

Rushing to Judgment

The old expression about not having a second chance to make a first impression speaks volume about our general tendency to draw conclusions – and stick to them – about people and companies based on the way they initially appeal (or don't appeal) to us. The idea of the elevator pitch is really all about making that first impression work, as too are the brochures, business cards and other materials we prepare to represent us.

When we think about it, it is clear that a good deal of the time our first impressions are just plain wrong. Sometimes we enter into the encounter with expectations that, through no fault of the other, are not met. Sometimes we have different agendas that cause us to make a hasty or incorrect evaluation. And sometimes we are simply rubbed the wrong way, with our personal displeasure being reflected in how we judge someone professionally.

All of these add up to one thing – first impressions shouldn't be the last word on the conclusions we draw about someone or something. We need to be a bit more tolerant and understanding that not every encounter is filled with satisfaction and joy. People are entitled to an off moment without it forever being held against them.

One way to second guess your first impression is by better understanding the person's (or company's) reputation. A fine restaurant that serves a less-than-fine meal may actually deserve a second chance. If a person comes highly recommended and leaves you wondering what the person who made the recommendation sees in him/her, find out. Only then should you pass judgment.