

FIRST IMPRESSION DYNAMICS

GOALS

1. To increase personal awareness of First Impressions, especially in nursing behaviors.
2. To present First Impressions as one aspect of leadership decisions.

THE MEANING OF A FIRST IMPRESSION

In psychology, the first instantaneous or judgement of another person is the observed “First Impression.” Such information elicits a message formed as an outcome of a human-to-human encounter. The choice of dress and responsive behaviors leaves a First Impression of that person resulting in a thought and a remark to others. This impression provides an observer’s first piece of information known in literature as a quick/snap opinion, first reaction, first glance assumption, or a primary belief.

The term, First Impression Bias, refers to a person’s *too quick judgement* of others. This untimely too soon bias arises from the theory that some people are limited in personal instantaneous informational (First Impression) processing ability! This tendency toward instantaneous judgement(s) indicates either a choice, refusal, or lack of ability to think clearly and objectively about the First Impressions they observe.

THE EVIDENCE OF POSITIVE FIRST IMPRESSIONS

There is a debate as to the accuracy of First impressions. First Impressions (negative or positive) often result in an *overall assumption* about everything else—an assumption that may not be so! It is often said that a book is judged by its cover—and within 17 seconds to one minute a person’s First Impressions leave their influence and beliefs regarding a person’s future interactions. First Impressions include, but may not be limited to:

- Appearance: Personal looks, attractiveness, general emotional state, facial shape, clothing, and grooming. Therefore: *Dress and act the part with a winning smile.*
- Body Language: Personal body stance--especially placement of arms, facial expressions, eye contact. Therefore: *Look and act confident.*
- Clothing: Choice of appropriate dress. Therefore: *Dress as though you were reporting on the job, situation, or according to expectation.*

- Verbiage: Friendly, and positive comments and suggestions. Therefore: *Say friendly, appropriate, and supportive comments or suggestions that show respect and support for appropriate behaviors related to the situation.*
- Confidence: Self-assured in one's own abilities or character. Therefore: *Even if you are nervous, be confident about the truth of who you are by standing tall and displaying the expected behavior.*
- Be Your Best Self: Exhibiting your best behavior. Therefore: *Give others your full attention and be courteous.*

Historically, First Impressions of personality disorders were determined by measuring bumps on a person's skull. There was, also, a tendency by the observer to determine a person's personality and character traits by focusing on facial, personality, general character traits, and attributes.

Johann Kaspar Lavater (Swiss pastor in the 1700s) published essays related to determining a First Impression by using the shape of a person's nose and closeness of the person's eyebrows to determine the First Impressions of a person's kindness, intelligence, and perseverance for a specific occupation. He noted that characteristics of body language, behavior, interactions, and ability to verbalize fluently tend to lend knowing future behaviors with a degree of accuracy. Likewise, the observer (historically as well as today) makes an intellectual decision (often unconsciously) from observing another person's First Impression.

HEURISTICS—A SITUATIONAL IMPRESSION OR “RULE OF THUMB”

At another level of intellectual understanding, “First Impressions” are a form of what is known as “Heuristics” (a Greek word). Heuristics helps to find, discover, or recognize information using a known “Rule of Thumb” to make *any decision* quickly and efficiently. This quick efficient process of using a Heuristic method of “what works” for any situation is especially helpful when faced with the need for a quick decision of an uncertain, complex, or thought-provoking task. An intuitive Heuristic outcome (like a First Impression) can simplify the complex task of judging another person or situation which would normally be a lengthier and more challenging task. Therefore, Heuristics is another valuable, more refined, and usually a more overall objective method of assessment.

CONSTRUCTING THE LEADERSHIP PUZZLE

The ability to make appropriate leadership judgements of others is enhanced by:

1. First: Increasing awareness of a person's First Impression behaviors and appearance.
2. Second: Recognizing related cognitive ability and knowledge related to the task/work to be performed.
3. Third: Determining the ability to perform appropriate and required psychomotor abilities.
4. Fourth: Observing the existence of an attitude which promotes success.

Putting the leadership puzzle together to decide overall success always starts with a leader's First Impression of a person. The leadership judgements are enhanced and refined for leadership decision-making accuracy. Therefore, there is increased accuracy by considering the observed First Impression combined with the other three significant determinants. The First Impression, however, most often reveals the most significant behavior(s) and impression(s) that reveal the potential for potential success.

Such instant influence of a First Impression encourages or discourages continued or future interaction(s) between two people! It is the simplest way a First Impression can share a spoken and unspoken message. The truth is: It is amazing how the simplest observations can often provide the most significant information and determinants of another person's future behavior!

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Let every person be aware of the opportunities to leave their positive first mark of caring, kindness, appropriateness, and love in the world in which we live, especially through our First Impressions. It costs nothing for each of us to be kind to others, as you would have them do to you. Personal rightful doing to others is required for a positive presentation of ourselves THE FIRST TIME AROUND. Unfortunately, it is so hard to undo what we, historically, have already and unthoughtfully done to others. So---take the time to carefully listen to others and note the statements of others about their observations of outstanding First Impressions—then, use that as your example of important First Impression behaviors.

As a nurse, I listened to a friend reiterate her First Impressions regarding the hospital nurses as they entered the hospital room to care for her husband. Every behavior, facial expression, patient interaction, gesture, professional appearance, and treatment of family

members were noted and reported by her. Certainly, this report of First Impressions showed the importance of a nurse's First Impression.

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