

You can't judge a book by its cover—but we all do it!

The old adage is undoubtedly true, but it's next to impossible to stop ourselves from doing it.

Just think about it -

You go into a restaurant. The aroma of good food reaches you. The wall paint gleams. The tablecloths sparkle. The lighting glitters. The waiters look impeccable. You assume this is a good restaurant, and you'll get good service and a fine meal.

You go into another restaurant. The distinct odor of insect killer in the air assaults you. The wall paint is peeling. Some of the light bulbs are burned out. The tablecloths are stained. The waiter is disheveled. Your expectations for the quality of the service and the meal are low.

Your new lawyer, in a well tailored, properly fitted suit, has nice, clean offices in a well-maintained building, and you naturally have confidence in his ability.

Your friend's lawyer, in an ill fitting sports jacket, has dingy, grimy offices in a rundown building, and you figure he's second rate, and probably doesn't know what he's doing.

Now the "stinky" restaurant may have great food, and the poorly dressed lawyer may have graduated from Harvard, but we'd all be very surprised if that was the case. In our own experience, there are few "diamonds in the rough." Mostly, what we've learned is that what you see is what you get. And if a place looks like no one cares, chances are no one does!

As a result, we all judge books by their covers, and in our heart and soul we are sure our judgment is sound. The 'sharp' lawyer is from Harvard. The 'clean' restaurant is gourmet. And nobody is going to convince us differently. Our own experience has shown us time and again, that our first impression is usually right, and our customers and prospective customers feel the exact same way.

What first impression do your store and employees make?

Are you projecting, "You chose well, come on in!" or are you projecting "Buyer Beware"? When you answer this question don't confuse expensive call office furnishings with a good first impression. Neat, clean, tidy, well lit and well maintained may make you the best in class for the market you serve. The most expensive counters, carpets, signage and paneling can't make up for a facility that isn't taking pride in maintaining its "furniture and fixtures" or whose employees look like they slept in their clothes.

The Best in Class

You don't have to have the most expensive mahogany counter or the Italian ceramic tile floor, but you do have to look like the best in your class. Whatever that class may be.

Not every cleaning customer wants deluxe pricing, designer décor, obsequious service and luxurious packaging. But every customer does want to do business in an environment that shows care and respect. Respect for the people

who work there and respect for the customer who brings their business there. As a traveler, you may not choose to pay for the luxury of staying at a world class Ritz Carlton with their Egyptian cotton sheets, oriental rugs, pima cotton towels, down pillows and comforters and perfectly groomed and uniformed staff, but there are minimum requirements you set for even budget accommodations. You don't want run-down furnishings, peeling paint, or dirty windows. You expect fresh sheets, vacuumed carpets, clean facilities, and polite, friendly service, offered by clean and tidy professional, knowledgeable employees. You may chose budget, but you want the best budget available—not seedy and rundown. And you'll pay a few dollars more for a "best in class" budget motel, while others will pay even more for world class.

Your customers and prospective customers feel the same way about you. They want to do business with the "Best in Class." Budget or world class, but always neat, clean, tidy, well groomed (people and place), never old, tired and rundown.

Take This Test

Let's take a moment from our killing workday to take a fresh look at the first impression we make. 100 is a perfect score. Deduct two points for everything you see that isn't perfect. Remember, this is strictly for you. There is no benefit in being anything but ruthlessly honest with yourself.

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GO OUTSIDE. LOOK AT THE STOREFRONT, SIGNAGE, WALKWAY, PARKING AREA:	POINTS	LOOK AT YOUR PEOPLE:	POINTS
Missing letters, numbers, logos, etc. (deduct points for chips, cracks, etc)		Poorly dressed (deduct points for tank tops, blue jeans, unironed shirts,)	
Illuminated signs - (deduct points for flickering or burned out lights)		Poorly groomed (deduct points for dirty hair, purple fingernails, etc)	
Windows (deduct points if they are not squeaky clean)		Their attitude (deduct points for no smiles, sour faces, sneers, etc)	
Windows (deduct points if 'junk', dead or dying plants or other debris is visible in the window)		LOOK AT YOUR PACKAGING - DEDUCT FOR EACH ITEM NOT USED	
Window posters (deduct points if not matted and/or framed - hung with tape)		Tissue - sleeves, sweaters , etc.	
Signs - (deduct points if hand printed or expired [example: Christmas in July])		Shoulder guards	
Awning - (deduct points if dirty - rips and/or tears)		Custom Imprinted Bags and Capes	
Sidewalk - (deduct points if not swept and/ or not clean)		Sweater bags, carrying bags	
Parking area - (deduct points for pot holes, trash, etc.)		Garment covers	
		Properly sized poly with bottom banding	
STEP INTO THE CALL OFFICE:		Collar supports	
The floor (deduct points if it is not swept or vacuumed - debris and/or scraps of paper)		Bust forms	
The flooring is in poor repair (deduct points for stains, chipped and curling tile, etc)		Custom imprinted express bags	
Counters (deduct points if they are dirty and / or grimy)		LOOK AT YOUR PRINTED MATERIALS	
Counters (deduct points for chips, cracks, loose moldings, poor repair, etc.)		Flyers and coupons (deduct points for handwritten, copied onto cheap paper, or copies made from copies).	
Counters (deduct points if they are cluttered with 'stuff')		LOOK AT YOUR COMPANY VEHICLES	
Handout, brochures, (deduct points if they are lying around loose, on the floor, etc)		Good, physical condition (deduct points for dents, creases, crashes, etc)	
Deduct points if bits and pieces of stain stickers, tags and papers are scattered around		Maintenance (deduct points if dirty, inside and/or out)	
The walls and ceiling (deduct points for cobwebs, clinging lint, etc)		No name or logo (deduct points if you painted the name and address on yourself)	
The paint (deduct points for chips, cracking, peeling, loose panels, poor repair, etc)		Sub Total	
All posters or signs (deduct points is they are old, yellowed, curling or hung with scotch tape)		Subtract subtotal from 100 for Your score	
The lighting (deduct points for burned out or flickering bulbs, generally dull and dreary)		<p>Score – 100: You're Best in Class and should be proud of it!</p> <p>Score – 86-98: You're very close and with just a little bit of effort you could be perfect.</p> <p>Score – 70-86: It's a challenge, but you need to make a reasonable investment of time and money to improve your image.</p> <p>Score – 60-70: Elbow grease and repairs are definitely the order of the day. You and your employees will feel better about the business and yourselves after you've cleared up and cleaned out.</p> <p>Score – below 60: Take a deep breathe and do what you know needs to be done. Pretend you are the NEW owner and take a page from the diary of the cleaner who turned 'the diamond in the rough' into a polished gem and increased sales dollars by three fold in one year. ♦</p>	
The lighting fixtures - (deduct points for lint, dust and dirt)			
Behind the counter -(deduct points for messy, dirty, unswept)			
Incoming order handling (deduct points if clothes are thrown on floor)			