

First Impressions

When meeting someone for the first time, undoubtedly, there is a mutual sizing up and exchange of predilections. The visual review of a person's characteristics isolates those elements that can be easily cataloged for recall and regurgitation. Perchance, if there is an exchange of salutations the salient tidbits are recorded, should they prove useful in future encounters. Visual and auditory characteristics are typically our initial point of recognition and serve to underpin much of our notion about others. They become the basis for most of our biases and stereotyping.

Think for a minute about a particular fruit that you have never tried. One of the first questions you may ask in being introduced to it for the first time is, "What does it taste like?" If you are like me, it is very difficult to convey the taste of, let's say, a mango. Why? Because there are an infinite variety of mangoes and each with a different taste. If you are Jamaican, there are Bombay's, East Indian's, St Julian's, and the common mango, to name a few. In American supermarkets we know mangoes by the little sticker glued to the skin. Most are from Mexico, Guatemala, Haiti or Brazil. But I know, in those countries, as in Jamaica, there is a wide variety of mangoes and none named Mexican, Guatemalan, or Brazilian. The mango is native to India and is the most cultivated fruit in the tropics.

Once you are able to visually recognize someone—call her/him by name, it becomes easier to move first impressions to another level. Similarly, after eating a few varieties of mangoes, you may develop a taste for a specific one, mine is the St. Julian, or Julie, for short. (Unfortunately, I have to go to Canada if I want to find one.) The more we communicate the more we can gauge the interpersonal levels of trust. Trust is a generalized expectation that other people can be relied on and builds on these three attributes:

Ability refers to an assessment of the other's knowledge, skill or competency. This dimension recognizes that trust requires some sense that the other is able to perform in a manner that meets our expectations.

Integrity is the degree to which the trustee adheres to principles that are acceptable to the trustor. This dimension leads to trust based on consistency of past actions, credibility of communication, commitment to standards of fairness, and the congruence of the other's word and deed.

Benevolence is our assessment that the trusted individual is concerned enough about our welfare to either advance our interests, or at least not impede them. The other's perceived intentions or motives of the trustee are most central. Honest and open communication, delegating decisions, and sharing control indicate evidence of one's benevolence.

Communication, therefore, is the common thread through which we move understanding forward and away from first impressions to lasting memories. These attributes are called *uncovered characteristics*. Building on trust, we now share more readily, over time, family histories, religious affiliations, political persuasions, and all manner of personal traits that we otherwise would not. *The greater part of who we are resides in the uncovered*. Our need to be understood, and in turn, to understand others is at the core of social interactions. Our sense of belonging to a family, a club, a department begins with the notion that I understand others and they understand me. This can only happen through communication.

So, how many new faces have you seen in the PBH halls recently or at community meetings? And how many different voices do you now hear on the phone? Do you transfer calls as does Peggy on the Discover Card

commercials, or do you ask that second or third question to uncover ways to assist another? As we welcome new affiliates, providers, consumers and colleagues, also welcome new conversations, for in the words of *The Prophet*: *There are those among you who seek the talkative through fear of being alone. And there are those who talk, and without knowledge or forethought reveal a truth which they themselves do not understand. And there are those who have the truth within them, but they tell it not in words.*

I look forward to those conversations.