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# Appearance, body language make a difference to your boss

By Anita Bruzzese, Gannett

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## On the Job

By Anita Bruzzese

A new generation of job candidates entering the work force may have spent much of their formative years communicating with a computer.

They're smart, they're technological savvy and they are texting wizards.

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Yet they may not have a clue about how to conduct idle chit-chat with a real, live human being at work. Nor are they able to read an interviewer's body language or network with an employer at a job fair.

The result is that many young people, whether looking for work or starting a first job, are having difficulty finding success. They may miss important clues in a person's body language that will help them communicate better or give the wrong impression when meeting a hiring manager for the first time.

That's why communications expert [Dianna Booher](#) says young people need to go back to the basics of professional behavior, to hone their interpersonal skills as much as their technical skills. By doing so, she says they better prepare themselves to interact with others so they can then climb the career ladder successfully.

"There have been some people who have been sitting behind a computer so long that they just don't have the interpretive skills they need," she says. "Sometimes, they have no idea how to even ask a question or contribute something meaningful to a discussion."

One thing that Booher, author of *Creating Personal Presence: Look, Talk, Think, and Act Like a Leader*, (Berrett-Koehler, \$15.95), wants to emphasize is the importance of personal appearance, which she says is No. 1 in making an immediate impression on others.

Research backs up Booher's experience: A recent study found that people judged women wearing makeup to be more competent than those without cosmetics. Those seen as attractive are viewed as more intelligent and often are offered jobs over those who aren't seen as handsome or pretty.

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So how do you level the playing field if you're not [Broad Five](#) or [Halo Five](#)?

The key. Learn to dress correctly, use gestures appropriately and communicate well so others see your potential instead of your flaws, Booher says. By improving that first impression, you position yourself to get ahead.

Booher offers these tips:

- **Package yourself well.** Research shows that taller people can earn \$789 more a year per inch.

Even if you're well past your growing years, you still can find ways to make more of an impression. Ask a personal shopper at a high-end department store or a good tailor to give you tips on clothing designs that flatter your figure or make your legs appear longer.

- **Pay attention to detail.** In Booher's 20 years of coaching executives and asking them about their employees, some of the most frequent complaints have to do with appearance.

Bosses often complain about employees' sloppy dressing, wrong kind of shoes and messy hair. Even a missing button could derail your aspirations if a boss believes your lack of focus on your dress translates to a lack of focus on your job, she says.

- **Improve your body language.** Using small gestures, standing with your arms crossed or rolling your eyes are turnoffs when communicating.

They may prompt others to see you as defensive, unsure or hostile.

- **Speak with confidence.** Don't use a longer word when a shorter one will do, and make sure you're using and pronouncing terms or words correctly.

For example, many people pronounce "library" as "li-berry" instead of "li-bra-ry." Such slips can hurt your image, even if you're dressed to the nines.

- **Prepare talking points.** Whether you're going to a job interview, networking event or a meeting with colleagues, consider the issues you want to discuss.

If you don't plan, you may babble too long or not make key points. Impress others with well thought-out ideas conveyed in a concise, clear way.

- **Drop arrogant language.** If you say "Let me be perfectly clear," you may be seen as patronizing.

It's better to use "I want to emphasize ..." Or, instead of blurting out, "You're wrong," say "I disagree" or "I have a different opinion."

*Anita Bruzzese is author of "45 Things You Do That Drive Your Boss Crazy ... and How to Avoid Them," [www.45things.com](http://www.45things.com). Find an index of On the Job columns. Write to her in care of Gannett ContentOne, 7950 Jones Branch Drive, McLean, VA 22107. For a reply, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.*

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