- Attend networking events at least twice a month
- Join a professional association
- Join a committee or volunteer group
- Start a blog if you don't have one (Posterous is easy!) or post regularly on your existing blog

What goals are you setting for yourself?

Proving once again Mother was right

Mom was right about minding your manners. Although behaving appropriately and properly seems to be lost these days, it is still the best way to behave, especially if you care about your personal brand and personal marketing.

This evening I was at an event about social media. Lots of people were tweeting and in this context that is acceptable behavior. However, lots of people, especially a very obnoxious man behind me, were chit-chatting during the panel presentation. This is not acceptable. It shows lack of respect for the speakers, the audience, and very poor manners. Of course, this is no way compares to the congressman shouting "you lie" to the president or the obnoxious rants of a self-absorbed, self-important rap/pop star (I am omitting the names because you know who I am talking about and I am sick of giving them any more publicity).

Manners and considerate behavior are in free fall in our society and we should be concerned from a personal branding and marketing perspective, among others. Why? Because someone who has bad manners shows him/herself to be very self-absorbed, even narcissistic. And do you want to do business

with someone like that? In the end, we always want to do business with people we like and maybe even respect. Let me tell you, if I ever see the man whom I mentioned was seated behind me, I will not want to meet him. And why should I? He has shown me through his behavior that he lacks common courtesy.

The takeaway is this: mind your manners to show the world your best self, and in the process you will help improve your personal brand perception.

On Monday, Kami Huyse discussed this very issue on her blog, Communication Overtones. She came to a different conclusion. She thinks the overemphasis on personal branding has allowed character to fall by the wayside. I think society and culture have more to do with that. I was thinking about it this evening and really, I don't think you can fault personal branding at all. In fact, as I said before, if you care about your personal brand, you should aim to be civil, be polite. It is better to be known for your ideas, your experiences than for your crassness and lack of manners. Right?

What are your thoughts on this subject?

Personal marketing and communications

Although we think of marketing communications as mostly printed and electronic promotional pieces, there is one part of the communication process that is completely personal—you. Most of us represent our companies or even ourselves, if we are looking for a job or a project. We may have nice business cards but what else are we doing to market ourselves?

Yesterday, I attended a networking/educational event where I saw Kate Perrin, a fabulous networker and business person. We discussed (among other things like the Daschle debacle) how people present themselves. This area, which I consider personal marketing, is rarely addressed but it is crucial nonetheless.

Why is your personal presentation a part of marketing? Simply, because *all marketing is about perception*, and how we look (how we are dressed, our body language, our demeanor in general) determines the perception others have of us. If I show up to an interview in sloppy clothes, doesn't it seem that I didn't put any effort in and that I really don't care what people think? Similarly, if I go to a business event where everyone is wearing "business attire" and I am wearing flip-flops and shorts, don't I look out of place? Creative people generally dress creatively and corporate people also tend to dress in corporate attire. There is a reason for this—they are branding themselves. This extends to business cards as well. A lawyer probably will hand you a linen embossed card and a designer might give you a colorful one.

A few months ago, I attended a networking event. The woman in charge was a business owner, and had a direct marketing firm. She talked about email campaigns and such. However, I was distracted from her message because she was dressed in a suit circa 1985, and had unstyled long hair. She was clearly stuck in an earlier era, so my impression of her was that in no way could she conduct a 21st Century direct marketing campaign.

Of course not everyone should be cookie-cutter, dressed in navy blue suit and showing no hint of personal style. But there are some generalities about personal marketing:

- Clothing style reflects your brand—what do you want your brand to be?
- Sloppiness never looks professional
- Business cards are part of your personal marketing

package

- Your handshake speaks volumes about you
- A smile goes a long way