

COVER STORY

Beware the big turn-off

Exuding confidence is all well and good, just don't take it too far, writes **Sue White**.

When Sarah Donges began working as a personal stylist, she soon learnt the hard way that selling wasn't as simple as it first appeared.

"I did a sales course that was all about sell, sell, sell - at least that was what I took from it. I tried to sell everyone the biggest and most expensive package. Of course it didn't work, it wasn't what people wanted," she says.

While she may have appeared self-assured, like most new business owners, it took Donges a while to gain underlying confidence in her product.

Luckily, the founder of The Beauty Tutor discovered early on where she was going wrong in her sales pitch. "I wasn't listening to my potential clients. It took me a while to realise how detrimental that was to my business. By having a five-minute conversation with my clients, I learnt to help them with what they actually wanted. Changing tack created a big shift, but I had to be confident to do it," she says.

When the simple change of approach helped Donges project confidence without appearing cocky, sales took off. "It's about striking a balance: you need to be empathetic, listen and understand your client's concerns and needs," she says.

Business and executive coach

Andrew Roberts regularly helps workers sell their skills more effectively.

He believes what first looks like overconfidence is often a sign that quite the opposite emotions are bubbling under the surface.

"Nervousness and insecurity can often appear as cockiness. You're not thinking clearly, in part because you're simply starving the brain of oxygen... Breathing, relaxing and simply smiling will help you move past it," he says.

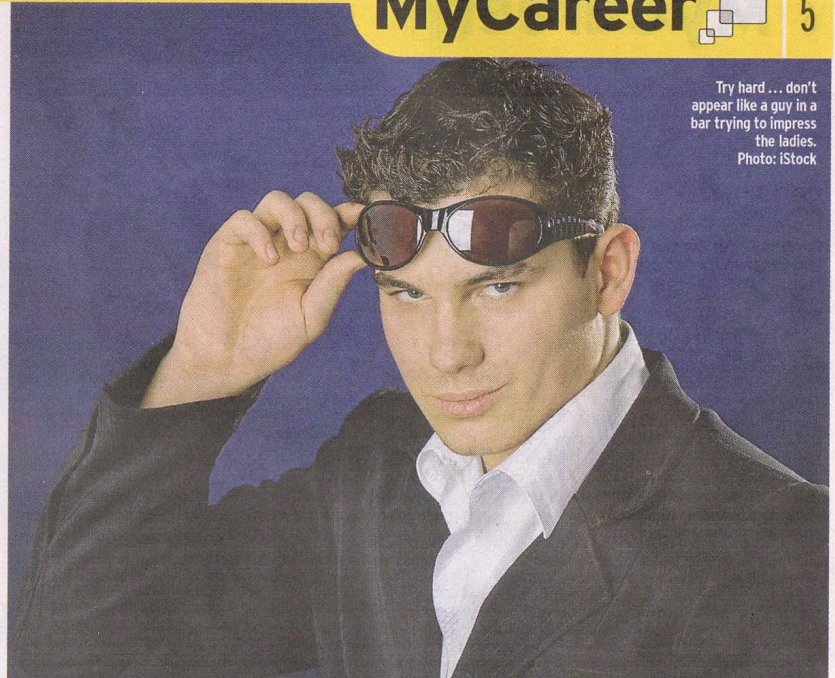
While confidence and arrogance may sometimes appear to be a matter of perception, Roberts says there's a clear difference.

'A cocky person would be full of conversation but building rapport is about showing an interest in the other person.' Andrew Roberts, business coach

"Confidence is a relaxed state, where you are able to portray a sense that you are comfortable where you are in your life and that you can add value to the organisation," he says.

"Desperation sometimes comes across as arrogance. It happens in the same way that a single guy hoping to meet a girl in a pub covers up for his insecurities by trying too hard."

To get off to a confident start



Try hard... don't appear like a guy in a bar trying to impress the ladies. Photo: iStock

with a new employer or potential client, Roberts believes it's important to focus on the rule of three. "You have three seconds to make a strong first impression; this will buy you 30 seconds. You have 30 seconds to find common ground; this will buy you three

relevant in the media. I've been in a job interview where the interviewer was from the town where I grew up," he says.

Building rapport can be a tricky business. As Roberts notes, it's important to be careful given that the interviewer is in the driving seat. "A cocky person would be full of conversation but building rapport is about showing an interest in the other person.

"In that first three minutes, I like to find out more about the company or ask them how long they've been working there. It shows you are taking an interest in them," Roberts says.

David McDonald, Head of College at APM College of Business and Communication, says it's becoming more difficult to get away with relying on style instead of substance in an interview.

"Interviewers are looking for more authenticity and proof of what you can and can't do. Using too many superlatives or adjectives just puts people off. Instead,

determine what the position requires and tailor your talking points to that," he says.

For McDonald, the key to confidence is knowing your audience and understanding their needs. "Align your skills to the position to demonstrate you can fulfil the role or the task without over-demonstrating the other things you can do. Know the company, its people, culture and behaviours, even talk to the salespeople in the company before going in," he says.

It's a state, says Roberts, that comes down to self-esteem. "Confidence is a liking of yourself and a belief that you are worthy of a good position. When I meet someone who is arrogant, I actually feel sorry for them; I just wonder what insecurity they are covering up," he says.

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