

The art of an effective handshake

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Have you taken your handshake inventory lately? Do you shake like Arnold Schwarzenegger or more like a limp noodle?

A firm handshake along with at least 3 seconds of eye contact shows strength and vigor and creates a favorable first impression. You can speed up rapport with another by extending your hand and smiling.

A strong handshake also projects confidence and sets a professional tone. Lots of people have questions about this ritual. Men and women are not sure about who should initiate the handshake. People from outside the U.S. may have been raised with different expectations re: how and when you shake hands.

Patti Wood, a body language expert, suggests some rules for 'the perfect handshake':

- Rise - if seated unless you are eating.
- Always use your right hand to shake. That means moving your cell phone, briefcase, etc. to your left hand before the greeting.
- Smile briefly but don't overdue it. Women need to watch this one as smiling too much can reduce their personal power.
- Face the person head on or heart to heart. This shows you are straight and open.
- Wipe off clammy hands and hold drinks in your left hand to avoid freezing your recipient.
- Move the arm fully outward, not too close to the body.
- Go "palm to palm": Shows you are open and honest.
- Match the pressure of the other person. This is not a contest to see who can shake hands the hardest.

What bothers you about the way people shake hands? Do you think people should avoid the handshake when they have a cold? Does a strong or weak handshake matter? What cultural or gender differences have you observed?