

# Powerful Postures: Think Big, Act Big and Feel Big

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**T**hink of the three top performers in your organization. Picture them in your mind. See them walk down the hall, stop to greet an acquaintance and afterward walk into an auditorium to deliver a scintillating presentation.

Were the shoulders of any of these people caved in? Did their heads hang low? Did they look downcast? *Nope. Not a chance.*

I'm so convinced of it that I'll wager \$100 the opposite is true: the top performers you pictured stand tall, with their shoulders back and their heads held high. Similarly, they make eye contact with the people they see. And smile at them.

## HOW CAN I BE SO SURE?

Research shows that the way we carry ourselves tells a story — about who we are — and how confident we feel. For instance, a slouched posture conveys fatigue, poor health or low esteem. On the other hand, when you sit erectly and stand tall, you convey self-assurance — to those observing you — and also to yourself.

## HOW WE LOOK MATTERS EVEN MORE THAN WHAT WE SAY

For a half century, social psychologists have been saying that body language communicates anywhere from 50 to 80 percent of what we get across. Now researchers have shown that powerful postures may trump title and rank.

These research findings surprised even the professors from the Kellogg School of Management who conducted the study: When research subjects were asked to place one arm on the armrest of a chair and the other on the back of a nearby chair, they felt more powerful and took more action than those asked to sit in a constricted position: hands under thighs, shoulders dropped and legs held tightly together.

Likewise, research subjects who were instructed to sit in either an erect or slouched position varied in the degree to which they believed they would perform as a professional employee.

“People assume their confidence is coming from their own thoughts,” observed Dr. Richard Perry, professor of psychology at Ohio State University and a study co-author. “They don’t realize their posture is affecting how much they believe what they’re thinking.”

This will automatically make you pull in your stomach and stick out your chest. Take a few steps away from the wall and practice walking down the hall. As you do, tell yourself that you are smart, strong and sexy. Your mind listens to what you say, especially when you’re standing tall.

**Posture, like other habits, can be changed.**

## WHAT ARE POWERFUL POSTURES?

First, make yourself BIG: take up a reasonable amount of space, since doing so connotes power. Stand with your feet planted about eight to 10 inches apart with one foot slightly in front of the other. This allows you to easily change weight from one foot to the other, increasing the amount of space you occupy.

Women sometimes adopt the first position in ballet: the inside of the left foot touches the inside arch of the right foot. Experts point out, however, that women who stand in this position in business often look like they may topple over. I suggest avoiding it.

For their part, men may tend toward the fig leaf stance. If this is you, promise yourself you’ll never do it again: experts observe it guarantees a loss of respect and power before a man even opens up his mouth.

When walking, hold your head up, shoulders back, with your arms swinging from side to side. Look people in the eye: maintaining eye contact without staring is interpreted as open and disclosing.

Similarly, smiling increases attractiveness and likeability. Research indicates that people who smile a lot are deemed more trustworthy, more cooperative and earn more money.

## WHAT IF YOU HAVE POOR POSTURE NOW?

Posture, like other habits, can be changed. Stand with your back to the wall and look straight ahead. Make sure your head and back are touching the wall. As you stand there, touch your shoulders to the wall and hold the position for 10 seconds.

Before you know it, you’ll be feeling and acting like the top performers you pictured in your mind. ●