

Firm Handshakes Help Land Jobs

By LiveScience Staff (posted: 07 May 2008)

If you're seeking employment, get a grip. A firm handshake is key to landing a job.

In a new study, scientists put 98 students through mock job interviews with businesspeople. The students also met with trained handshake raters who, unbeknownst to the students, rated their grips. Separately, the businesspeople graded each student's overall performance and hireability. The two group's scores were then compared.

Students who got high handshake marks were also rated most hireable.

"We've always heard that interviewers make up their mind about a person in the first two or three minutes of an interview, no matter how long the interview lasts," said study leader Greg Stewart, associate professor of management and organizations at the University of Iowa. "We found that the first impression begins with a handshake that sets the tone for the rest of the interview."

The study will be detailed in September in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

The real you

Stewart thinks handshakes provide a glimpse of the real you.

"Job seekers are trained how to act in a job interview, how to talk, how to dress, how to answer questions, so we all look and act alike to varying degrees because we've all been told the same things," he said. "But the handshake is something that's perhaps more individual and subtle, so it may communicate something that dress or physical appearance doesn't."

Handshakes may be indicative of overall personality differences.

Stewart also found those with strong handshakes scored better with the interviewers in part because they also exhibited greater ease with small talk, eye contact and other social skills.

"We probably don't consciously remember a person's handshake or whether it was good or bad," Stewart said. "But the handshake is one of the first nonverbal clues we get about the person's overall personality, and that impression is what we remember."

How to do it

Good handshakes involve a firm, complete grip, eye contact and vigorous up-and-down movement, Stewart advised.

This may work against women, however, because their grips tend to be not as strong. But other research finds women tend to be stronger in other nonverbal communication skills that seemed to offset their less brawny grips, Stewart said.

And in the study, women who did have a strong handshake seemed to have an advantage over men.

"Those women seemed to be more memorable than men who had an equally strong handshake," Stewart said. "A really good handshake made a bigger impact on the outcome of the interview for the women than it did for the men."

