

Managing Your Image

Managing your image starts with the first impression you make. It can be very difficult to change a perception someone has formed of you. For a start that would involve the other person admitting they may have misjudged you and secondly it would require you to do something different to force them to reflect upon their earlier perception.

From the beginning it is important to be yourself. Believe it or not, most people develop intuitive means of sensing when someone is being artificial. If you have habits or behaviours that others may find difficult to cope with, then you need to change those behaviours – or at least ensure they don't surface at an inappropriate moment.

Many of us are egotistic to some degree. One of the first signs of someone lapsing into egotistic behaviour is when they begin to talk about themselves and their future achievements, often without evidence of past achievement or ideas on how to monitor future achievement. When you find yourself telling others how great you are going to be it is time for you to reassess your behaviour and reflect upon the impact you might be having upon others. Let your behaviour shine your light and then let others proclaim to the world how great you are – or not.

The reality is this. Externally the human species is pretty damned ugly. Our skin is blotchy, etched and saggy, we come in a variety of different shapes and sizes and colours, some with more hair, others with less, and the list goes on. Our external appearances do not make us who we are. What makes you who you are is how you think and how your behaviour reflects your thoughts. Body language is important. Alan Pease's books on body language are humorous and entertaining and if you attempted to be aware of every possible body language trap you might fall into then you would be afraid to get out of bed in the morning. Read the books so that you understand the issue and the implications and then focus more on how you think and what you think. Get your thinking right and your body language will follow in an appropriate manner.

Understand the context of any situation you are in. Different situations call for different approaches. This is not about faking things; it is about being aware and conscious of what is expected of you. Many years ago when doing my military training and participating in an officer training program, the trainers took us uneducated grunts and placed us into a social environment for officers – just to see how we would assess the environment and respond to the expectations.

Know your stuff. Having said that, you cannot know everything. Be confident in your own abilities and knowledge and be confident in what you have yet to learn. Many people try to fill in the quiet spots in a conversation with their opinion. Avoid doing that unless it has been sought. Instead ask the other person a question and take time to listen. Be part of situations where you don't know what is happening by all means, this is how you learn and develop, just avoid acting as a know-all when in reality you know bugger all!

A blues player once told his audience that they should never play a note they didn't believe in. You should apply the same concept to your communication. Before you speak you need to listen. In doing so you will pick up clues as to the environment, the type of people you are working with, how they might respond during conversation. All this helps you to communicate, it ensures the language you use is in synch with others, they will be comfortable, more likely to engage you in conversation

and listen to you. When you make others comfortable then they will help you be comfortable. If you are not familiar with neurolinguistic programming (NLP) I recommend you hop onto the internet or obtain an introductory book and read up on their ideas in this area. As coaches when coaching others we use an ontological approach where we listen for the language being used, the things being said and watch for behaviours and actions to guide us in our coaching conversations. It is a very non-threatening process.

Avoid talking 'bullshit'. Use stories by all means to illustrate your experiences and ideas just avoid embellishment or story telling for the sake of telling stories. Be careful with humour. Something you believe to be funny may not be to another person. This is where your understanding of the circumstances, the social environment and the language being used by others are important. When you do use stories to illustrate your experiences ensure they are credible. Everyone that spends time fishing knows that for everyone 'big' one, there are thousands of undersized fish returned to the waters and unspoken about. The aim of storytelling is to reinforce your credibility; not to damage it.

Fashion has its place yet it has destroyed more reputations than it has made. When we become slaves to fashion we will inevitably stand out from a crowd – sometimes for the better, other times for the worse. In any event we will create perceptions in the minds of others; we will invoke a range of emotional reactions, from pleasant memories to reminders of our own ungainly body shape to questions about who can afford that sort of money. Yes you might attract the eye of a member of the opposite sex but will it be for the right reasons? Rule number one with clothing, being comfortable in both body and mind. Rule number two, be tidy and clean and rule number three wear clothing that is appropriate for the situation. The good thing about fashion is that there are infinite variations on the theme.

Grooming sits alongside clothing. Be tidy and be clean. Be aware of body odours, sweat stains, unwashed shirts, creased or crumpled clothing, dull or dirty shoes. The key to a healthy complexion and feeling comfortable in your own body is to live a healthy lifestyle. If we focus more on what we eat, drink and how we exercise than we do on the shape of our bodies then we will feel more comfortable with ourselves. Take time to look in a mirror before entering a room, what you will see is what others will see.

One final word, if you make a mistake in a meeting, at an event or during a presentation. Say sorry to those there, blush appropriately and move on. Try to avoid justifying your behaviour or making excuses as you often end up in a worse place. We are human beings, we are not perfect, we will never be perfect so focus on just being the best you can be, above all be true to yourself.

This management tip has been brought to you compliments of John Coxon & Associates. We have developed an Integrated Management Process (IMP), including a suite of diagnostic tools, designed to help you develop the potential of your management group and align their effectiveness with your mission, strategy and outcome. We work with management teams and managers in the health sector and not for profit sector in Australia and New Zealand. Telephone Australia (03)5561 2228 or NZ (0272) 583232. Email john@johncoxon.com.au or go to our website at www.johncoxon.com.au or www.johncoxon.co.nz. Please feel free to pass this information onto anyone you feel may benefit.