

YOUR LADDER TO THE RIGHT JOB

Improving your image

BY ANTHONY NGAPE

RESearch findings show that 90 per cent of people make up their minds about you in the first five seconds of meeting you, the competitive business environment the importance of making the right first impression in business meetings cannot be overemphasised. Therefore the business of impression management is as critical as the business at hand.

Most people looking to move up the corporate ladder realise the importance of mastering job-related skills. But what they may not also know is that soft skills - the way they carry themselves, dress, interact with others - can be just as important in determining whether they will or will not be promoted, and may even be creating a negative image without their knowledge. For example, I knew two managers who were competing for the same promotion. Both were equally technically competent and mentally ready for the move. Yet, one had outstanding social skills, dressed for the position and could easily strike up a conversation with anyone. The other was sloppy in appearance, hid in a corner and had poor eye contact at social events. Guess who got the promotion?

Conversely, there are also many professionals who think that they are great at networking, making small talk, and connecting with people when in reality they exude an unprofessional image.

Having well-rounded socialising skills are not an option, but a necessity of business life.

Have you ever been to a business lunch and not known which knife and fork to use? Or perhaps had to make an important business presentation and felt that you would be ter-

rible, despite knowing your subject perfectly. "People in the corporate world need to realise that you are constantly selling yourself to others depending on the way you call yourself," says Diana Mather, the Chief Executive Officer of Public Image Inc Ltd.

Maybe you want to be able to work a room with confidence to give you that extra edge when it comes to networking. Whether your personal ambitions are corporate or social - poor conversational skills, inappropriate dress, a clumsy walk or a lack of presence might be hindering you. You are not alone. You are among masses that could greatly benefit from Public Image training.

The firm trains professionals on modern manners in congruence with international expectations.

Regular contributor

"At Public Image we champion for the back to the basics in modern mannerism and etiquette," says Mather, an author of three books, *Surviving The Media*, *Imageworks for Men*, and *Imageworks for Women*.

Early in 2005 she spotted a niche in the market and re-invented the traditional British finishing school by founding The Finishing Academy.

Soon she will be setting up The Public Image School of Etiquette in Kenya and Public Image hopes to open in Uganda as well. Mather is a regular contributor to television and radio programmes, giving advice on public relations, etiquette, image and style. Earlier this year she co-hosted a TV programme on international etiquette and manners in the US after beating competition from experts based all over Europe.

Modern manners is the virtues of respecting and showing kindness to people while etiquette is the code of ethics that society conducts itself.



MATHER: A firm handshake, eye-to-eye contact and voice intonation are critical in eliciting confidence among other people.
 —PICTURE: PLUS CHELIVOT

Steps towards a better you

- **Set goals.** Where do you want to be in one, three and five years from now? Do you want a promotion? A new job or career? What are you willing to do to achieve them? Write them down and review them periodically to keep on track.
- **Take a good look at yourself or better yet, ask your mentor for feedback.** Unfortunately, we never see ourselves as others do. If you are not getting the results you want, ask for feedback from others to better understand what is holding you back.
- **Commit to the change you want to create.** To make any change in behavior you must practice the new skill repeatedly for twenty-one days. Set aside time to do

are not aware of how they are communicating with their body. Forgetting or not making eye contact, will give you away. Keep a smile on your face and your body language open.

- **Fake it until you feel it.** If you feel as if you have already achieved your goal, it will happen. Individuals that maintain an upbeat attitude portray a positive image and attract positive contacts.
- **Use power to convey a positive image and attract positive contacts.**

- **The bad news is cut throat competition will always be here, however the good news is you can do something to help build your confidence and enhance your impressions among others.**

worth having strong public image skills? One may ask.

"Yes" Mather affirms. "As long as you are dealing with people, then it is imperative that the image you project is acceptable in their eyes"

Ms Bernadette Ngara, the Head of Marketing at Fina Bank agreed that public image skills adds that much needed value in ones life, image and career. Ngara says professionals make mistakes in business meetings by assuming that your know-how is all that matters. "55 per cent of our communication is in the way we look, 35 per cent in the spoken word (pitch, tone of voice etc) while only seven

per cent accounts for the content that you deliver in a meeting," she says.

This by no means does not make the content any less important since everyone must have full comprehension of issues any given time, she continues "However, by the time you are getting to say it, the people/audience have already made their mind about you," Ngara reckons.

But with public image and prescribed mannerism for parading business lunches where does this leave our cultural diversity? You are your own advert in public image," asserts Ngara. "If you do not strike gold the first few seconds... sorry."



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