



The Raphael Report

**Observations on marketing,
advertising, sales and
promotions
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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Sign on receptionist's desk at Caltex Oil, Australia: "Director of First Impressions." A national survey by Brit Beemer, America's Research Group concluded, "four out of ten customers judge how much you know by how professional you look."

As a salesperson, your first job is to make a good first impression.

Psychologist Dr. Morris Massey wrote and spoke on the subject, "You Are What You Were When." His point: Your reaction, decisions, outlook on life are determined by the times that occurred in your growing-up years.

A young friend was just graduated from dental school and told me of a job interview he lined up with a 60-year-old-plus dentist.

"What are you going to wear?" I asked.

He said what he was presently wearing: An old sweat shirt. Jeans. Worn sneakers.

I suggested he change to a suit, shirt, tie and shoes if he wanted the job. He did. And got the job.

"Wait!" ask the younger generation. "Look at rock stars. They appear on stage in grunge outfits. Is that a good first impression?"

Answer: Absolutely! If they came out on stage wearing a three-piece suit, tie and freshly shined shoes in place of soiled sneakers, the audience would wonder, "Who are these odd looking people?" Wrong first impression.

Making a good first impression gives you an immediate edge in selling yourself. Award winning speaker Bill Gove said, "The messenger is more important than the message." His point: If you don't make a good first impression, if what-you-say isn't presented in an interesting manner, it doesn't make any difference WHAT you say. First impressions count.

John Henry Patterson, founder of NCR, was the first person to demand his salespeople dress in neat clothing, wear white shirts and be clean shaven. He knew the importance of the First Impression.

A simple illustration: Think of people who wear uniforms. Members of the Armed Forces. A policeman, fireman, judge. You see what they wear and you immediately form a favorable first impression. These are people with responsibility who wear the clothing of authority.

The meal in the restaurant tastes better when there is a uniform dress worn by the waiters. If you were approached in a fine restaurant by someone taking your order wearing torn jeans and a soiled t-shirt would you immediately decide you wanted to dine somewhere else? Probably. The initial impression gives you the "look" which in turn, gives you the "image" of that particular business.

Your thoughts become, "I don't like this person" which is only a half-step away from "I don't like this environment." And if you are unhappy in a certain place in time and space . . . you leave.

Edward Young of Emory University in Atlanta did a study on the sales effect of what men's clothing salesmen wore in their shops. Result: When the salesmen wore suits, their sales increased more than 40 percent more than those that wore only shirts and ties.

Good salespeople follow the advice Polonius gave his son Laertes in "Hamlet:"

"Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy
But not expressed in fancy; rich not gaudy;
For the apparel oft proclaims the man."

Direct marketing experts write and speak of the importance of the "first impression." They point out the importance of the "look" of the envelope you receive in the mail which they say is really a "salesperson." Is it neat, clean, inviting, attractive to look at? If the envelope is dirty, soiled, with smudges of ink and nearly indecipherable writing would you take the time to open and find out what's inside? Probably not.

In giving my first selling presentation to a large audience of more than 7,000 businessmen, I was concerned how I would look on stage. I considered my traditional navy and black suits with shirt, tie and shined shoes. But other speakers would do that as well. What could I do to create a strong first impression?

What if I wore a tuxedo? Black bow tie, pleated shirt, cummerbund, satin lapels and stripe on the pants - the complete "look."

"But your program is nine o'clock in the morning." said a friend, "Do you think you'll feel, well, out of place?"

I decided to take the chance.

When I walked on stage in my black tie outfit, I could "hear" the "sounds" in the audience. Who was this person? Part of a dance band? Was there a special party about to take place? Was I the maitre d'? What?

I did my rehearsed and prepared presentation and noticed the audience was extra-attentive and responded more quickly to the humor and the serious parts of my program.

The audience was asked to evaluate the fifty-plus speakers that made presentations over the three-day convention period and I came out first.

Would this have happened no matter what I wore? Perhaps. But, maybe the reaction was the same written by the Spanish Jesuit philosopher Baltasar Grecian who, in the mid 1600s, wrote about first impressions saying, "Things do not pass for what they are but what they seem. Most things are judged by their jackets.

(Next month: The next step is: LISTEN!)