4 Ways to Make a Really Bad First Impression

There is a hilarious scene in the Oscar-winning film *La La Land* that shows the easiest way to make a terrible first impression.

Emma Stone's character Mia arrives at a pool party and is introduced to a man named Carlo. The conversation begins fine. Carlo repeats Mia's name, demonstrating that he's paying attention. He firmly shakes her hand, makes and holds eye contact, and asks Mia a question—all positive social cues. Then things quickly turn south.

Mutual Friend: Carlo is a writer.

Carlo: They say I have a knack for world-building. I got a lot of heat right now. A lot of buzz. People talking about me, which is exciting. You work so hard to earn validation (inaudible) …

Mia: I'm gonnna grab a drink.

Carlo: Okay. It was really nice to meet you.

The scene is brilliant because it's so true to life. Carlo, who is shorter than Mia and wearing a suit to a pool party, can't stop talking about himself. He is a stark contrast to all the beautiful, tan people in swimwear casually talking. He is not just boring; he sounds deeply insecure.

Most of us have been there at one time or another. Someone asks a question (usually to be polite), and we can't stop talking about ourselves. The words just keep coming, either because we're nervous or we truly think we're all that. (It happened to me recently at a cocktail party after being introduced to a person of some importance by a mutual friend.)

Hubris is probably the easiest way to make a bad first impression, and it's not just me saying that.

A recent study led by Utrecht University psychologist [Janina Steinmetz](#) showed it is one of four ways people often make a bad impression on people. *Psychology Today* [offered](#) explanations of the other three, which I've abridged:

Humblebragging

This form of impression mismanagement refers to bragging that is disguised as complaining or humility. An example, as provided by the authors, is a social media user who posted: "Hair is not done, just rolled out of bed from a nap, and still get hit on, so confusing!" By appearing humble, a person can draw attention to their positive attributes in a manner that is seemingly unoffensive. This tactic backfires because it calls into question the sincerity of humblebraggart, leading to a negative impression.

Hypocrisy

Hypocrites are those who claim a certain image for themselves but fail to live up to the standards that image. Put another way, they talk the talk but don't walk the walk, especially around moral issues. Hypocrisy, however, can work if the divergent behavior can stay concealed. But once the daylight between the favorable image and the failure to conform to its standards shines bright, the hypocrite will be disliked much more than those who behave as the hypocrite does but didn't claim the image.

Backhanded compliments

A backhanded compliment is an insult cloaked in a compliment, where the flatterer is purposefully condescending. For example, "I didn't expect you to do so well on that on the exam. That's great." They stem from the desire to at once wanting to be liked and to have high social status. People like compliments and see complimenters favorably. But people recoil in the face of backhanded compliments.

Most people, I think, are smart enough to avoid backhanded compliments and hypocrisy, if they try. Hubris and humblebragging are more likely to trap us. In my experience, even people who are quite socially aware find themselves in social interactions bragging about themselves, either subtly or overtly.

We're more likely to fall victim to humblebragging and hubris in social interactions because avoiding them requires more than social awareness. It also requires good self-discipline.

First, however one must recognize the very human tendency to ramble on about oneself. Only then can one avoid being Carlo, the guy who desperately wants people to believe he is throwing off heat and generating buzz.