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KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

Whether it's journalists, staff or the board, it helps to have people on your side. But while a manager might be brilliant at holding court in the changing room, communicating well in the public arena can be a challenge. Alice Hoey asks Roy Hodgson and Master Image Consultant Lucinda Slater how to make a good impression.

In any walk of life, being liked, respected and trusted can open doors and ease your path through life – professionally and personally. Making friends and influencing people works.

Communicating with stakeholders, employees and the public, often via the media, has always been an important part of the manager's job. However, since the rise of the digital age, it has never been more important to get it right. Now that every creased brow, slip of the tongue and post-match grumble reaches innumerable eyes and ears in minutes, ensuring you convey the right messages – through words, appearance and body language – has become a valuable skill.

Smile for camera

With over 30 years' experience of managing teams in the UK and around the world, Fulham's Roy Hodgson knows better than most that the media can be your best friend or your worst enemy.

"When you go into a high profile job such as this, you have to realise that you're part of the media game," he says. "To some extent, you display the emotions that are expected of you. If, after a game, you were to simply shrug your shoulders and say, 'it's only a game', you wouldn't get very far."

Instead, experienced managers try to strike a balance between euphoria and disappointment after a match, he says. "If you're on a losing streak, you don't want to give the impression that life as you know it is coming to an end. But, conversely, if you've beaten a top side, you wouldn't act as if everything is perfect."

Hodgson adds that he tends to be more aware of how he comes across when things haven't gone well. "It's important at those times not to let your concern show too much," he says. "But, in less stressful moments, I don't think about it too much. I just rely on the moment and strike the right pose."

Lost in translation

The good news for managers is that coming across well in interviews – as someone who is trustworthy and credible – is largely about being yourself. "While tips and guidance are useful, especially when you're starting out, you shouldn't try to reinvent yourself," agrees Hodgson.

Having faced microphones and press conferences the world over, one of the

biggest challenges he has found has not been what to say, but how to get it across in different languages.

“The nuances in what you say and how you express yourself can have a big impact on how people perceive you,” he explains. “Once, when I was managing Inter Milan, for example, I used the incorrect Italian preposition. I intended to say that ‘we were a team currently in the middle of the league table’. But what I actually said, and what was reported, was ‘we are a middle-of-the-table team’. As you can imagine, that didn’t go down too well.”

Having managed several international sides, Hodgson has also faced the problem of how to demonstrate allegiance to another country without appearing insincere. “You have to stress your commitment and show it, first and foremost to the players,” he says. “You do that by your work with them on the field and the passion you have when talking about the team and its chances of success.”

Scrubbing up

Of course, making a good impression isn’t only about what you say, but how you look. “Making an effort in how you present yourself conveys respect for others and also for yourself,” says corporate image consultant Lucinda Slater. “If you represent a world-class team, you need to look like you belong. You need to look world class,” she says.

Slater adds that dressing smartly in professional situations is also what is expected. “Therefore, if you fail to meet those expectations, it naturally raises questions in people’s minds about who you really are and your ability to do the job.”

But focusing on clothes alone is also a mistake. Slater points out that in a situation where people are looking at you for some time, they may well notice the finer details. “Poor grooming will undermine any positive impression that you’ve made,” she says. “It conveys messages such as lack of self-awareness, poor organisation and lack of self-respect.”

The good work your mouth is doing can also be undone by what the rest of your body is up to. “However well you speak or are dressed, it may be undermined if your body language is sending out a conflicting message,” says Slater. In fact, where there is such a conflict, it is the message conveyed by your body language that will be believed,” she adds. “Think, for instance, about the person who says they have time to stop and talk, but who constantly checks their watch.”

Being aware of simple things like not slouching and maintaining eye contact with those around you can make all the difference.

A captive audience

Managers also need to be able to adapt how they speak and present themselves according to the audience. Motivating the players at half-time requires a very different approach to charming a roomful of hacks.

But interacting with the players is the priority, says Hodgson. “The most important places to be a good communicator are the training pitch and the dressing room,” he says. “A good example is Sir Alf Ramsay, who was known by his players to be knowledgeable, strong and a great tactician. Yet, because he put across a very different, taciturn image to the press, they didn’t warm to him.”

Keeping a large group of people interested and involved can also be quite different to engaging in a more personal tête-à-tête. “In a group, there’s a risk that people will switch off if they feel the speaker isn’t talking directly to them,” says Slater. “The key is to address the group in such a way that each person feels you are speaking to them individually. Take your time, using pauses so they can take in what you are saying, and make eye contact.”

An advocate of being as natural as possible in such situations, Hodgson thinks he is pretty consistent with everyone he speaks with. But he also knows when to hold his tongue. “Obviously, when you’re faced with people who will report your every word you will be much more guarded,” he says. “With your staff and team, you’ll allow your emotions to show more.”

Slater sums up why all of this matters, saying, “A great corporate image actually helps you do your job. If the signals that you are giving out visually – through your appearance and body language – back up what you are saying about yourself, your messages will come through loud and clear. You’ll be credible.”

BOXOUT:

Behave yourself

Don’t:

Put on an act – stick to your natural charm and avoid appearing false

Forget to preen – poor grooming implies a lack of self-respect. Tweezers out!

Slouch – it gives the appearance of disinterest. Stand or sit tall

Forget to smile – showing your gnashers puts people at ease and builds rapport

Do:

Make eye contact – if not, people will think you have something to hide

Relax and stay calm – you may regret words said in the heat of the moment

Listen – more than you speak in face-to-face meetings. Show you’re interested