

Takeaways

- * If you want to appear similar to your audience, then dress like your audience, but make sure you really know what that means.
- * If you want to gain authority, dress one notch above your audience.
- * If you can legitimately wear a uniform (for example, you are a doctor or in the military), then wearing the uniform when you present will add authority.

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PEOPLE LISTEN TO AND ARE PERSUADED BY THOSE SIMILAR TO/ATTRACTIVE TO THEM

People are more likely to listen to and be persuaded by you if they find you attractive, believe you are similar to them, or both. (In case you think that some people might be affected in this way, but not you—everyone is affected by the factors of attractiveness and similarity.)

YOU HAVE THREE BRAINS, NOT ONE

In my book *Neuro Web Design: What Makes Them Click?*, I write about unconscious mental processing and the new brain, the mid/emotional brain, and the old brain.

The old brains of your audience will be evaluating whether or not you are attractive. If they decide you are attractive, then you will be able to initially grab the audience's attention—and possibly hold it (if you are really attractive!). This decision about your attractiveness will be based on the geometry and symmetry of your face, what you are wearing, and various “programmed” as well as learned factors about what attractive means.

What's important to remember is that your audience is using all three brains in responding to you. Unconsciously, the mid-brains of your audience are deciding whether to trust you and be friends with you—they are unconsciously evaluating whether you are similar to them. Unconsciously, the old brains of your audience are deciding whether you are a possible partner for sex and whether the environment is safe enough to stay in the room.

SIMILAR IS BETTER

Similarity builds rapport. If people feel that you are like them, then they will tend to like and trust you more. People find it easier to like those they are similar to or those they perceive as sharing their background or values. It can even boil down to clothes—people like people who are dressed similarly to them.

VOTE FOR THE MOST ATTRACTIVE PERSON?

Efran and Patterson (1974) analyzed elections in Canada and found that attractive candidates received more than 2.5 times as many votes, despite the fact that 73 percent of voters said that attractiveness did not influence their vote. Robert Cialdini (2007) reports on the large body of research that shows that people who are physically attractive are perceived to be smarter, more capable, and more intelligent.

A MATHEMATICAL FORMULA FOR ATTRACTIVENESS

Hatice Gunes and Massimo Piccardi (2006) took many different measurements of human faces. For example, they measured the distance from the top of the eyes to the bottom of the chin, the distance from the top of the eyes to the bottom of the nostrils, and so on. They compared these measurements to people's ratings of who was attractive. They found that most people agreed on who was attractive and that those rated as attractive had certain proportions to their facial structures. Although attractiveness is affected by cultural and surface norms, such as clothing and hair, there does seem to be a mathematical basis to decisions about who is attractive, and that basis seems to hold true across cultures.

Of course, people in your audience don't take a ruler to your face before they decide whether you are attractive or not. The unconscious is able to process these mathematical proportions in the blink of an eye, and it sends information to other parts of our brain that says whether this person is attractive and should be listened to.

Takeaways

- * Get to know your audience as much as possible, and then see what you can do to make them feel you are similar to them in some way. You can do this through the things you talk about, how you talk, and how you dress.
- * You are either "mathematically attractive" or you aren't, but whichever you are, you can use your clothing, posture, and facial expressions to appear more attractive.

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SPEAKERS' BRAINS AND LISTENERS' BRAINS SYNC UP DURING COMMUNICATION

When you listen to someone talking, your brain starts working in sync with the speaker. Greg Stephens (2010) put participants in his research study in an fMRI machine and had them listen to recordings of people talking. He found that as people listen to someone talk, the brain patterns of both speaker and listener start to couple, or mirror each other. There's a slight delay, which corresponds to the time it takes for the communication to occur. Several different brain areas were synced. He compared this with having people listen to someone talk in a language they did not understand. In that case, the brains do not sync up.

SYNCING PLUS ANTICIPATION EQUALS UNDERSTANDING

In Stephens's study, the more the brains were synced up, the more the listener understood the ideas and message from the speaker. And by watching what parts of the brain were lighting up, Stephens could see that the parts of the brain that have to do with prediction and anticipation were active. The more active they were, the more successful the communication was.

SOCIAL PARTS LIGHT UP TOO

Stephens noted that the parts of the brain that have to do with social interaction were also synced, including areas known to be involved in processing social information crucial for successful communication, such as the capacity to discern the beliefs, desires, and goals of others.

Takeaways

- * Listening to someone talk creates a special brain syncing that helps people understand what is being said.
- * Because of this brain syncing, your audience is affected more strongly by listening to you than by simply reading slides or a report.