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# Finding the Right Balance of Impression Management

## Applying the Power of Influence and Persuasion

*Donn LeVie Jr. / Donn LeVie Jr. STRATEGIES, LLC*

The concept of impression management and its associated language is an important tool for building and applying influential and persuasive intelligence, which is the mark of a Presence-Driven Leader, but it requires a delicate balance. It’s not difficult to understand that we have varying approaches to processing information, developing ideas, and communicating them to others.

Individuals fluent in the language of impression management have the ability to adapt to the communication styles of decision makers and interviewers they’re trying to influence, persuade, or impress, rather than remain within the rigid confines of their own comfort zones.

On the one end of the external impression-management[[1]](#footnote-1) spectrum lie individuals who seem oblivious of other’s reactions to their behaviors. While some may engage in conscious action to generate attention, these individuals often fail to process information in a manner that has any relevancy.

In other words, such people often direct their attention away from themselves to other persons, places, or things in their immediate environment, and therefore do not consider how others see their behavior. In essence, they have no feedback loop that allows them to adjust their behavior based on how others see them.

During an interview, candidates with this impression-management style (fortunately, they are few and far between) do not find favor in the eyes of decision makers with hiring authority.

At the other end of the impression-management spectrum are individuals with heightened public self-awareness, who are aware of every aspect of their appearance and behavior that others observe. Such people find it difficult not to focus on the impressions others are reaching about them. They purposely scan for visual, auditory, or body language cues, and respond selectively to cues that foster the “right” impression for a first date, job interview, audition, public speaking engagement, or any other particular situation.

In fact, this acute form of impression management can manifest itself as performance anxiety or stage fright for some actors, musicians, athletes—and interview candidates. Unfortunately, this impression-management style does not create a strong positive first impression with decision makers.

Truth be told, most people monitor how others perceive them at a subconscious level without paying obvious attention. This subliminal self-monitoring can be attributed to many self-preservation behaviors that have become routine. Some individuals are motivated to carefully manage the impressions they project but refrain from doing so during interviews. Maybe because they do (or don’t) pick up on external cues, such as personal familiarity with the decision maker or relationships with existing employees.

In general, the more expertise and accomplishments a candidate has, the more likely he or she will keep overt impression management at minimal levels, allowing expertise and achievement to speak for themselves. However, if a position is one for which there is significant competition, then an applicant will be more motivated to manage his or her impression in the hopes of obtaining some advantage.

Impression management strategies are designed to increase likeability and social favor with decision makers. We all want to convey a positive image and without some degree of self-monitoring, it’s easy to appear too withdrawn or overzealous. Impression management can also mask anxiety and thus become a coping mechanism for people who are prone to panic attacks.

Psychologists claim that public self-presentation is almost always overtly manipulative to some degree because the intent is to maximize projected benefit and minimize expected penalties. But it’s not sinister at all. You’re managing your impression by simply observing others and mirroring their communication style and demeanor in an attempt to connect with them on a relational level that makes you memorable in a positive, cooperative way. It’s another application of persuasive and influential intelligence.

 Who knows…impression management may also help you get out of a traffic ticket….or help you get a second date.

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*Engagement and positioning strategist, leadership platform expeditor, author, and conference speaker Donn LeVie Jr. has 30 years’ experience leading people and projects for such Fortune 100 companies as Phillips Petroleum, Motorola, Intel Corporation; government agencies (NOAA), and academia (Department of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, University of Houston Downtown College). Donn specializes at the intersection of leadership, communication, and performance, which means he works with organization leaders and executives through the doorway of coaching and consulting. Contact Donn at* *donn@donnleviejrstrategies.com**.*

1. *Internal impression management* is a term used to describe behaviors directed to the self as the primary audience (self-esteem, self-image), whereas *external impression management* describes behaviors directed to others as the primary audience. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)