

Brand You: First Impressions

Roger Ailes was an incredibly successful spin doctor, front man, PR guy—whatever you want to talk about it—for President Ronald Reagan. He went off to create Fox News or become its first president, or something like that. And he wrote a book, and the book was kind of about how to get things done in your life professionally. And there are a couple of things that really popped out at me. One of them that hit me right between the eyes—and you’ve heard this, including from your mother when you were seven years old—but he talks about first impressions. But he does something, and he takes first impressions and he quantifies it. And what he says is—listen precisely here—what he says is, “You have seven seconds to make your first impression.”

And when I started thinking about it, I was saying, “Oh, that’s an exaggeration.” But I think that there’s probably an awful lot of truth in that. So ... it’s not a matter of your brilliant comeback or your brilliant whatever, your brilliant statement, your brilliant wit. It’s “What do you project?”

And the term that he uses is “amp up your attitude.” You *do* in the first seven seconds give off energy, enthusiasm, engagement—whatever it happens to be. So I suspect 100 percent of us believe in the first impressions thing, and I suspect 98 percent of us believe in the incredible power of first impressions. But try thinking about it in terms of seven seconds. And think about—as much as it may bug you, particularly if you’re an engineer or somebody like that—think about what that facial expression says about you. Are you engaged, are you energetic? There are two kinds of people in the world, energetic and not-so-energetic. The good news is, at least within some limits, you can work on it. Seven seconds. Life or death. Great first impression, awful first impression.