

WHY CEOs SHOULD SMILE MORE

Leaders are recognising the positive value a smile brings to their organisation.

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According to the researcher Ekman, there are 17 different types of smile and most of them don't signal what you might think. Only six occur when we're having a good time. The rest happen when we're in pain, embarrassed, uncomfortable, horrified or even miserable.

A smile is sometimes believed to be an effective way of manipulating others or distracting them from our true feelings and more often than not, the universal symbol of happiness is used as a mask (worth thinking about while watching the movie *Joker*).

The urge to smile may be universal, but when it's acceptable to – and how it is interpreted – depends on cultural rules.

In Japan, where etiquette dictates that emotions are stifled in public, there's a greater emphasis on smiling with the eyes alone. In Western cultures, smiley faces tend to focus on the mouth, rather than the eyes.

It's believed the English smile less often than many other groups because of their ideas about the virtues of the "stiff upper lip" and not appearing emotional. They also keep their teeth hidden and pull their mouth sideways rather than up. One explanation for the common pursed smile of the English is that for a long time, a small mouth was considered more attractive and desirable.

One common Russian proverb translates as "smiling with no reason is a sign of stupidity", while a government leaflet on working in Norway warns that you've been in the country too long if you assume smiling strangers are drunk, insane or American.

And it's true. In the United States, they are known to take the smile a step further with a full baring of the teeth or what I have heard called "the American Smile" where the mouth is fully open, something Hillary Clinton utilised frequently.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

We know that, on average, women smile more than men. At two months old, we can observe that baby girls smile more than baby boys and we know that powerful men smile less than powerful women. Overall, however, regardless

of the speed, context, length or muscle combination, when women smile they are rated to be more fake.

Participants also judge men's smiles to be more flirtatious. It is suggested this is because women tend to smile more overall, thus diminishing the smile's strength. However, as men smile less overall, when they do smile, it carries more meaning.

CAN YOU TELL WHEN A SMILE IS FAKE?

Our brain can easily distinguish between what's real and what's fake. Researcher Dr Paula Niedenthal argues there are three ways we can do so:

1. **Our brain compares** the geometry of a person's face to a standard smile.
2. **We think about** the situation and judge whether a smile is expected.
3. **We automatically mimic** the smile to feel ourselves whether it is fake or real. If it is real, our brain will activate the same areas from the smiler and we can identify it as a real one.

When judging a false smile you need to consider the following:

- **Duration:** How long it lasts. False smiles last longer.
- **Assembly:** They are put together (eyes,

mouth) and taken apart more quickly than real smiles.

- **Location:** False smiles are "voluntary" and involve mainly the lower part of the face whereas "involuntary" smiles involve much of the upper part of the face around the eyes and eyebrows.
- **Symmetry:** If the smile appears more on one side of the face (often the right side) it is more likely to be false.

BENEFITS OF A SMILE

Research by Dr William Fry of Stanford University found that laughing 200 times burns off the same amount of calories as 10 minutes on a rowing machine.

Another study found that after a bout of laughter, blood pressure drops to a lower, healthier level than before the laughter began.

Laughter also oxygenates your blood, thereby increasing energy levels, relaxes your muscles and works out all your major internal systems such as the cardiovascular and respiratory systems.

People known for smiling very little (such as Russian president Vladimir Putin and the late UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher) have a reputation for being tough and non-submissive, which is the persona they want to portray. Smiling affects a person's reputation and those in the reputation business know this only too well.

The world of leadership and the need to appear tough, however, is changing.

In 2017, Anna-Katharina Goedecke from the University of Twente in the Netherlands, found when it comes to perceptions of leadership effectiveness, getting the smile "right" guarantees scores that are more positively rated by the leaders' staff and colleagues.

If I were a betting type, I would proffer that smiling will be a critical part of the new world of leadership in a diverse working environment, where there will be more movement, more gesturing, more smiling and more expressions of emotion.

Dr Louise Mahler is a body language and confidence expert.



Joaquin Phoenix in a scene from the film *Joker*.