

# { Executive *Memo*

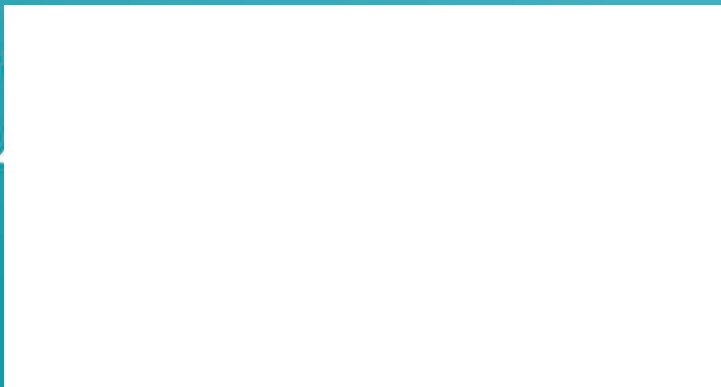
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EXCELLENCE BY ASSOCIATION

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MAKE THEM COUNT!

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# YOU HAVE SECONDS. MAKE THEM COUNT!



By **Sylvie di Giusto**, CSP

It happens every day. You meet someone for the first time. It could be a potential member of your association, someone who would like to work on your team, or someone who simply wants to do business with you. They will form an immediate opinion about you. If you have not taken the time to control the details, you are leaving your impression entirely in their hands rather than in yours.

People's brains immediately decide things such as whether you are trustworthy, smart, successful, or reliable. And most important, their decisions will lead them to follow you, buy from you, stay with you, sign up for the net conference or membership—or not. A first impression happens in the blink of an eye, and although a first impression is based solely on you, it will affect how people think about the association you represent.

So, what are first impressions based on?

First impressions are based on many factors, but there are a few that will stand out to almost everyone you meet. How can you make your first impression work for you? How can you be sure your first impression is what you want it to be at any moment and with any person? How can you impress your team, your board members, your sponsors, your members, and those who are considering joining

your association? Unfortunately, there are no simple answers to these questions because there is no one-size-fits-all formula. Instead it is all in the details and is based on what I call the ABCDs of your first impression.



## **A = APPEARANCE**

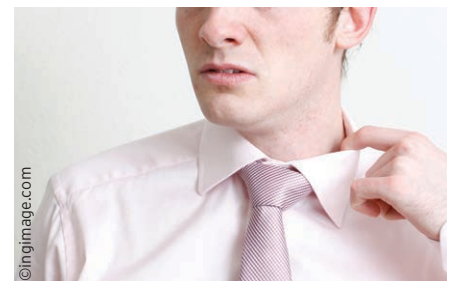
Appearance is the first thing people will see when you step into a room, show up at a meeting, or walk out on the stage at your annual conference. We don't like to think people are judging us by what we wear or how we look, but they do. We all do it, even when we try not to. Our appearance can say a lot—quickly and loudly. It starts with the suit you are born in—your body. Does it look healthy? Do you take care of it? Next comes your clothing, your accessories, your hair, or your makeup—everything people see when they simply look at you.

As a leader within your association, you set the tone right here. You need to lead by example, including visually, to

help your team understand how you all need to represent your association and its values. Your team needs to understand whom they serve and what those people's expectations are. What is their typical dress code in their own establishment? What do some of the most successful members of your association look like? Asking these questions and preparing you and your team properly can mean the difference between a hit and a miss.

## **B = BEHAVIOR**

Behavior, while not as visible as appearance, is the next thing people will notice about you. This can be anything, such as your smile, eye contact, how you stand, how you shake hands, and much more. Do you fidget when you talk to someone, which may make you look nervous or uncomfortable? Do you slouch instead of standing tall and confidently?



# Listening is the most important part of every conversation you or your team members have.

Do you look around the room when you are talking to someone instead of making eye contact? Most important, your attitude speaks loudly, long before you open your mouth. In critical situations, when emotions run high, how do you control your attitude toward your team members? What attitude do they show toward your associate members or partners when they call in with questions or they meet them at the next conference?



## C = COMMUNICATION

Communication constitutes a big part of others' first impression of you. Yet, perhaps you may be surprised that communication is not only about talking. Influential conversations are based on a verbal give and take. Listening is the most important part of every conversation you or your team members have. The better you listen, the better you can respond with confidence. Did you prepare questions for the person you will be meeting beforehand? Did you take the time to learn something about him, his organization, passion, or latest wins and worries? Preparation is key when it comes to communication, and it can help with opening conversation and keeping it flowing. The more prepared you are, the more confident you will be. And the more confident you are, the calmer your voice will be. When you are prepared and confident, it will be easy for you to get your point across while providing helpful and useful information. People will notice your preparation and confidence when you speak, and these traits will be part of the impression you leave.



## D = DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

There was a time when your digital footprint was not a factor, but today, people gain their first impression of you online—before they even meet you. Your and your team's digital footprint cannot be overlooked as the most important part of the first impression you and your association make on others. Your social media profiles, your email style, and everything you do online can be analyzed at any given moment. Before you get the chance to shake a potential or existing member's hand, she has already formed an opinion of you based on the conscious and unconscious footprint you and your team leave online. And, while you may think your posts are private, a future prospect, member, or business contact does not differentiate and may judge your entire association based on one post an employee on your team made. When did you perform a digital background check on yourself? What will you find about you and your team? Will it be the impression you had hoped to make?

## BEING UNPREPARED IS A SERIOUS SHORTFALL

Your first impression is all in the details and in the way you control those details. It is important to make sure you know what you want to say to others with your image and that you work to control that image so it does not control you.

You may be wondering what you can do to make sure your impression is saying what you want it to say. The easiest way is to start with finding your "one word."

## WHAT IS YOUR ONE WORD?

I ask many of my clients and audience members to do this when trying to decide how they want their image to be perceived. Finding one key word that describes the image you want others to see is crucial. Examples might be words such as trustworthy, leader, caring, dependable, creative, or intelligent. Once found, how does this word translate into your appearance, your behavior, or the words you say online and offline?

I encourage you to do the same for your association. What one word describes what you think your members are seeing in the organization you lead or work with today? What is the one word that pops up in their heads when they think of their picture-perfect association? How big is the gap between those two words? And do you and your team represent those words in every micro moment that people judge you based on your ABCDs?

Whatever word you or your association want to be known for, you will need to work with your team on every aspect of your image to become known for this word. Working to cultivate a specific image that you want to show others will require working on all the little details that make up your association's brand. Before you know it, that seven seconds will never be a problem for your association; instead, you and your team will make them count! 📌



*Sylvie di Giusto, CSP, empowers people to influence the success of their own careers. She speaks to audiences worldwide about the importance of "first impressions... and everything beyond" and takes them on an entertaining journey that reveals how the world sees them. She is the author of The Image of Leadership, the co-owner of the Studio for Image Professionals, and the creator of "How You Impress." Find her at SylvieDiGiusto.com.*