

# 9 Steps to Stave off Screen Face

## Don't let *Screen Face* Freeze Your Future

Many experts believe that the confluence of the pandemic and remote-working technologies has changed how business is conducted forever. But the need to connect on a human level will never change – no matter if you are interacting face-to-face or virtually.

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## The Rise of *Screen Face*

After two years of pandemic induced isolation, so many forms of face-to-face interaction have moved online. Many of us have forgotten the necessary social rituals outside of Instagram and Tik Tok. The constant siren song of screens has left us with shortened attention spans and the rise of *screen face*. *Screen face* is the vacant stare of the screen-addled whose hallmark is a telltale slouch, failure to emote and lack of verbal and non-verbal responses.

## Attention is an Investment

“Who was the student in the second row wearing the red jacket? I'd like to interview her.”

I was having coffee with a fashion company executive after his presentation to my internship class at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT).

“What did you notice about her?” I asked him.

She has the positive energy and enthusiasm we look for. I liked that she asked questions. And asked the *right* questions,” he replied. “Honestly, I would be surprised if we didn’t end up hiring her.”

I knew exactly what he meant. When I’m teaching or presenting, I’m aware of who looks dialed in and who appears tuned out.

Those who pay attention at the right times see a good return. Energy and enthusiasm can open doors, garnering callbacks and invitations. Appearing disengaged or distracted sends the message that you are not interested in the person who’s interacting with you, the subject they’re speaking about or the shared purpose that brought you together. Any job can bring about malaise or indifference in even the most dedicated after a while. However, nobody wants to hire someone who looks like they’re already “over it” before they’ve started.

## **Screen Face – Perception is Not Reality**

Just because someone *appears disengaged* does not mean they are. Nevertheless, an executive with limited time is more likely to be drawn to a job candidate who readily displays energy and enthusiasm. They don’t have time to “survey” the audience.

I have had more than one guest speaker say, “How can you tell?” when I told them a class loved their presentation. What is disconcerting is that these industry folks cannot tell and at the end of the day it is their perception – as gatekeepers and leaders – that matters most in hiring decisions.

## **Fixing the Problem – Staving Off Screen Face**

Our society straddles multiple generations and business leaders still assess and value the traditional social skills of potential employees when making hiring decisions.

For recent or soon to be grads with little or no professional experience, enthusiasm, passion, positive energy and a demonstrable desire to learn are your most marketable skills.

Think back to the student in the second row that was engaged, enthusiastic and present in that moment. What message was she conveying? “Get to know me! Hire me! I’m excited by what you’re saying, and I’ve got something to offer in return!” That is what her body language, affect and participation expressed to the speaker. She got the interview and the job.

## **Break Out of Screen Face – Create Your Own Opportunities**

1. If you are attending a virtual presentation, leave your camera on! A blank screen with your name and/or phone conveys a lack of seriousness or commitment and negates another opportunity to connect and make a good impression.
2. The nature of *screen face* is that you are unaware you are doing it. So, the first-step in avoiding it is to cultivate a greater awareness of your demeanor and non-verbal cues.
3. If participating virtually, make sure your face is centered on the screen. Position the camera at eye level or slightly above. That way the speaker will perceive you as looking directly at them. And it will help keep you engaged.
4. Nod along with the speaker.
5. Maintain eye contact, particularly when mask wearing

- obstructs your face.
6. Check your posture. People who are paying attention, sit upright and lean a bit forward in their seat.
  7. Ask smart questions. Before attending a presentation, do some research on the presenter or subject. If something the speaker says resonates with you, send them a note afterwards letting them know.
  8. Get out of your comfort zone. Talk to strangers. Strike up conversations. Embrace opportunities for *IRL* socialization that we've missed due to the pandemic.
  9. Turn off your phone.
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