

# Network With A Smile

The positive response to a friendly face | By Laura Schwartz



**G**iven the choice, I'd rather talk to the happy person in a paper sack than the sad sack in the Armani power suit! Last month I addressed the importance of physical appearance and first impressions, a topic that could have spanned four pages (we barely touched upon the importance of finding the right makeup and utilizing personal shoppers!). But, it would be futile to talk about the *physical* without discussing the equally important power of your *emotional* appearance.

To start, here's a real life story that you can all relate to because the person I'm about to describe will either remind you of someone you know, or it will—whether you admit it or not—remind you of yourself. Years ago, I worked with a beautiful and well-dressed woman. She was always primped, no hair out of place or makeup smudge to be seen. However, while perfected on the outside, she had the emotional appearance of a dead man walking on the inside. We nicknamed this beautiful, well-dressed colleague of mine the "Fun Sponge" because no matter what, she was always negative, a "Miss Half Empty" who sucked

the fun out of any party or work event. In fact, an almost visible dark cloud seemed to follow her around just like the billowing brown dust cloud that enveloped Pig Pen every time he went to hang out with the Peanuts gang. Not surprisingly, one of her biggest complaints was that she "never met anyone" at any event.

News flash: If you're pleasant to be around, people will want to be around you. If you're not, people are going to stay away from you. It's that elementary and simple. And, when it comes time for that promotion or new account, no matter how many years you've given the company, whom you slept with or how late you've stayed at the office—that promotion or new account is going to be given to someone else.

Don't get me wrong, I'm entirely sensitive to and aware of the varying degrees of clinical depression. It's a very serious medical condition and should be treated by a qualified doctor or therapist. If you or someone you know have symptoms of medical depression, seek medical help.

But, if that's not the case and you're just plain negative, peruse the self-help section at Borders or seek out Dr. Phil.

## PRACTICING EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

So how emotionally involved are you anyway? No, not in your current relationship; how emotionally involved are you in your current conversation? Even if the individual or topic at hand isn't your favorite, you've got to at least act like you're emotionally interested in those around you. There's nothing worse than a person who seems as if they're doing you a favor by taking the time to talk with you. We all know someone like that. They're not just the stuck-up girls we knew in high school—they're in our break rooms, next to our cubicles, in the corner offices and at our cocktail parties. Instead of maintaining eye contact with you, these emotionally disconnected individuals choose to constantly look *around* you as if searching for anyone more interesting to talk to. To note, the only thing worse is when someone looks at your hair instead of your eyes. Unless hair is hanging in the eyes of the person you're speaking with, don't stare. We've all had bad hair days—or bad outfit days, bad makeup days, etc.—we don't need anyone drawing attention to our physical flaws, making it worse and shaking our confidence!

It's very important to remember that although you may not be interested in the topic or person presently, you never know whom they know or what they'll be needing in the future. Five minutes of emotional involvement can only help you.

Finally, outside of being positive and emotionally involved, keep in mind **confidence** and **approachability**. These two traits speak to your credibility and state that you believe and feel secure in who you are, what you are and what you want to become both professionally and personally. But, a warning: These two factors can cancel themselves out if confidence becomes arrogance. Overconfidence does not always indicate an overachiever.

Now, practice. When someone asks, "How are you?" Take a second before deciding to answer, "Great," "Good," "OK," or "Miserable." No one can be happy all the time, but when it comes to "working" the scene you've got to grin and bear it. Do your best to put whatever may be bothering you in the back of your head. Producing an upbeat attitude at an event will put you on the path to obtaining a positive response...and result.

**Bottom Line:** Your emotional appearance plays an important role in determining your power as a guest because it not only sets your tone but also the tone of the people around you. You've only got one shot at a first impression, so make an effort not to be "Miss Half Empty"—go ahead and have your vodka tonic filled to the top! Which reminds me—next month my topic is The Power of Conversation: Is It Business Talk, Cocktail Talk or Your Cocktail Talking? Cheers! ■

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