

Five Ways to Get the Perfect Handshake

By Kate Lorenz, CareerBuilder.com editor

June 28 is National Handshake Day -- time to honor the age-old custom of proffering up our palms. Whether to establish rapport during job interviews, client meetings or networking events, shaking hands is normally the only physical contact people have when conducting business. How you do it can make a powerful impression: Shake too firmly or pump too much, and you'll come across as overly aggressive. Shake too limply and you'll exude incompetence and a lack of vitality. Don't pump at all and risk appearing insecure.

Get the gesture right, however, and you'll project respect, trust, energy and sophistication. Here are five things to consider:

When Do You Shake Hands?

It is business custom in the United States and many other (but not all) cultures to shake hands during introductions or at the start or conclusion of a meeting. Usually the person of higher social status will initiate the shake. While germ-a-phobe Donald Trump avoids handshaking, you should never reject a handshake as it is a gesture of wanting to bond. (Carry a bottle of hand sanitizer, if you must!)

What's the Best Way to Shake?

To give a proper shake:

1. Extend your right hand to meet the other person's right hand, pointing your thumb upward and extending your arm at slight downward angle. (You should be standing about 18 inches from the other person.)
2. When your thumb joints come together, wrap your hand around the other person's hand.
3. Grasp the hand firmly and squeeze gently once. Hold the handshake for two to three seconds (or, if you wish, you can pump your hand up and down two or three times) as you look them in the eye, smile and say a few words.

When shaking a person's hand for the first time, it's usually best to let them determine the length and firmness of the handshake. Follow their lead and maintain pressure until they release.

What Should I Do With My Left Hand?

When John F. Kennedy was running for President, he commissioned a study to find the most effective handshake. This resulted in his signature double handshake: the left hand cupped under the clasped hand. For most people, though, it is safest to leave it relaxed by your side upon first meeting. Some people like to put their left hand on the other person's elbow or shoulder or place it over the top of the handclasp. With this move, however, you can come off as too touchy-feely or invading a person's personal space.

How Can I Ensure My Hands Are "Shakable?"

You want to offer a dry, warm palm. If you're at a gathering, hold your drink in your left hand so that your right one is available (and room temperature). If you've just come in from the cold, rub your palms together to warm them. If you're feeling clammy, keep a handkerchief handy for wiping.

If your palms are excessively sweaty and you are often called upon to shake hands, you may want to speak with your doctor. You may have a condition called hyperhidrosis that is medically treatable.

Practice Makes Perfect

To see how your handshake comes across, try it out on a few friends, and ask for their feedback on your timing, grip and technique. Then, practice until you get it right, so that you know you'll be putting your best foot -- er, hand forward.