



# PROVE IT! PODCAST

HOSTED BY DEBBIE ALBERT

## Episode 121: You Never have a Second Change to Make a First Impression!

**Guest: Shelly O'Donovan**

*This is Prove It. A podcast for impatient business owners overwhelmed marketers, and PR practitioners with no time for podcasts. In just 10 minutes they answer 3 questions and offer proof of what's working in marketing communications today. Here's Debbie Albert, President of Albert Communications.*

**Debbie:** This episode of “Prove It!” is all about nonverbal communication, something that's so, so crucial in all our interactions, both personally and professionally, yet it's often overlooked. But it can really make or break a deal or relationship and, as we all know, you never have a second chance to make a first impression.

Our guest on this episode is Shelly O'Donovan, who leads the Authentic Influence Group. Shelly works with executives and their teams on learning to use subtle and authentic nonverbal methods to illuminate their messages. She lectures about this at Wharton and I want to welcome Shelly to this episode of Prove It. Hey, Shelly.

**Shelly:** Hi. Thank you, Debbie. It's great to be here.

**Debbie:** It's funny that we're doing a podcast, and no one can see your body language, but we'll have to make your own voice count. Okay?

**Shelly:** Exactly, yes.

**Debbie:** So, we have 10 minutes and three questions. And then a proof point. So, I'm going to just jump right into the first one.



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Can you just give us an overview of what non-verbal communication is and why it's so important?

**Shelly:** Right. So, if you think about when you're communicating, we often zone in on the verbal piece, right? What are we saying? And we never think about how we say it and how we're going to communicate. So, what is our voice going to do? What kind of gestures are you going to make? What kind of facial expressions do you make? And those things are so key to what that message that you're trying to put forward is conveying. Whether it's just saying that you're excited to be here and sounding that way. I had a gentleman last week I was working with on a pitch and he did not sound excited. So, we tweaked that. But also adding in all those layers of the nonverbal communication to help people really get their brain around what you're trying to convey from an emotional perspective and just from a feeling perspective and what those thoughts and feelings are.

**Debbie:** So, what kind of mistakes do we all make every single day?

**Shelly:** So, the big one I see in business is handshakes. So, often we come into a room and we're coming into a meeting and we don't really acknowledge the other people in the room with a handshake. And so, a handshake is worth three hours of connection time.

**Debbie:** What, wait, say that again? That's incredible. Like the *right* handshake?

**Shelly:** The right handshake is worth three hours of connection time. So, if you're going into a meeting with the CEO and he's there and you don't shake his hand, you're leaving that on the table, right? You're leaving that context and that connection with that VIP on the table.

**Debbie:** That is an incredible statistic. That's interesting. **Should men and women's shake hands differently?**

**Shelly:** No. So, there are some cultures in which there's some norms that are a little



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bit different than in the US, but certainly here in the states, a handshake should be firm. It should be kind of horizontal. So, up and down and making sure that it's firm and dry. You're not giving anyone like a dead fish, if you think about that. So, thinking about those things and also making sure that *you* try to initiate the handshake as well. So, having the confidence to bring them handshake forward and to initiate, not just waiting for the other person to initiate it with you.

**Debbie:** Wow. That's great. **Has the importance of nonverbal communication changed over the years?**

**Shelly:** So that's a really interesting question, and I think it has not changed over the years. What has changed, even if you go back to caveman times, you're walking down the path and we see each other, you're going to look to see if I have a weapon in my hand, right? So, you're still looking for those nonverbal cues.

However, today we're looking for other things, whether it's in a business meeting or when we meet someone new. And certainly, I do think that the most recent election really shed light on how important those nonverbals are because you didn't have to go farther than the day after the debate to see people talking about what the nonverbals were from the candidates. And so, it's definitely gotten a little more mainstream now and researchers have done a tremendous amount of work in this space. But it's always been an important piece. We just didn't always consciously know that.

**Debbie:** Let me ask you a question that just popped into my head. **How has nonverbal communication changed since we all started looking down at our cell phones all day?**

**Shelly:** Yes. So, this is a problem and there is research that shows that it's really starting to affect people in terms of posture. And so, it's really a tricky area because obviously, we're all going to still look at our phones, but when you look at your phone, you're literally pulling in your body language. You're pulling in your posture.

And so, I even tell candidates when they go to an interview to be really careful about that because that sends a message when you're pulled in like that. And that's not a very confident message. So that if you have to be on the phone, that you need to kind



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of pull back and hold your phone out a bit so that you can correct that. Because we are starting to pull in a little bit more and that immediately tanks that kind of confidence factor that people see in you.

**Debbie:** Well, I would think even whether or not you have the phone out, certainly not during a job interview, God forbid anyone does that. I don't know, it might happen. **But even pulling out your phone when you're having a meeting with someone, doesn't it say to them, "you're not as important as what could possibly be on my phone right now"?**

**Shelly:** Exactly. It does. And there's even been research to suggest if you have your phone sitting on the table and face down, that that sends exactly that message that you're talking about, that you are not as important.

**Debbie:** Boy, I'll tell you, I think we've all made mistakes in this area.

**Shelly:** We have. Definitely

**Debbie:** There are people who have to be connected, whether it's someone who is waiting for an emergency call or whatever, but when you think back 20 years, we all survived without them for an hour. Right?

**Shelly:** We did. We did.

**Debbie:** **What's the most important thing that listeners should take away from our conversation today?** I know it's only 10 minutes, but is there something that we could practice, that we could start doing now? Is it related to phones? Is it related to our posture? what's a good takeaway?

**Shelly:** So, the best takeaway I can give your listeners is the importance of the first impression. So, when you first meet someone, within about 20 seconds, they have already subconsciously made a first impression of you. Now, I don't say that to scare people, but I do want you to realize that the way you walk into a room and if your posture is up if you're confident, that sends a really important message. So, trying to walk in with some purpose, if it's a big thing, like if you're giving a presentation or



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leading a meeting, then maybe doing some kind of exercise to juice yourself stuff up before you go in there.

So, for me, if I'm meeting you to give a presentation at your company, Debbie, I would listen to music on the way. Some of my favorite songs that get me juiced up and I'd be bouncing around in my car. But that really gets me ready to take on that meeting. So just putting those practices in place to help you with that first impression.

**Debbie:** I want to slip in one more question before the 'prove it'. **How about what you wear?**

**Shelly:** Yes. So that is important. We call those *ornaments*. And it's really anything that you wear, but that sets the tone for who you are. There's a famous musician called Lisa Loeb and she always has these glasses on and that's really key to her look, into who she is.

But just in general, making sure that you fit the part for what you're trying to play that day. So, if you're going to a business meeting, making sure that you're the right attire, that your hair is done and knowing that makes you comfortable. And it's really more about making yourself feel confident in the moment and putting on the best suit that you have sometimes helps you to really bring that A game forward.

**Debbie:** I think when you and I first met, I told you the story about a woman who came for a job interview with me and it was a very hot day, but she walked in with a water bottle that was only half full and some would say half empty, right? It was half-full, and she had flip flops on and as hot as the day was, it was still the most inappropriate way to show up for an interview.

**Shelly:** Absolutely. I would also just give some advice that even if she was going to change her flip flops, at the Starbucks next door to just be careful with that, because if you had walked into the Starbucks and even seen her walk into the Starbucks with the flip flops on before you realized she was your candidate, you would have made that first impression still.



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So, I tell people to be very careful about where you are in relation to where you're going to make that big first impression.

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**Debbie:** Great point. So, let's get to the 'prove it' point. **Can you give us an example of someone who strategically used nonverbal communications and it's made a difference for that person?**

**Shelly:** Absolutely. So, you don't have to look further than Michelle Obama or Margaret Thatcher or both of them have had some training. And so, if you look at their early careers and look for early videos, you'll see that they made a tremendous difference. So, with Michelle Obama, it was really about facial expressions and with Margaret Thatcher was about voice tone. So, she was talking in a much higher pitch and was given the advice to lower that pitch and she was taken much more seriously.

In my own practice, I've worked with executives. So, I was recently working with someone who was a vice president who had just landed into this role as vice president. And she was already getting feedback that she wasn't leadership level enough, right? Her style wasn't strong enough. And so, we worked on how she walked into a room. She was smaller stature, so we worked on how she sat up in the chair, which chair she would use, how she shook hands, how she really approached her team.

And all of these kinds of nonverbal things made the difference between her now being seen as one of the stronger VP's in her company. So, it's these little tweaks that you work on, but they can make a tremendous impact on how you're perceived in life and in certainly in business.

**Debbie:** This is wonderful. I appreciate this. I have a million more questions, but we're out of time. So, you and I are going to have to get together again because one





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of the things I was thinking about is what happens when you have a younger person who comes in and has to be the leader of people who are older than that person?

**Shelly:** Oh yes.

**Debbie:** That must be a lot. There's a lot there.

**Shelly:** There's a lot there.

**Debbie:** So maybe we'll do another episode. So Shelly, thanks so much for joining us. Thanks to our listeners. Stay tuned to more episodes to help you gain clarity in what's going on in marketing communications today. Thanks for listening.

*You just listened to prove it the production of Albert Communications. Find a transcript of this episode and more about this feisty creative team on the web at [Albertcommunications.com](http://Albertcommunications.com)*

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