

10 indirect things we get judged on — how do you shape up?

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Every day, and in every way, we consciously and unconsciously analyze everything about everyone. This is part of being social; it is part survival; and it is how we size people up to establish some level of predictability about who and how people are. This is a natural and nonstop process we experience with everyone we come in contact with. As business leaders, managers and colleagues, we pay attention to everything about a person, to gauge who is successful and driven, whom we want on our teams and whom we would prefer to avoid. Here is a list of 10 subtle things we get judged on:

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1. Appearance

The very first thing to notice about anyone is his or her overall appearance -- in a bigger picture sense, before we pay attention to detail. The first things others notice is gender, race, height, weight, hair and clothing, all of which create deep psychological assessments about us in others. Meeting someone for the first time is like going through a TSA checkpoint: We are immediately sized up from the second we come in contact. To make a good first impression, make sure you're well-kept, nicely dressed and clean, and that you smell good and smile.

2. Handshake

Many believe handshakes reveal everything about a person. Through a handshake, people can sense if we are confident or insecure. Those with a natural confidence shake hands with a balanced and kind sense of authority. Too strong a handshake, however, reveals the need to dominate, while a weak or limp handshake reveals insecurity and/or frailness of personality.

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When making a first impression in an interview, or meeting a new customer or salesperson, we need to recognize that our handshake is often a litmus test right from the start. No one wants to start a new relationship with a weak future. Find a balance among the factors of intelligence, elegance and confidence when shaking someone else's hand.

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3. Teeth

Our teeth function like our business card. Teeth reveal everything, from social status, income level and hygiene, to our overall state of health.

Attractive, successful people are associated with pearly white Hollywood smiles. Teeth expose things such as our age and gender and the type of personality we have, all of which have a huge impact on the first impression we give.

Bright, white teeth make people look more successful, more employable and appealing. Pretty, white, straight teeth also make people appear five years younger, so head off to get that whitening treatment to improve the first impression you give.

4. Nail-biting

As a psychologist, one of the first things I look for is the condition of a patient's fingernails. Nail-biters, or those who pick and chew the skin around their nails tend to have anxiety issues and issues with perfectionism.

Perfectionistic, nervous people are viewed as having difficulty relaxing and performing tasks at a normal pace.

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Nail-biters tend to have lower levels of frustration tolerance when they do not meet their goals. They also experience higher levels of boredom when not deeply involved in a task. To avoid showing your nerves, work on staying busy to avoid chewing on those nails. Nail-biting is essentially a form of self-soothing. Taking a little natural GABA supplement (GABA being gamma-aminobutyric acid, a neuro-transmitter in the brain) can help calm that nervous energy.

5. Posture

Posture communicates a physical and emotional response to positive and negative stress. When we feel confident, the chemicals in our brains prompt us to stand up straight and arch our back. The more confident we are in ourselves, the taller we stand the major portion of the time. However, when we feel timid, nervous or fearful, or don't want to be the center of attention, our brains react with the impulse to withdrawal into a fetal-like position.

To make a better impression, keep in mind that we can use our posture to get us out of negative stress by holding ourselves as if we have all the confidence in the world.

6. Laughter

Laughter is judged and experienced as relaxing, natural and lighthearted, or as annoying, overcompensating and nervous. When laughter is natural and appropriate to the situation, it eliminates tension and boosts morale.

However, when it comes from a disingenuous place, it creates annoyance and division between people.

Annoying, needy or attention-seeking laughter may be judged by others as off-putting. So, be sure to laugh naturally, and with a sense of composure, so people enjoy your company.

7. Tone of voice

When it comes to communication, it is not just our words which have an impact, but also our tone of voice. Whether one's voice is booming, screechy, mousy, raspy or demure, it speaks volumes about our personality. Our voices subtly communicate our true emotional state, even when we'd rather it not. The subtle wavers in our voice communicate that we're sad or nervous.

When our voices get louder, our words more blunted or pointed, that communicates that we're angry. This deeply impacts how other people perceive us, maybe even more so than our physical appearance. That is why it is often said that, *it is not what you say but how you say it that makes all the difference* in communication. For this reason, think about how you're speaking before you actually do.

8. Eye contact

When there is too much eye contact it can make others feel they are being stared or glared at, making things awkward or threatening. Too little eye contact is interpreted as insecurity or a lack of honesty. Natural, healthy, well-received eye contact lasts no more than six seconds.

It is important to break contact occasionally and look away -- to pause as we express something. It's also important, when listening, to look at the person

speaking with consistency, as that shows that we're engaged and listening. The most important thing to do when we converse is smile. Smiling changes our eyes in a positive way.

9. Punctuality

Being on time communicates responsibility. We spend a considerable amount of time keeping track of other people's time, judging them to be early, on time or late. We use units of time to describe ourselves and others. For example, describing someone as "always late" may imply a judgment, that we see that person as disorganized, flaky, disrespectful or immature.

To be punctual is a positive attribute and a reflection of many admirable personality qualities, such as responsibility. For this reason, be on time and/or actively communicate your ETA. Others will appreciate the gesture.

10. Handwriting

If we have to write something by hand at work, or we ask that of a prospective employee, the handwriting that results will give us some great insight into who we or they are. It is believed that the size of our letters reveal whether we are shy or outgoing. Small letters which do not reach the top line are indicative of a timid or introverted personality.

When we write with large letters which go over the top line, we are seen as more outgoing and confident. Those who put a lot of space between words are seen as preferring to have more freedom and independence, while those who put very little space between letters are seen as preferring to be around others and disliking being alone. When we dot our I's and cross our T's, we

are seen as detail oriented, and if we apply a lot of pressure to our pen, we are seen as confident, whereas if we write lightly, we are viewed as more sensitive and empathic.

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Because it is natural to judge and be judged, use this list to understand how others may be perceiving you and your personality. These subtle things are oftentimes the make-it-or-break-it factors that determine your receiving future opportunities over others. So, pay attention.