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**The First Impression of Credibility: Your Face**  
 June 16, 2009

By Michael Lovas

Here's the situation: A prospect has just walked up to you. Stop right there—what does your face say right then?

This instant in time is one of the most misunderstood split-seconds in business. If you don't know what your face looks like when your prospect first sees it, you can't alter it to make yourself more approachable, more likeable, or more credible.

In this article, we're going to address the two questions raised by that first impression.

**1. What face are you wearing?** The common advice in American culture is to give your prospect a big smile. It's wrong. Do that and you'll more likely look like Gomer Pyle. Consider the mismatch if your prospect is suffering from a serious problem. He's frowning with concern and you're wearing a big goofy smile. It destroys rapport and gives a terrible first impression.

Then you have people who sell technically sophisticated products and services. Such folks are overwhelmingly analytical, and analytical people tend to frown when they think. Since these people are almost always thinking, odds are they're wearing a frown when their prospects see them for the first time.

Whatever the prospect sees in that frown, it's not thoughtful, intelligent, or anything else good. Most likely, the prospect is thinking indigestion, gas, trouble at home, business slump, IRS audit, etc. The expectation a frown gives is anything but inviting.

**2. What face should you be wearing?** There are two answers here. First, start with a smile in your eyes. This sort of face is referred to as "optimistically neutral."

Second, look into the other person's face and wear a more subtle version of the same face he or she is wearing. Doing that tells the visitor that you understand and are sympathetic to his/her state of mind. Let's say the prospect's eyebrows are raised and his eyes are wide open. That would tell you he's excited. If you don't put on that same facial expression, he'll think you don't understand. So, you'll be driving a wedge and making it harder to build rapport.

If it's a new prospect, that simple error could spell the end to any chance of doing business. Research has overwhelmingly demonstrated people do not buy from others they dislike. If you can't build rapport, it's a safe bet the other person isn't going to like you. And matching the facial expression is one of the most effective rapport-building skills you can use.

Also, bear in mind most people will not follow your face. So if the relationship is important to you, it's best to assume the lead on the rapport-building, and take responsibility for that first impression.

The basic skills discussed above may sound as mindless as the rabbit running around the tree when you tie your shoes. Nonetheless, they're extremely effective and will pay off for you handsomely.

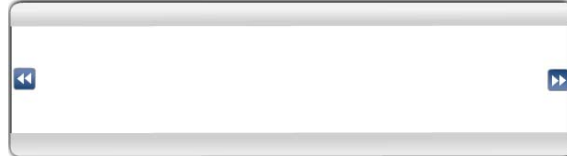
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