

Show Confidence Through Your Walk and Posture

By Lillian D. Bjorseth

No one ever has too much confidence - ego, yes, confidence no.

Do you keep in mind that your walk and posture bespeak your confidence before you begin your pitch? They influence your audience of one or one hundred to make initial decisions about your capabilities ... before you even shake hands, begin a conversation or show your first slide.

The way you stride down the hallway, across the parking lot or into a room is a powerful first clue to how you feel about yourself. Walk erect with your head held high, your shoulders back, your chest out and your stomach in. With the aura you create, you command respect without ever saying a word.

When you overdo it with a swagger or a strut, it can equate with egotism and a pompous attitude. Underdone, like when you have your back arched and your head stuck out and down, shows a lack of confidence.

When you are giving a presentation, use your walk as a form of physical punctuation. Strengthen transitions by stepping to the side, pauses by standing in place and emphasis and persuasion by moving forward as if you want to touch the audience. If your movement is unnatural or mechanical, it will detract from your presentation. Standing in one place throughout a talk may indicate you're "frozen to the spot" by the fear of speaking.

Your posture talks, too.

Once you have walked into that meeting, office or conference and found your spot, your posture becomes a telltale sign. Remember what your mother used to tell you, "Stand up straight". You literally "make your stand" through your posture. It tells people how confident you are, how much self-esteem you have and how you want to be treated.

Taking up a reasonable amount of space equates to having power. Plant your feet about 8 to 10 inches apart with one slightly in front of the other. This allows you to easily change weight from one foot to the other. This is particularly important if you are behind a podium; you don't noticeably appear to be shifting weight (which you need to do so you don't get frozen in the "speaker" position). When you don't do it smoothly, this shifting can be distracting to the audience ... and to you when you become conscious of it.

This stance also makes you feel more comfortable, balanced and grounded, which is a plus when you undertake the arduous process of starting/maintaining a conversation. Women often think it is more ladylike to assume the first position in ballet, i.e. the inside back of your left foot rubs against the inside arch of your right foot. In reality, women who stand in this position in business look as if they might topple if given a nudge.

Avoid the fig-leaf stance.

A stance to avoid is what I term the fig leaf. In addition to having your feet close together and your hands crossed over your genital area, you may tilt your head sideways

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as you look up to engage in conversation. This posture almost always guarantees you a loss of respect and power before you ever say a word!

Remember how your ancestors claimed their land? Stake your property, too! Failure to stake your claim reminds me of a saying from my German heritage: "Mache dich klein." (Make yourself small.)

It's what my mom would say to me repeatedly when she viewed my eagerness to speak to everyone in sight as annoying chatter instead of a natural asset! What I am encouraging you to do instead is to "Mache dich grose." (Make yourself big!) Expand and claim your space! It's yours for the taking.

A tango instructor said it well: Stand as if you own the world. I learned this from one of my coaching clients who was taking dance lessons. Attitude plays a vital role. Think highly of yourself (you will stand taller), and the world will notice and react accordingly.

How to achieve good posture

Stand with your back to a wall and look straight ahead. Make sure your head and your back are touching the wall. As you remain standing there for a few minutes, periodically touch your shoulders to the wall and hold for 10 seconds. This automatically makes you pull in your tummy and stick out your chest. Take a few steps away from the wall, and practice the same techniques on your own.

Envision the John Hancock Building in Chicago, one of the tallest in the world. Now, stand up. Imagine your body is a tall, narrow building. Plant your feet 8-10 inches apart. Now, make sure your knees are directly about your feet, hips above your knees, stomach above your hips, chest above your stomach and head above your chest – such that if you took a piece of heavy string and dropped it from your nose, it would fall between your feet. Keep this image in mind as you stand around at networking events, meetings and receptions.

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