



First Impressions

-Mark Haeussler, CEO

Our brain does not work quite like we think it does. We think our higher brain, our neocortex, is in control, but it usually is playing catch-up to other, faster-acting, regions. Look at the photo to the right and notice what quick conclusions you make. You have not heard a bit of the conversation, yet your brain is generating assessments.



What does this have to do with leadership? Everything.

Humans constantly make judgments of other people, and there is no on/off switch. Science has helped us understand what is happening: the inner regions of the brain work ahead of our higher reasoning. Reactions and emotions are processed before logic, and done so much, much, faster. This leads us to jump to conclusions before we reason to conclusions. Stress produces cortisol, a chemical that intensifies sensory awareness but dulls rational thinking. We often judge others without solid reasoning.

Here are key strategies for leaders to increase the opportunity for a positive first impression:

1. Pay attention to the quality of your *being* more than how smart of a leader you seek to be. Remember, people judge *who* you are before how bright your ideas are. Being the smartest person in the room is playing catch-up in the assessment-game to the person with the most settled presence.
2. Have a very clear of the person you seek to be – the *brand* of the leader you are becoming. It is helpful to always see yourself as a progression toward the leader you want to be, as it both keeps you challenged and self-forgiving.
3. *Be* the leader you seek to be and be it all the time. Instead of having a work persona that is different than the person outside of work, align your entire self to *being your leadership brand*.
4. Work on your presence, one that is centered, aware, and genuine. This is not a tips-and-techniques strategy, but a daily *practice*. Learn to recognize the difference of jumping to a conclusion from reaching a conclusion. Get help from a coach with mastery in leadership presence (a field sometimes referred to as *somatics*).

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