

Posture and Presence

By Stephanie Bickel

The manner in which you hold and display your body telegraphs four things: age, health, stress level, and confidence. Possessing proper posture helps garner the confidence of colleagues and clients. You also put observers at ease when you move gracefully and easily. If you are slouching or contorted, people assume you (1) are either too young or old for the task, (2) have poor health and probably do not exercise, (3) carry too much stress and tension, or (4) have a diminished self-image. Aside from hurting your image, poor posture leads to physical discomfort and improper breathing and speaking. Here are some quick tips to adjust common issues in posture!

You do not receive the credibility you deserve due to your age! Leaning against walls, fidgeting, shifting your weight, and standing on one hip are habits that lead people to believe you are uneasy or immature. Concentrate to add more weight to your movement and center yourself between your feet.

You are heavy-set, and colleagues and clients judge you as sloth-like! Perhaps you lean forward and collapse the ribcage to help diminish your height or size. Maybe you bring your shoulders forward or thrust your chin forward to reduce your size. Carrying excessive weight is a danger for health reasons, but also it gives observers the idea that (1) you lack self-discipline, (2) you lack balance in your life, or (3) you are uncomfortable in your body. Stop trying to shrink your body, and imagine yourself larger. Stretch your spine to stand taller, and mentally always strive to be the largest force in the room. Proper posture is not only slimming, but it will give you the appearance of vigor and strength. Turn your size into an asset (while striving to reduce fat grams and calories).

Your shoulders almost touch your ears, and observers think you are square and rigid. Tense shoulders and necks are a signal that you are working too hard, and that you are carrying too much stress. If you possess excessive tension in your neck and shoulders, start stretching and relaxing them immediately and

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consider consulting a chiropractor. This tension can become extremely painful and will begin to reduce the range of movement in your neck if not managed.

You give people the impression they can walk all over you! Perhaps you are tilting your head from side to side, lifting your head up to people, or staring at the floor. Try to line up your ears directly over your shoulders while keeping your chin level. No matter what your height, try to maintain level chin placement. Practice this placement, until it becomes a new habit.

It takes time and patience to adjust postural habits. Find specific occasions to check in with your posture and alignment. For example, choose to work on your posture (1) whenever you are waiting in line, (2) when speaking with a certain colleague who possesses poor posture, (3) when waiting for the train, or (4) even when sitting at your computer. Do not allow your posture to kill a first impression.



Stephanie is the Founder and Director of Speak by Design, an executive coaching firm based out of Chicago. Speak by Design provides private and group trainings for people seeking to become crisp, confident, and credible communicators. Services include executive coaching, presentation skills, vocal image, accent reduction, and other custom training programs. Visit them at www.speakbydesign.com.