

Ten Easy Steps to Enhancing Your Image Overnight

By Stephanie Bickel

1. Find a neutral head position. Hardly anyone has this! It is the fastest and easiest way to improve your non-verbal communication. Notice where your chin is placed. Are you lifting your chin to people when you speak to them, or are you pointing it at their feet? You should not be looking up or down at people. This weakens your image incredibly. If your chin is too far down, you look shy and surly. If it is too high and you are speaking with a taller individual, you will appear to be searching for their approval – even needy. If you are taller and are still tilting your chin up to people, you are giving a strong impression of negligence and distraction. Also do not cock your head from side to side. You appear coy and indecisive when you tilt your head from side to side. It can also appear flirtatious! Watch out. You can be communicating something completely contrary to your intentions.
2. Stop shifting your weight! Stand centered over both feet. Bend knees slightly. Do not rock forward and backward. Do not cock the hips to the side. When you shift your weight, you appear distracted and agitated. You are giving the impression that you would rather be elsewhere. Do not lean on desks, walls, or chairs. You should appear strong enough to stand alone on two feet – unsupported.
3. Stand Tall! Women tend to slump, curving the upper middle back. Make sure your shoulders are not trying to meet each other in front of your body. Your spine should be properly aligned with your hips dropped – not tucked under you.
4. Listen! As we grow more accustomed to the onslaught of emails and media, we develop sharp skills in “tuning out” noise. A great leader is a great listener. You will find that improvements in listening are directly correlated to improvements in focusing. A great listener has incredible focus and control over her thoughts. A great listener can be overlooked, but a poor listener sticks out like a sore thumb.

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5. Relax the eyes! Many of us are over-using our eyes. We are carrying all of our stress between or around our eyes. Observe yourself in the mirror. Try lifting your eyebrows ever-so slightly and relaxing your eyelids slightly. In between your everyday expression and your best Marilyn Monroe impression, is a neutral and relaxed eye position. We spend so much time running about and staring into computer screens that we forget to relax when we are not engaging in these activities. The ideal eye expression is relaxed, yet engaging.
6. Relax your jaw! When we are not tensing our eyes, we are tensing our jaw. Try smiling. Is your jaw clenched when doing so? Approach a mirror and try smiling while your jaw is relaxed. When your jaw is relaxed through your smile, you appear more confident and capable. Now try to relax your jaw completely, but keep your lips together. Put only a slight curve to the corners of your mouth. This should be your neutral facial expression: your business poker face.
7. Slow down your movements. A woman who moves slowly and decisively has become a rarity. Deliberate, controlled behavior is the more admirable and desirable mode of movement. Your walk should be solid and direct. Do not float or flick, but rather glide and press. There should be some weight to your walk. The heavier you appear in your movements, the more powerful you appear. If you like to be light on your feet, you will be treated like a “light-weight.”
8. Simplify your gestures. Do not overuse your hands when speaking. It is imperative that you learn how to walk with your arms relaxed at your sides. Stop putting your hands in your pockets or playing with your hands. When women put their hands in their pockets, they establish a very masculine image. It also draws a great deal of attention to the hip line. When women play with their hands, they appear extremely nervous and agitated. You do not want to distract the listener with your gestures.
9. Drop your pitch. Unless you are a smoker or have an unusually low voice, you are probably speaking too high. Using lower tones commands your audience’s attention instantly. Higher voices not only sound weaker than lower ones, but a higher voice is extremely grating and tiresome on the ear. Humming on lower

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pitches on your way to work is a great way to lower your pitch and tone of voice. My favorite exercise is exhaling on a “z” which helps establish support for your voice.

10. Say the ends of your words. Try this for 30 seconds. Try to enunciate the ends of your words for 30 seconds to appear more confident. A less confident person will trail off at the end of statements instead of toning the ends of her words. A confident speaker will be proud of her final consonants. Word-completion exercises will greatly assist in enhancing your professional image. I recommend practicing for 30 seconds 3 times a day. The results are astounding!!!



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.