



# Connection Pros

Title – Never Underestimate the Power of a Handshake

Last month, I started to share with you the three steps to a successful introduction. The first step is a great smile. I know it's just a small facial expression that is caused by the upturning of your lips and the displaying of many of your teeth, but it's really so much more.

A smile shows friendship. It can brighten another person's day. It puts other people at ease; leaves a favorable impression on others; makes you look confident, warm, and approachable; and best of all, it has the ability to create life-long relationships.

Unfortunately, a great smile will only get you so far. You can't walk around with this huge grin on your face and expect the world to come banging on your door. Eventually, you're going to have to approach people to introduce yourself, and that leads me into the second step of a successful introduction, which is a great handshake.

Shaking hands is probably the most common gesture people use on a daily basis. Men and women alike use it constantly in business and social situations. It is typically the first contact between two people and the first chance to establish a connection and a relationship. Your handshake conveys an impressive, non-verbal message, many times before you speak verbally. It speaks loudly of your professionalism, confidence, trust-worthiness and savvy. It is as common in America as it is around the world. In most countries, it is an accepted gesture of introduction, agreement, friendship, congratulation and good-bye. With all that being true, have you ever really given much thought as to the form, style or etiquette of your handshake?

Handshakes are very important to me. In January 1973, one month before my Bar Mitzvah (a ceremony that marks a Jewish boy's entry to adulthood within the Jewish community), my father sat me down and formally explained the proper way to shake hands. I still remember that precious moment with my dad like it was yesterday. Unfortunately, my father passed away five short years later, but this handshaking lesson lives on in me. My handshake has become one of the most recognizable aspects of my personality, so much so that it thoroughly impressed my future father-in-law when I first met him.

Many times our handshake forms the first impression ... an impression that speaks very loudly about who and what we are... what is your handshake saying about you?

Here are 10 tips to help you ensure a powerful and confident handshake in business:

1. Always stand up - whether you are a man or a woman, you should rise.
2. Face the person squarely, not at an angle.
3. The handshake should be a "web to web": contact between your thumb and index finger. By shaking hands web to



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web, this avoids the dead fish or fingertip only handshake.

4. Thumbs should be straight up. Avoid rolling one hand over or under for this may often denote a power struggle.
5. Make direct eye contact and hold the gaze through the introduction.
6. Smile, using a pleasant and approachable smile, not an overly big grin.
7. Carry papers, briefcase, drinks, etc., in the left hand leaving the right hand free for shaking hands.
8. Do not squeeze someone's hand too hard (bone crushing) or too soft (dead fish); these are both signs of insecurity.
9. Avoid pumping the hand up and down excessively.
10. The person who is being introduced "to" should extend his hand first. (Thank you to Cynthia Grasso from the Charleston School of Protocol)

Here's one last piece of information for you. I am often asked what to do if you get the dead fish or incorrect handshake. Do you correct it? NO! Absolutely not! The number one rule of etiquette is to let someone save face. Do not embarrass anyone at any cost, even if it causes you to shake hands incorrectly (for example, by reaching across a desk or object). Although you know it is incorrect, avoid embarrassing the other person. This would not add positively to building a relationship if you start out by correcting them. More important, if people give you a dead fish handshake, it is either one of two things: They were never taught the correct way to shake someone's hand or they are uncertain. Either way (in business neither is looked at positively), it is at this point when we start to read the other person and we truly begin to communicate.

Your handshake is a very important part of who you are. Once you understand and implement the correct etiquette, it can be a powerful tool for you in business and social situations. I teach people to think of their handshake as their signature. Use it as a tool to speak about yourself in a positive and powerful way. See you next month.