

# Presenting Yourself as a Leader

## Objective

To assess how you present yourself at work and determine how you might improve in order to further your career.

## You Should Know

Are you looking for a promotion? Would you like to advance your career and become a supervisor or manager of others? It may seem like an impossible leap to make, but you can do many things to prepare and position yourself to make that jump.

How you present yourself matters. How you speak, listen, write, behave, and look all impact other people's perception of you. The next time they are looking for someone to promote, you want them to believe you can handle the work because you have been showing (not telling) them that you are ready.

**Speaking.** How you speak tells people a lot about you.

- Do you use good grammar?
- Do you have nervous tics like "uh," "like," or "um"?
- Do you speak clearly? If you are working with older adults, realize their hearing may be less acute than yours. Asking you to speak more loudly, slowly, or clearly may irritate or even humiliate them. They may go without understanding you rather than continually asking you to accommodate their needs.
- Do you understand and use industry terms correctly?
- Are your words positive and kind, or are you a gossip who drags the workplace's mood down?
- Are you upbeat or do you complain a lot?
- Do you bring up ideas and contribute to meetings and conversations, or are you worried about your performance or others' reactions? Do you talk too much and listen too little?

The ability to speak in front of others is usually necessary for positions of responsibility. It is scary for many people, so getting comfortable with it is a great way to prepare yourself for career advancement. It is just a matter of practice, so joining Toastmasters or a similar group is a great investment in your career.

- Are you comfortable and confident speaking in public?
- Are you poised in front of a group?
- Can you deliver information clearly and concisely?
- Can you use technology with confidence to deliver your message?

**Listening.** The other side of speaking, of course, is listening. Many experts say the skill of active listening is the most important leadership skill to develop. Active listening is the ability to put

your own agenda aside and focus on someone else completely so they feel heard and understood.

Active listening is important because leaders must communicate to build a strong team. Think about how you respond when you feel your boss wants to hear what is on your mind, is open to questions, cares how you feel, is interested in your ideas, and will always hear you out? That boss earns your respect and even your loyalty. He or she pulls the best out of you and benefits from your ideas, knowledge, experience, and willingness to work hard for them.

The techniques of active listening are easy to learn but hard to master. It is easy to find articles, books, and courses to help you get started. Start practicing now. This skill will help you succeed in every area of life, especially in relationships and with family.

**Writing.** Regardless of your profession, writing skills impact how others see you. If your emails are full of grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors and do not clearly and concisely express your message, that is how the people in charge will treat you. You might be the most wonderful, skilled, professional person in the department, but that is not how you are presenting yourself.

Many people struggle in elementary school and think they dislike writing, only to discover in adulthood they are pretty good at it and it is a satisfying thing to do well. This, too, is a skill you can learn, and the time to do so is now.

**Appearance.** It might not be fair, but how you look impacts how people think about and act toward you. There is even a term for it: *appearance discrimination*. To the extent you can enhance your appearance, you can strengthen your impression at work and show you are ready for more responsibility.

This does not mean spending lots of money on hair or clothes; it means making an effort. If you look like you do not care about your personal appearance, people at work may assume you do not care about your work, either. Even on “Casual Friday” you can show up in appropriate clothing that is neat, clean, and unwrinkled.

There is a hidden benefit in taking care of how you look: you will feel better. Feeling better about yourself gives you more confidence and positivity, and that shows in your body language and how you treat others.

That brings us to another side of professional appearance: behavior. How you behave is how people think of you. Do you follow company guidelines? Even the little things, like wearing your nametag consistently, reveals your attitude. Lingering in the break room or angling to avoid the tough jobs tells your boss you are not a leader.

**Social Media.** To present yourself as a leader, you cannot ignore social media and its impact on your image at work. When you are interviewed for a job or a promotion, take it for granted that someone will check the major social media platforms looking for your name. How will your posts portray you? How can you use it as a tool to get ahead?

## What to Do

List some qualities you think are important in a leader.

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Does your behavior reflect these qualities? \_\_\_\_\_

You can ask someone you trust for feedback. Who might you ask? \_\_\_\_\_

What feedback did they offer you?

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Remember what you are working toward and why. Describe your leadership goals and why they are important to you. Be specific.

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Now evaluate yourself in terms of the suggestions above in the following table. You can also ask people at work to help you evaluate yourself. If you think of other areas you want to work on, add them in the "Other" lines.

What I'm Doing Well	How I Can Improve/ Skills I Need to Build	Action Steps I Will Take
Speaking		
Listening		
Writing		
Appearance		
Social media		
Other		
Other		

Once you have some action steps, write a plan for when, where, and how you will complete them. Be specific. For example, "I will search for videos about active listening this Tuesday evening and spend at least half an hour watching them. Wednesday evening, I will develop a plan and a timeline for how I want to learn more and practice active listening. Thursday, I will ask my friend Jasmine if she'd like to do it with me." If you keep a calendar, record those tasks on it.

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Is it possible that you can become a leader? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not at all likely, 5 = somewhat likely, 10 = extremely likely)

You do not have to do everything at once. Choose one or two action steps that feel doable and satisfying to start with. Avoid overwhelming yourself—set yourself up for success so you gain confidence and momentum.

What is your first action step, and when will you take it?

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Are you surprised at what you are already doing well?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to improve your leadership skills?

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