

What leadership image do you portray?

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Did you know that within 10 to 30 seconds people form lasting impressions of who you are? In an interesting study in schools, social psychologists found that once that first impression is set, it remains constant with little change over time. In the study, a group of students were asked to come into a classroom and rate a teacher they met for the first time. Their ratings were consistent with those of other students who rated the same teacher after an entire semester. The same can hold true of first impressions in the business world as well as with leaders.

There is a field of study used by politicians and business executives alike called “impression management” where people learn to control the impression they give to other people. Just like an actor creates a character with the way he or she walks on stage, leaders must take charge of the image they send to colleagues and other business professionals. Here’s a good place to start: Take the following assessment created by the American Management Association and find out the current image you portray.

Rate yourself on each assessment item: 1: Never 2: Rarely 3: Sometimes 4: Often 5: Always.

Part I. The “Outer You” (Matters of Appearance).

___1. *Appearance.* Do you look like a confident, competent leader?

___ Good posture.

___ Neat/clean/appropriate attire.

___ Good grooming.

___2. *Eye Contact.* Do you make steady eye contact (without staring)?

___3. *Smile.* Do you smile easily and naturally around people?

___4. *Vocal Confidence.* Do you speak up clearly and confidently?

Part II. The “Inner You” (Matters of Character).

___5. *Friendliness.* Do you treat people in a friendly, accepting way?

___6. *Precision.* Are you precise but relaxed when speaking?

___7. *Enthusiasm.* Are you positive and enthusiastic, but not over-bearing?

___8. *Attentive Listening.* Do you listen attentively to others?

___9. *Smarts.* Are you up-to-date on the latest concepts and technology?

___10. *Lack of Pretense.* Do you show your expertise without showing off?

___11. *Genuine Concern.* Do you show genuine concern for others?

___12. *Integrity.* Do you demonstrate high levels of integrity and honesty?

___13. *Objectivity.* Are you fair, impartial, and objective in tough situations?

___14. *Courtesy and Respect.* Do you show respect for others?

___15. *Avoidance of Gossip.* Do you abstain from gossip and innuendo?

___16. *Confidentiality.* Do you keep the secrets that others share with you?

Next, have others whose opinions and perceptions you trust (and who are not afraid to tell you the truth) to rate you as well. Hopefully, your ratings

are similar to their ratings. If they are, you can easily see areas of strength and areas needing improvement. If the people who rated you were consistent with each other yet different than your own ratings, there’s a strong possibility their ratings are more accurate than yours. (It’s not uncommon for people to rate themselves higher than deserving.) If everyone’s ratings are inconsistent, then you should develop a strategy to improve in all areas. And then, at a later time, administer the assessment again.

Your professional image is a function of the factors listed in Part I. As much as 55% of the impression you make is visual. This is more than “dressing for success,” it also includes the nonverbal cues you give off with your body language. Mark Leary, a communication expert, suggests you try to see yourself as others do. Have a friend videotape you when you practice a speech, or set up a camera and tape yourself walking into the room where others are present. It sounds strange but whenever you see yourself on video, you often notice things that you never knew were there. You may realize you sound, look, and act differently than your originally thought.

So take the image assessment and identify the areas in which you scored lower. Those areas are your opportunities for growth. Be the leader who portrays an excellent image--the one others want to trust and follow right from the get-go!

~ The End ~