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## Business Strategies

### WORKSHOPS HELP GET THAT FIRST IMPRESSION RIGHT

At **BankUnited**, executives are expected to be at the center of their communities. The bank executives are involved with their chambers of commerce. They visit schools to talk about financial planning. Some coach the neighborhood soccer or baseball team.

It's not an unusual strategy for a homegrown bank, but BankUnited has taken it a step further by making sure its executives are prepared to represent the bank and community.

"We want our people to present a total package when presenting for the bank or the community they serve," says Carlos Fernandez-Guzman, executive vice president of marketing for the Coral Gables-based financial institution.

So BankUnited hired **Thorp**



#### MARCIA HEROUX POUNDS

COLUMNIST

**& Co.** to sharpen its executives' communications and presentation skills.

People have 90 seconds to make a good first impression, and communications, body-language skills and appropriate dress are the keys, explains Patricia Thorp, president of the Coral Gables corporate communications firm.

In communications

workshops, Thorp talked about physical appearance, eye contact and demeanor, and gave other helpful hints to making people like, trust and want to do business with you.

Research shows that a first impression is based primarily on physical appearance and gestures, Thorp says. Good eye contact is important to enhancing trust as well as posture, facial expression and demeanor. Don't slouch when talking with a client. And remember, people respond to smiles, not scowls.

"So many times, especially in a competitive business environment, we're so oriented to cut to the chase and get the deal done that we totally overlook the human side, creating a relationship," Thorp says.

She tells the story of an

executive who was a little too laid back when he met with clients. He would put his feet up on the desk and lean back in his chair, hands behind his head. The clients didn't react well to him. "He was not as engaged in the process as the clients wanted him to be," Thorp says.

At important meetings, put on your game face, she says. "You want to come across as authoritative, focused, positive."

Nicholas Boothman, author of *How To Connect in Business in 90 Seconds or Less*, says it's important to connect within a few seconds of meeting a potential client. "If they like you they see the best in you," he says.

To improve your chance of being liked, adjust your attitude, he says. "Just as you

choose what clothes to wear in the morning, you can choose your attitude when you meet people."

An appealing attitude is one that is welcoming, enthusiastic and curious about others. People tend to repel others when they act bored or angry, Boothman says. "Are you charming or alarming when you meet? In business, are you an opportunity or a threat?"

Boothman says expert communicators know how to synchronize body language with another person, leaning forward if the other person is doing so, for example. "It says you like each other."

Thorp also recommends investing in professional attire, even if you have to wear the same suit again and again. The two items that tend to be most noticed are the suit jacket and

shoes, she says.

"Always dress one step up from your clients," Thorp says, even if the dress is casual. "If your client is in short sleeves and flip flops, you may want to be in an open-neck shirt and loafers." Why one step up? "They're paying you," she says.

Boothman says business dress should communicate that you know what you're doing. But also wear something that says you're approachable or shows a hint of personality, such as red suspenders.

When making an impression in business, "it's difficult to get a second chance," he says. "You can't walk away from relationships in business."

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