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Subtle behaviors and attitudes make big dent in company image

Branding, marketing and logos are only part of a company's image. Other parts include attitude, behaviors and even dress code.

From the moment a client enters a business or meets a company representative, the judging begins. Potential customers want assurance that they're spending wisely. Each positive or negative assessment adds up to buying or not buying. Image is truly everything about the organization or individual, from a friendly greeting to a clean carpet. A quality organization tries to stack all the affirmatives in its favor.

"Amateur status" is easily spotted. Even if marketing materials are creative and beautiful, they can still contain problems that project incompetence. For example, a company has "international" in its name, but its business cards don't include an area code. This oversight automatically tarnishes slick, expensive marketing and instantly labels the company as an amateur, not to mention limiting its potential customer area.

Suit up. Many companies have more casual dress codes. However, when the meeting counts, employees should dress accordingly.

For example, a company is presenting at



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a seminar or tradeshow and the presenter wears a frumpy, ill-fitting, wrinkled dress. Even though the message is business-like, the attire isn't. There's a reason they call it a "power suit."

Ironically, people notice little things more than big things, such as a company representative with a hole in his shoe, a run in her stocking, broccoli in his teeth or a sour expression. Perhaps when an employee concentrates, he always frowns. A customer doesn't know the worker's life story; they only see the visible imperfection. Taking time to assess employees' appearances may prove beneficial since, as the old saying goes, "The devil is in the details."

Clean house. The appearance of a business inside and out has a huge impact on potential customers. A good example is restaurants. If the restrooms are filthy, the whole establishment is tarnished. Banks, shops and other businesses give a first impression from the outside in.

For example, if a parking lot or reception area shows signs of neglect, the proprietor may also neglect customers. Potential customers want assurances that they will be cared for, but if the facility looks cluttered, disheveled or dirty, they may go somewhere else for fear they could be neglected, too.

Communicate correctly. Communication happens so rapidly in the modern business world, but poor grammar can still influence a company's success.

An e-mail or presentation with grammatical errors creates an instant distraction

and further proof that a company or person doesn't produce quality work. Employees should proofread materials carefully.

"Hokey dokey." Sometimes colloquial phrases are endearing, but they can also indicate limited capabilities. Company representatives should use local phrases sparingly at first when forming new connections or business relations to increase understanding. Once a rapport is built with the customer, mirroring their morays can be appropriate.

Stay professional. Presenters are advised to know the audience before speaking politically or religiously. Insensitivity can stem from arrogance or ignorance, but neither trait conveys a positive business image.

Employers should be strongly advised against discussing problems or airing dirty laundry in front of customers. This shows a clear disregard for propriety and discretion, two business traits that people value. Solution sessions or venting are best saved for the conference room.

For managers, correcting or criticizing an employee when customers can hear doesn't portray control, but rather looks pathetic. Potential clients may think if a company treats employees cruelly, they could get caught in the crossfire, too. Promote a comfortable and safe work environment.

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