

Play to Win

**Packaging Yourself  
Five things that contribute to a favorable first impression.**

By [Sally J. Schmidt](https://www.attorneyatwork.com/author/sally-j-schmidt/) August 23, 2018



I was driving through a neighborhood recently and saw a mailman — at least I think he was one. He was wearing a blue shirt with the U.S. Postal Service patch but it was untucked and unbuttoned with a T-shirt underneath; he had on cargo shorts and a floppy hat.

It got me thinking about the times I’ve had unfavorable initial impressions of lawyers. While we’re taught not to judge a book by its cover, when they lack further information people do exactly that.

The first impression you create is something you can and should manage. Your personal brand includes a lot of things, like how you communicate, the kind of experience people have when interacting with you and how you differentiate yourself (e.g., experience or credentials). It also includes how you “package” yourself — your tone, how you carry yourself, your dress, [your manners](https://www.attorneyatwork.com/dining-table-faux-pas-etiquette/) and your mannerisms.

I remember reading a quote by Michael H. Goldberg, a former executive director of the National Basketball Coaches Association and sports agent, about his bow ties. He said:

**“I started out just wearing them during the summer, but then when I got into the sports business, I found that people would remember me and be like, ‘Oh, you’re the guy with the bow tie.’ And I thought, Well, that’s not bad, that’ll be my little brand.”**

In fact, it was such a memorable part of who he was that when he passed away last year, many NBA coaches wore bow ties to their games.

**When It Comes to Your Brand, Don’t Stifle Your Personality — Reflect It**

Back in the day, there was a business best-seller titled “Dress for Success.” It was based on some research that showed the impressions that people had of others were typically based solely on their dress. Unfortunately, the book provided a recipe for dressing for business. Everyone looked the same. It was terrible.

Reflect your personality. Do you like bright colors? Great. Do you prefer pants to dresses? Fine. Do you like suspenders? Go for it. But do think about how potential clients and referral sources will perceive you. Do you want people to think you’re worth $300 per hour, $500 per hour or $800 per hour? Then you should look and act like it.

**Are You Failing at First Impressions?**

Here are a few examples of things that contribute to positive or negative first impressions.

1. **Attire.** Worn-out shoes, wrinkled shirts or slacks, hems that drag on the floor. Do you not recognize the problem or don’t you care? Neither is a good perception.
2. **Accessories.** I get it — that’s your favorite briefcase or purse; it’s sentimental. But it may also look like you don’t take care of things or can’t afford something new.
3. **Attentiveness.** Bring a notepad and take notes; [use a nice pen](https://www.attorneyatwork.com/perfect-pencil-perfect-pen/). Put your phone away and make eye contact. It’s amazing how many people appear distracted in meetings.
4. **Greetings.** Smile and look confident. A firm handshake is necessary; weak ones are memorable as are those that break bones in your hands.
5. **Posture.** I have seen more than one woman lawyer in a meeting sitting on her leg. Casual dress makes people behave more casually. Watch your posture and project professionalism.

How we present ourselves gives people an inkling of our personality, our professionalism and our perceived level of success. It contributes greatly to the perception people have of you and your personal brand. What impression are you creating when you first meet someone?