

READ IT FIRST

FOREWORD BY VICTORIA MORAN,
AUTHOR OF *CREATING A CHARMED LIFE*

POISED FOR
SUCCESS

MASTERING THE FOUR QUALITIES
THAT DISTINGUISH OUTSTANDING
PROFESSIONALS

JACQUELINE
WHITMORE

AUTHOR OF *BUSINESS CLASS:
ETIQUETTE ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS AT WORK*

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CHAPTER I

Poise Is Presence Personified

**GIVE THE WORLD THE BEST YOU HAVE, AND
THE BEST WILL COME BACK TO YOU.**

— ELLA WHEELER WILCOX, AUTHOR AND POET

Whenever you have an unusual job, particularly if you're a circus clown, crematory operator, snake charmer, or etiquette expert, people make assumptions about your personality and background. In my case, I *am* an etiquette expert, and many people I meet today assume that I grew up enjoying a privileged lifestyle. But nothing could be further from the truth.

I was born the fourth of five children in the small town of Haines City, located in Central Florida. My mom, Elsie, left my abusive, alcoholic father (her third husband) when I was just five years old. Unable to support all of us on her own, Mom had to make the heartbreaking choice of sending my three older siblings to live with their father. My mother, my younger brother, and I moved in with my Granny Johnson until Mom could afford a down payment on a government-subsidized house she found in a quaint middle-class neighborhood.

Growing up, I didn't attend fancy tea parties, cotillions, or private schools. Life was more than modest; my clothes came from discount stores or I dressed in my cousin's hand-me-downs. The special activities many of my friends enjoyed, including dance classes, piano lessons, and summer vacations, were simply out of the question. I was raised Southern Baptist and spent most of my childhood in church, where I learned to sing and play handbells.

Because my dad was a World War II disabled veteran, I was fortunate to attend college thanks to the educational funding I received from the Veterans Benefits Administration. I majored in broadcasting at the University of Florida with the intent to become a TV reporter. But my career aspirations quickly fizzled when I took an internship with CNN in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, I loathed every minute of it and realized that I wasn't cut out for the cutthroat radio and TV industry.

After graduation, I had no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up, so I explored a variety of unique and diverse occupations. I was a sales associate for ladies' clothes at an upscale department store, a singer, dancer, and actor at SeaWorld of Florida, an administrative assistant and special events coordinator at the Walt Disney World Dolphin Resort, and a flight attendant with Northwest Airlines.

I found happiness in every job I had and I never imagined that life could get even better . . . until I landed my dream job in 1993. That's when I had the good fortune to be hired as the assistant director of public relations for one of the most luxurious and exclusive hotels in the world—The Breakers in Palm Beach, Florida. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the hotel has played host to generations of the rich and famous. My job at the prestigious and palatial Breakers Hotel was a portal into a

glamorous, glittery, and elegant world. It was also my finishing school. Who knew that one day this small-town girl would dine and dance at some of the most opulent charity galas in the world or rub elbows with people she read about in magazines and newspapers? As time went on, I eventually took part in The Breakers Annual Executive Etiquette Camp and then went on to take a more extensive business etiquette certification course in Washington, D.C. As a result, I was named the hotel's first protocol officer, which afforded me the opportunity to mix and mingle with some of the world's most interesting and influential people who came to Palm Beach.

WHAT PRESENCE IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines presence as “a noteworthy quality of poise and effectiveness.” Poise is all about balance—the way you hold yourself and how you move through the world. It's about paying attention to the details of you, which means accepting, embracing, and taking full advantage of all you have to work with. It's your desire to improve, without the fear of embarrassment or intimidation.

The Palm Beach lifestyle could have easily intimidated me, but my sheer desire to be a part of this exciting world helped me quell any hesitation or discomfort I felt. I learned to cultivate my presence and adapt and assimilate into my surroundings just as a chameleon blends in with its environment. I loved working at The Breakers, but like all good things, my tenure there eventually came to an end.

My mother often said, “A person's life can change in an instant with just one phone call or trip to the mailbox,” and she was

correct. On a hot, sticky afternoon in August 1998, I unsuspectingly received a phone call that changed my life. My boss called me and in a curt voice he instructed me to report to his office immediately. When I hung up the phone, I broke out into a cold sweat—the kind you get right before someone tells you some really bad news. When I entered my boss’s office, my heart sank when I saw the director of human resources sitting next to him. My suspicions were immediately confirmed—my job position was about to be eliminated.

I sat there, calm and composed, but on the inside I felt rage and disappointment. My husband and I had only been married two months; we had a mortgage, car payments, wedding bills, and other financial obligations. But rather than focus on the “failure” aspects of this experience, I decided to stay poised and face my adversity with grace. A month later, I decided to take the plunge and start my own business—The Protocol School of Palm Beach, a company that’s still going strong today.

Whenever you can stay centered and embrace your own poise during tough times, you tap into your most precious inner resources—insight, strength, and depth of character. Presence has its own power source. When you’re composed, sufficiently practiced, and self-assured, when you feel strong enough to move mental mountains, you are poised for success.

Most of the greatest achievers in the world, from entrepreneurs to athletes and artists, could not have achieved their levels of success without experiencing some adversity. For example, swimmer and Olympic gold medalist Michael Phelps has athletic poise and presence. During competitions, he has the ability to develop and maintain a particular state of physical and psychological readiness, both of which he can summon on demand.

Whether you’re an athlete, astronaut, business owner, or em-

ployee, presence is a prerequisite to peak performance. Some people consider presence an innate gift or inborn talent, such as the ability to carry a tune or draw a picture, but anyone can cultivate this quality. It's simply the ability to develop an internal sense of serenity or centeredness, a state of mind that brings enormous peace and inner strength. It's the ability to put yourself in a state of mind where calmness and power intertwine (think extreme self-confidence), allowing you to stand out, perform at your peak, and outshine the competition!

Presence isn't something you put on in the morning and take off in the evening; it's a part of your essence. Once it's internalized, it emanates from within, replacing self-doubt and anxiety with self-empowerment. Others are drawn to you because you exude a "humble" self-confidence and optimism. It's evident that you have something special to offer. In this book I explain how to achieve that "special something."

Professionals who possess presence are confident without arrogance, composed without stiffness, and kind without pretension, to friends and strangers alike. They are able to express their graciousness with everyone they meet, from corporate leaders to custodians.

When you cultivate your own presence you draw admiration from others. Not only will people want to develop friendships with you; they also will want to socialize with you, do business with you, and, in some instances, maybe even date and marry you. (Don't laugh . . . it happened to me.)

CHAPTER 2

Package Yourself for Success

**WHEN YOUR IMAGE IMPROVES, YOUR
PERFORMANCE IMPROVES.**

— ZIG ZIGLAR, BESTSELLING AUTHOR AND
MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER

In life, just as in school, we are graded by others. But instead of test scores, we are “graded” on our appearance. The good news about this covert social classroom is that every time you dress well you earn extra credit. Why? Because the way we dress and the way we carry ourselves can communicate to others that we are competent, knowledgeable, elegant, gracious, or powerful, or possess any other quality we choose to convey. It helps to consciously consider the kind of image or ability you wish to present to a particular “audience” because this is something you have control over. And who doesn’t love to be in control?

In less than thirty seconds, we form opinions about others based solely on visual cues. This is such a common practice we’re often not aware of the reactions or judgments we make based on someone’s appearance and bearing. If you have any doubts about this, the next time you’re seated in an airplane observe other

passengers as they board. You'll realize that you're assessing each individual and maybe even deciding whom you'd like (or not like) to take the seat beside you.

Think back on previous flights and recall the people you've avoided talking to as well as those with whom you've initiated conversations during flights. Most likely there have been times when you were disappointed or even a bit disgusted at the bedraggled or unbecoming person who sidled in next to you. Some travelers instinctively place a handbag, book, or briefcase on the next seat in an effort to send a silent "Do not sit here" message.

Like it or not, human beings tend to be somewhat superficial at times and tend to favor good-looking, well-turned-out people. From job candidates to those we date or choose as life partners, looks are a compelling factor in our selection. Even in the animal kingdom, females are more sexually attracted to males with the strongest, most beautiful, exaggerated features.

Of course, it would be ideal if we were all judged for our intelligence and experience rather than our style and looks, but research indicates otherwise. Before we ever open our mouths to speak, people have already formed an opinion about our educational level, personality, career level, personal competence, and more. According to Dr. Mona Phillips, a sociology professor at Spelman College in Atlanta, studies continue to verify that attractive or good-looking people have distinct advantages over plain or homely individuals. Citing research (pioneered by K. Dion, E. Berscheid, and G. Walster) on the "halo effect," Dr. Phillips explains that many interviewers assume that if a candidate is physically attractive, then he or she must possess other good qualities, too. Phillips describes the halo effect as "a clustering of assumed positive attributes based on one's appearance."

Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint, a renowned psychiatry professor

and faculty dean for student affairs at Harvard Medical School, believes that people generally like to be around attractive people because of their physical appeal. In the article “Do Attractive People Get Better Treatment than Others,” published by *Jet* (September 3, 2001), Dr. Poussaint explains that even small children differentiate between playmates who are attractive and those who are unattractive (and while some of this may stem from fairy tales, let’s remember that even babies are exposed to TV and commercial images that drive the message home). “People tend to think that those with attractive looks are more trustworthy or honest than people who are unattractive,” suggests Dr. Poussaint.

On the other hand, he also admits that being too good-looking doesn’t always work in one’s favor, suggesting that extremely attractive people can stir up jealousies in others who then may reject them. At work, a woman who is drop-dead gorgeous may sometimes be perceived as less intelligent than her average-looking counterparts. She may have difficulty being taken seriously, especially by men, and end up being a source of resentment or envy by other women.

Yet, with few exceptions, the attractiveness factor persists. Dr. Frederick Work, Jr., a plastic and reconstructive surgeon from Atlanta, Georgia, posits that attractive people receive special treatment and there are more opportunities available to them. He points out that because our society regards attractiveness so highly, it’s almost a given that more and more people will opt for cosmetic surgical procedures. But before you break out your credit card and start looking for a qualified plastic surgeon, it’s important to know that regardless of what nature did or didn’t give you, it’s possible to enhance your appearance without having a nip or tuck or spending a fortune.

THE TOP FOUR EXCUSES FOR NOT LOOKING YOUR BEST

We all have our reasons for not stepping up to the plate and investing in ourselves from time to time. Here are some of the more common excuses for not looking our best:

1. “I’m too busy.” In today’s world of multitasking and multiple family demands, “appearance” often takes a backseat to necessities such as commuting, working, and caring for children and/or aging parents. Tight budgets can make dental visits, clothing purchases, hair maintenance, cosmetics, or self-care products low priorities in the face of house and utility payments or other financial obligations. You may often wake up tired and uninspired, but you don’t have to flaunt it. You only have one body, and you want it to last as long as possible. You only have one life, and you want to be the best “you” you can possibly be. We all know that when we look good we feel better about ourselves and others treat us better. This may sound like a stretch, but holding to high standards of appearance every day is an investment in being happier, healthier, and more successful in our work. Living in a visually oriented society such as ours places physical presentation on a par with our work presentations, and in this competitive marketplace no one can afford to send an inconsistent message. Looking your best isn’t about vanity; it’s about self-investment.

2. “I’m a casual type.” The definition of “casual” has reached an all-time low in our society. I’ll admit that from time to time I, too, will throw on the first thing that’s within grabbing distance and, since I work at home, I often live in faded yoga pants, flip-flops, and T-shirts, the ultimate in casual. I usually reserve makeup

and a hairstyle for when I meet with a client or have a speaking engagement. Just so you know, when I go out into the business world I strive to look my best; as I work in the etiquette business, people expect me to look and act a certain way, and I do my best to live up to their expectations, as well as my own.

Regardless of what type of business you're in, your overall appearance speaks volumes about you. Granted, there may be jobs where looking disheveled or poorly groomed is acceptable, but they are few and far between, if, indeed, they exist at all.

3. "I can't afford to be fashionable." Keeping up with fashion can be costly, but you can always be stylish, even on a budget. True style comes from within; it's an extension of your personality. You want a wardrobe comprised of items that fit, flatter, and add a dash of flair. Choose clothes that make sense for the life you lead, but keep an eye on your future career goals and dress accordingly. You don't need quantity, so invest in quality. Build your wardrobe around a core of timeless classic pieces rather than wasting money on tempting trendy items. From there you can systematically spruce up your wardrobe around central garments. I learned a long time ago that quality clothing lasts longer and can be amortized over the years to mere pennies per wearing. To stretch your wardrobe dollars, take advantage of the after-holiday sales; you might end up with two or three outfits for the price of one. If you find a designer whose styles work for you, over time you can craft personal touches to your appearance. With a little bit of money and creativity and a lot of consistency, you'll build a wardrobe that will make you proud.



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