

The Art of Charm:

Fabulous First Impressions from the Inside Out

by Laura Mixon-Camacho, PhD

Introduction

I know you! Well, maybe we've met and maybe not yet, but I know you. You are super smart, hardworking, wanting to serve, witty, caring and professional. You like people, but sometimes you secretly wonder if they like you back. You ask yourself whether you came across as too chatty or too serious, or too nervous or too goofy. And the truth is that first impressions count a lot. People are most reluctant to change their first impressions of you, or anyone else!

Here's what people decide about you within a few seconds of meeting you: how much money you make; how educated you are and your level of success. They wait a few minutes before deciding if they like you or not. After a brief conversation of just a few minutes, they are convinced they know your intelligence; your friendliness, your competence and trustworthiness. For the remainder of your relationship with this person, he or she will seek and find evidence to support their findings from this first encounter. As you know, you never have a second chance to make a first impression.

This 9-page white paper will let you know what goes on in meeting people for the first time (that is, what's going on in their heads.) You will also learn, or be reminded of what you need to do to make that first impression a fabulous one that leads to a mutually-beneficial relationship, which makes the world a better place for all. In any case, whatever first impression you make, the decisions that the person you meet makes about you will shape that relationship from that point on. You'll also learn to relax more.

Here are just a few of the benefits of creating a fabulous first impression:

- ♣ People want to work with you.
- ♣ People want to be friends with you.
- ♣ People will make other connections for you.
- ♣ People will send you business referrals.
- ♣ You won't have to offer the lowest price to get the business.
- ♣ You'll have more fun and more impact!

Did you know that whatever impression people have of you within seconds of meeting you is extremely unlikely to change even if they spend hours upon hours with you? Psychological and communication research point out strongly that first impressions shape a person's permanent opinion of you that is difficult to change afterward.

Here's a hypothetical situation: you're about to make a routine presentation to a new group of people. Five minutes before your talk, you find out your niece has been in a terrible car accident and her life is in serious danger. You know you can't help her right this minute so you decide to go on with your talk. You know if you tell people what happened that you'll break down right then and there. So you give your talk, you know it well, but you're off. You're distracted, worried, not really present with the group. After you leave, audience members murmur to themselves, “incompetent,” “dry,” “boring,” “inconsiderate,” and “unmotivated” are some of the descriptions used about you. Now, is that fair?

You've probably heard of the “halo effect.” It happens when meaning is assigned to one attribute that overshadows a person's other attributes. That's why tall people are considered more competent, more

intelligent, more capable than their shorter counterparts, even if the opposite is true. (Just kidding,

taller people do enjoy the halo effect, it may or may not be justified.)

7 Steps to Create a Fabulous First Impressions

Making a fabulous first impression is a worthwhile endeavor and, like anything great, it's the sum of many small pieces. Cary Grant even said that being Cary Grant was the sum of more than 500 little details. What you have in this white paper about first impressions are 7 factors you can incorporate, or even just polish in yourself, to make fabulous first impressions every time you meet someone.

1. **Set a clear intention to leave a fabulous first impression.** In other words, you have to want it.

What kind of first impression do you want to have on people? To gain clarity on how this applies specifically to your personality and your situations, consider exactly what does “fabulous first impression” mean to you? Think about these adjectives: competent, caring, intelligent, sophisticated, talented, funny, charismatic, charming, delightful, serious, brainy.

Write down 5 words you'd like people to use to describe you when they meet you:

2. **Feel relaxed when you meet people.** For a lot of people, even some extroverts, meeting new people is extremely stressful. Ironically much of that stress is the result of wanting so badly to make a fabulous first impression that you can get all worried about it. Worry negates charm, charisma, delightful and a host of other positive personality traits. Your being worried makes you come across as nervous (why, are you not competent?) self-absorbed (because you

are only thinking about yourself at this moment) and/or negative. In other words, a worry wart

can often leave the wrong impression, one that does not accurately reflect the talent of the person.

To not come across as worried, **you must drop your addiction to worry**, or at least put off this nefarious habit at will. You can use the services of an experienced therapist or you can simply drop the habit, even if it takes a bit of practice and discipline. The first step is to realize that worry is simply a bad habit, a common, but terrible habit. People often have this totally wrong idea that worrying about something will keep them on their toes and taking action. The truth is worry is praying for what you don't want and, in the worst case will actually bring on the undesired effect and in the best case is a terrible waste of time, energy and emotion.

Here's an exercise that allows you to transform your worry into quiet confidence, one worry at a time. If you don't feel that worry is a problem you experience, skip this section and go on to the next page.

Step 1. Write out a brief description of the negative state you're in. Example: I feel stressed out.

Step 2. Why do you feel this way? What seems to be causing your negative state? Example: I feel stressed out *because* I'm way behind in my sales quota for this quarter.

Step 3. When I feel this way, what impact does that have on me? Example: When I feel stressed out, I eat too much, get obsessed with failure and feel terrible, almost depressed. (All of which, by the way, does not help you sell more.)

You must see for yourself how your negative state is counterproductive before moving on.

Step 4. Turn your statement from Step #2 around. Continuing our example, take, “I feel stressed out *because* I’m way behind in my sales quota for this quarter” and transform it into “I’m way behind in my sales quota for this quarter *because I’m stressed out.*”

See the impact? See how you are causing your own anxiety? (I forgot to mention this method involves taking responsibility for the results in your life.) If you want help in dealing with worry or anxiety, feel free to email me at info@mixonian.com and we can set up a complimentary get-acquainted session to work with this at a deeper level.

Remind yourself that just as you choose to get stressed out, you can also choose peace. Just tell yourself, “I can always choose peace.” It takes a while to form a new habit but this is not rocket science!

3. Relive a fun moment. Far more than 90% of Olympic athletes use visualization as part of their training. You can use it, too. To get your energy up, recall a time in your life that represents a major victory for you. In recalling this moment, conjure up as many details as you can because recalling those details strengthens the neural pathway in your brain that is related to this victorious moment and your feelings about yourself. This victory could be your last big sales close, an innovative design for a client or meeting someone who turned out to become a close personal friend. Remember how great you felt? Savor that moment and breathe in that energy.

Scientific research indicates that our bodies transmit electromagnetic waves. The Institute of Heart

Math in California has shown that our hearts actually send out more and stronger electromagnetic

waves than do our brains. You can tap into this invisible connection by remembering something that makes you smile or proud of yourself.

4. Smile more than necessary. There is actual scientific research that supports the many benefits of smiling. It raises your own energy level and the energy of those around you. You look better, younger, smarter, more personable AND fabulous. Smiling activates 14 muscles in your face which stimulates the release of serotonin. Serotonin is a monomine neurotransmitter and is a well-known contributor to feelings of well-being. Some call it the “happiness hormone” even though it's not a hormone.

True confession: I started intentionally smiling a lot more about a year ago. I felt pretty dumb sometimes, but I received enough feedback to know I was on the right track. In March, while at the local post office getting my daughter's new passport for a trip we were about to take, I discovered that I, too, needed to renew my passport to reflect my newly-married last name. Although I had not prepared to have my photo taken, I knew I had to do it so I smiled HUGELY. A few weeks later in Paris, the immigrant officer, a dashing young man, commented on how happy I looked. I can promise you that is not a normal reaction for any sort of French immigration officer. Seeing my big, goofy smile made him smile. And that got our trip to Paris off to an awesome beginning.

5. Find things to like about *them*. People like people who like them. This is important and somewhat counter-intuitive. The reality is that when you focus on what is going on with the people you meet, they find you more fabulous. Notice what the other people are wearing and

look for some sort of honest compliment or question to make, like, “I love your earrings, where

did you find them?” (Note people don't care that your comment is not Nobel-prize for literature worthy.) It's your job to look for clues to get information ABOUT THEM, not sell yourself.

By the way, this is a bit off topic but let me take this opportunity to let you know that the big mistake people make in building relationships is getting too transactional too early in the relationship. That means soliciting business too early. It's productive to give someone your card right away, it's not time to close the sale.

6. **Get into *their* comfort zone.** When you have rapport with another person, you can see this in the mirroring of each other's body language. This process is unfailing and unconscious. If you like the person, you will automatically match their gestures. If you decide ahead of time that you want to like this person, you can go into the encounter looking for body language that you can mirror. That is entering the other person's comfort zone: conversational pace, hand gestures, tone of voice, volume of speech, size of personal space. For example, if the other person speaks faster than you normally do, up your own conversational speed in order to enter their comfort zone.

Sometimes when you strike up a conversation about someone, you feel that they don't really get you or are not that interested in you. No worries! A lot of people are uncomfortable when meeting new people, feel anxiety (because they haven't read this paper yet!) and simply are at a loss about what to say. It's your job to take charge. No matter where the meeting is or what sort of encounter you're having, act like you're the host. It's your job to make people feel comfortable. The easiest way to do this is to ask questions. Become a personal detective. And don't let it bother you if the other person does not reciprocate by asking you questions – they're busy thinking “what a great conversation.” You need not

ever worry what people are thinking of you; really it's none of your business.

7. **Follow up.** Technically this is not part of making a fabulous first impression but it really helps to build on your good work of building the relationship with someone if you follow-up very soon after meeting this person. And don't get transactional (that means don't try to sell them anything unless they ask for it.) The easiest form of follow-up is a quick “nice meeting you” email. You may also want to link up with this person on Linked-In. Sometimes, depending on how the relationship feels to you, you can connect on Facebook but I would advise caution in this. For some people, Facebook is more personal and they want to get to know you better before opening up their lives to you in this way. You can also write up a note on nice stationery or call the person. In any case, follow-up reinforces the image of you as a professional go-getter.

Summary

First impressions are hugely important and long-lasting. If you'd like some compassionate and objective feedback about the way you come across in meetings, Mixonian Institute can help you through free blog posts, workshops and personalized coaching. We also do customized workshops for groups. Meanwhile, Be Charming and create a Fabulous First Impression! For more information, shoot an email to info@mixonian.com or call 843.882.5135.

7 Steps to Create a Fabulous First Impression:

- 1. Set a clear intention to leave a fabulous first impression.**
- 2. Feel relaxed when you when you meet people.**
- 3. Relive a fun moment.**
- 4. Smile more than necessary.**
- 5. Find things to like about *them*.**
- 6. Get into *their* comfort zone.**
- 7. Follow up.**

Wishing you a fabulous and charming life. Please keep in touch!

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Brief bio

Laura Mixon-Camacho earned her doctorate in Communication Studies from Regent University in 2009. She also holds an MBA from the University of Dallas and a BA in both Spanish and Economics from Sweet Briar College. She began her career in banking then quickly moved to the financial press in Caracas, Venezuela. She taught at East Carolina University, Merici Academy and College of Charleston from 1997-2010. Laura formed Mixonian Institute in 2009 to help unconventional professionals get their brilliance out in a bigger way to change the world.