

Job Hunting: "It's Still The First Impression Stupid!"

By: [Paul Shearstone](#)

In the 1992 USA Presidential election, political strategist James Carville hung a sign in Bill Clinton's Little Rock campaign office that read, "It's still the economy, stupid." His intent? Simply to keep everybody focused on the most important issue of the day. History clearly demonstrates he was right and George Bush Sr. was soundly defeated.

The lesson to be learned from this is that even the most important among us; the inarguably qualified, are still not immune to a potential to overlook the obvious.

When it comes to job-hunting, nearly everyone's heard the mantra; You never get a second chance to make a first impression. True words to be sure - the importance of which, few will argue. Nevertheless, too many of us fail to appreciate how critical and how important the first impression really is.

Need proof? Try a little experiment of your own. Sit down at a local mall or somewhere there are people to pass by you. Assume for a second that every person you see is more than qualified for whatever job you want to imagine. Your task is to look at each person and decide whether you would offer them a job or not.

Strange as it may sound, you'll find yourself saying things like, "That Person? Definitely not! Him? Maybe. Her? Not sure. That person? Without question!" and so on.

The fact is, you can evaluate people and the reason is, we ALL do it subconsciously ALL the time. It's intrinsic to fundamental human interaction regardless of who we are or where we come from. Ironically, we couldn't stop engaging in this activity even if we wanted to.

The chilling part of doing an experiment like this comes with the realization you could and were making INSTANT value judgments based solely on first impressions that, if it were in the real world, would have significant consequences [positive or negative] on the lives of those you've judged - and it only took you a second! Would it be too Carvillian of me to point out, "It's still the First Impression stupid!" for success in the practice of job hunting?

Reflecting on my own experience as a trained recruitment interviewer for a Fortune 500 Company, first impressions colored nearly every interview. That's not to say people were hired strictly on the way they looked but rather to point out those who made poor first impressions put themselves at an obvious and avoidable disadvantage from the get-go.

There is another misunderstanding as it relates to first encounters. A first impression has so nothing to do with having to look like a movie star and everything to do with Looking the Part.

Clearly few of us can compete with Britney Spears and I've never seen Brad Pitt looking back at me whenever I look in the mirror. The important aspect to understand here is that we must take what ever genetics has given us and then work diligently to a) ensure we make the best of it, and, b) make certain our appearance is convincing.

Professional actor Dustan Hoffman has played many convincing roles ranging from a gangster to a woman. Aside from his obvious acting talent, what made him credible was how he appeared. A dress and makeup were essential for his role in Tootsie but hardly believable for his part as the Savant in Rain Man.

We can learn another lesson from actors. Practice, Practice, PRACTICE! Long before any actor steps on stage or in front of the camera, considerable time and effort has gone into rehearsing for the role expressly to achieve one thing – Believability!

Actors look for guidance from other actors and directors in a focused effort to improve their presentation. Would it make sense we do the same if our comport; how we look, walk, talk, sound and appear - in the span of a few seconds - may make the difference in getting a job or not?

The Bottom Line:

Too often the barriers that challenge us for success in anything are indeed fundamental, obvious and avoidable. In job hunting, we'd do well to observe James Carville's minimalist approach and remember, "It's STILL the First Impression stupid!"

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