

STAND OUT AT INTERVIEWS & NETWORKING EVENTS

Secrets to Effective Handshakes



Handshakes have been around since ancient times and originated as a gesture of peace. Today, a handshake is a gesture of friendliness, acceptance and respect, and communicates a powerful non-verbal message that “I’m interested in getting to know you.” In most North American business and workplace environments, it is generally the only physical contact you will have with someone. But this brief contact creates a link between you and the other person--allowing you to “connect”.

1. Offer your hand when:
 - a. Being introduced or saying hello
 - b. Leaving or saying goodbye
 - c. Greeting a colleague, business associate, acquaintance or client in your professional field/industry, particularly if it has been a long time since you last saw the individual
 - d. Offering congratulations or concluding a business transaction or meeting
2. To initiate or not to initiate? Cultural norms suggest that the person of higher “ranking” (e.g. a professor to a student, the CEO to a junior employee, or an interviewer to an interviewee) should initiate a handshake. If you are on roughly equal terms with a person, in terms of age and job position, offering a handshake is a way of portraying yourself as a confident, warm and friendly person. This would be applicable to both men and women. However, many suggest that waiting for the other person to extend his/her hand first in an interview or networking situation may leave the impression that you are passive, unreceptive, socially awkward or uncomfortable with taking the initiative in making things happen. Bottom line: Quickly read the facial and body language cues of the person you are meeting, use your judgement and decide whether to initiate or not.
3. Always stand up. Start by standing up, stepping or leaning toward the person you are greeting, making eye contact, smiling, and beginning with a voice greeting before extending your arm and hand from up to three feet away.
4. Make it a HANDshake, not a fingershake.

- a. Keep your fingers together with the thumb up and open
 - b. Slide your entire hand into the other person's hand
 - c. Match the web of your hand with that of the person you are greeting
 - d. Grasp the hand firmly (without crushing) and give a little squeeze
 - e. Keep smiling and maintain eye contact
 - f. Pump up and down 2 or 3 times; then let go
5. Cold and Clammy vs. Sweaty Palms? Either of these can leave the impression that you are uncomfortable, awkward, nervous or insecure. Always ensure that you have clean, warm, dry palms before you shake hands.
 6. Firm not bone crushing. A handshake is not a test of physical strength, and should not be overpowering. A limp handshake, on the other hand, tends to leave the impression that you are lacking in confidence or that you are uninterested in engaging the individual you are meeting and are simply going through the motions of the handshake.
 7. Always and only with your right hand. Even if you are juggling important documents or a plate of food, always carry items in your left hand and keep your right hand free to meet and greet.
 8. One hand is better than two. Avoid sandwiching the person's hand between your two hands. This is typically too personal for business, interview or networking situations.
 9. When meeting and greeting, convey the same respect to both men and women—exchange firm handshakes with everyone.
 10. Not too long, not too short. More than 3 to 4 seconds may make some people uncomfortable, but you can always take cues from the person you are meeting and adjust the length of your handshake accordingly. Too short a handshake may indicate to someone that you're not interested in building rapport with him/her and want to escape the greeting ritual as soon as possible.
 11. The main secret to an effective handshake is your intention toward the individual(s) you meet. If your intention is to learn about the person(s), connect with them, cultivate a mutually beneficial relationship, share ideas, and have authentic conversations, you will naturally do many of the things that are on this list.