

Don't Crowd Me

with Alan Stevens
Celebrity Profiler and Australia's leading personality
and business profiler



It takes just one tenth of a second to judge someone and make a first impression. In that brief moment people assess your trustworthiness and attractiveness. The impression you give will impact greatly on how you are seen and treated. In that brief moment, they have already asked themselves "Is this person someone I want to associate with?". It's indisputable that you're not going to get a second chance at the first impression and you certainly don't want to get it wrong.

First impressions tend to be very stable, so get it right at the get-go. The impression the person has, determines their treatment of you from that point forward. If you miss or hit on the first impression, people tend to set out to prove their first impression was right about you. If you get it wrong they will tend to mistrust you and everything you try to tell them.. On the other hand, those who gain a great first impression are treated as if they can do no wrong. No one does business with anyone they don't trust so it's obvious how you want to be seen.

You can totally blow it just in the way you approach someone. How you shake their hand, your smile and how you are groomed all have an impact. The greatest though, comes from how close and far you stand from them. You can be seen as a space invader, pushy and too eager. They'll feel disrespected and won't hear what you are trying to convey. All they will be thinking is "get out of my space". But when you stand well outside their comfort zone, they are now wondering what's wrong. Why are you so standoffish? Do you think you are better than me? If you feel you don't like them, they will reciprocate. In either case, people who feel uncomfortable won't be giving full attention to anything you are saying.

In my workshops I love demonstrating just how powerful this is. Only weeks ago I asked one of my students to come out the front and greet me in a way that she felt comfortable. Standing my ground with my arm only slightly extended with an open palm ready to shake her hand, I'd given her a stationary object to set her own comfort zone from. After the usual salutation and ensuring she felt comfortable where she was standing, I talked to the other attendees. As I did, I took a slight step towards her. I didn't need to look at her to see what she did. The faces of the others told it all.

"The best indicator however, is right in front of you; it's right there on their face."

Surprised amusement covered every face directly in front of me. She had stepped away very quickly to regain her comfort zone.

Their interpretation was that she jumped and that was the reason I selected her for the demonstration.. She, more than most in the room, had the facial trait that told me the moment I saw her, that she needed more space. If her trait had been the opposite, her reaction would have been less and slower if not non-existent, as it was in the other situation.



Standing next to me at a business network one day was a very tall man. Now I'm affable and happy to have people stand close to me, but this was way too close as I had to arch my neck to look up at his face. I took a small step back only to find he stepped forward to fill the gap. As we shook hands, he was quick to ask me a question. We were straight into a conversation, which could have led to a difficult situation if I hadn't taken the initiative. Where we were standing was across the room from the bar, so I used that opportunity to turn the talk into a moving conversation. Turning slightly and strolling while talking, we moved towards the refreshments. Once we had a drink in our hands, we naturally had more space between us. I was more comfortable and we both enjoyed the conversation. The manoeuvre allowed me to gain the space I needed, while still keeping the conversation going. And the bonus...I got a drink.

In those two situations, someone who didn't know how to recognise each person's personality traits, would have judged the situations completely wrong. She would have thought me to be a space invader, just as I could have, with him. I could have found her standoffish and disinterested, just as he could have, with me. Knowing in advance how to recognise how a person will react, means that I never have any of those situations arise.

There are many things that determine a person's personal space requirements when we meet someone for the first time, including:

- Age and sex of the two parties
- Cultural background
- Height and size differences
- Perceived social standing
- The situation
- Facial expression

The best indicator however, is right in front of you; it's right there on their face.

I've profiled thousands of people over several decades and I've found that a person's face tells me everything I need to know about them. You'll find it far more accurate than anything the person will try and tell you. Their facial expressions give away their feelings and emotions, while their facial features hold the truth about their personalities. Their features, ridges and creases are a history of how they repeatedly think and act.

When it comes to how much personal space a person needs...the eyebrows will give it away. The greater the gap between the underside of the eyebrows and the top of the eye, the greater the space the person needs. Yes, some people have horizontal eyebrows, while others have very dramatic eyebrows, angling up in a very striking manner. So look at the gap vertically through the pupil.

Those with high set eyebrows are just as friendly when they get to know you, but in the interim, they are more selective and discerning. If you are more of the affable type, with low set eyes, the other person will appreciate you being a little more formal and respectful. Get to know them before you try and sell them and don't rush them. Ask them if there is anything they are not clear on. Handle it right and you will break down the barriers very quickly.

If you have the more discerning trait and you are dealing with the more affable trait, be ready for them to stand close. It will work in your favour to be less formal, smile more and even wear softer, brighter coloured clothing.

Give it a try and see how you go. Next time you go to a social gathering, business networking event or just watching people in public or your office, watch their interactions and check out their eyebrows. Have some fun with it.



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