

The Nine Golden Keys to Making Great First Impressions

1. In the Reception Area

Remove your outerwear and give it to the receptionist if possible. Avoid entering an office with your arms full of clutter that can make you fumble and look inept. Always *stand* in a reception area — never sit. Receptionists will insist you 'take a seat' because when you do, you're out of sight and they no longer have to deal with you. Stand with Hand-in-Hand behind your back (confidence) and slowly rock back and forth on your feet (confident, controlled) or use the Steeple gesture. This body language is a constant reminder that you are still there and waiting. But never do this at the Tax Office.

2. The Entry

Your entry tells others how you expect to be treated. When the receptionist has given you the green light to enter, walk in without hesitation. Do not stand in the doorway like a naughty schoolchild waiting to see the headmaster. When you walk through the door of the person's office, maintain the same speed. People who lack confidence change gears and perform a small shuffle as they enter.

3. The Approach

Even if the person is on the phone, rummaging through a drawer or tying his shoelaces, walk in directly and confidently with a smooth motion. Put down your briefcase, folder or whatever is in your hands, shake the person's hand and immediately take a seat. Let the other person see that you are accustomed to walking confidently into offices and that you don't expect to be kept waiting. People who walk slowly or take long strides convey that they have plenty of time on their hands, are not interested in what they are doing or have nothing else to do. This not for anyone who wants to convey power, authority or capability or that they are a healthy, potential mate. Influential people and those who command attention walk briskly at a medium pace with medium length strides.

4. The Handshake

Keep your palm straight and return the pressure you receive. Let the other person decide when to end the handshake. Step to the left of a rectangular desk as you approach to avoid being given a Palm-Down handshake. Never shake directly across a desk. Use a person's name twice in the first 15 seconds and never talk for more than 30 seconds at a time.

5. When You Sit

If you are compelled to sit in a low chair directly facing the other person, turn it away 45 degrees from the person to avoid being stuck in the 'reprimand' position. If you can't angle the chair, angle your body instead.

6. Seating Areas

If you're invited to sit in an informal area of the person's office, such as at an informal coffee table, this is a positive sign because 95% of business rejections are delivered from behind a desk. Never sit on a low sofa that sinks so low it makes you look like a giant pair of legs topped by a small head - if necessary, sit upright on the edge so you can control your body language and gestures, and angle your body to 45 degrees away from the person.

7. Your Gestures

People, who are cool, calm, collected and in control of their emotions use clear, uncomplicated, deliberate movements. High-status individuals use fewer gestures than low-status individuals. This is an ancient negotiating ploy — people with power don't have to move much. Mirror the other person's gestures and expressions when appropriate.

8. Distance

Respect the other person's Personal Space, which will be largest in the opening minutes of the meeting. If you move too close, the person will respond by sitting back, leaning away or using repetitive gestures such as drumming the fingers. As a rule, you can move closer to familiar people but further back from new ones. Men generally move closer to women they work with while women generally move further back when they work with men. Work closer to those of similar age and further back from significantly older or younger ones.

9. Your Exit

Pack your things calmly and deliberately - not in a frenzy - shake hands if possible, turn and walk out. If the door was closed when you entered, close it behind you as you leave. People always watch you from behind as you leave so, if you're a man, make sure you have shined the back of your shoes. This is an area many men neglect and women are critical of this. When a woman decides to leave she will point her foot towards the door and begin to adjust the back of her clothing and hair so that she makes a good rear-view impression as she departs. When you get to the door turn around slowly and smile. It's far better that they recall your smiling face than your rear end.