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The Marque of a Man

Trust him, but keep your eyes open.
Found in Chinese Fortune Cookie

During face to face meetings, body language, pregnant pauses and persistent eye contact are as important as what is said in defining the significance of the encounter. Peripheral phenomena, such as allowing interruptions, a punctual start and consistent focus on the agenda, help characterize the meeting. Personal qualities of the individual we are meeting, such as quality of hairstyle, appearance of the manicure and the shine on the shoes, are additional factors that categorize a person's credibility.

In this age of externals, the cut of one's cloth can lead to unwarranted judgements. The individuals who are well coifed, carefully manicured and have shoes shined to perfection generally think very well of themselves. They are usually well controlled and self assured. But a meeting with some of these people is like a low-fat vegetarian dinner – great taste, not very filling. The proof comes when it is time to deliver. Is the check really in the mail? This is not to imply that the slovenly are more sincere than the neat, but that the casually dressed person with dirty shoes and wind blown hair may have more character than the individual who is well coifed and manicured.

Even when the meeting produces apparent agreement, there is a gnawing doubt about what was agreed upon. Some gifted people can tell. These people go through life self assured. They are also good at rationalizing when, down the line, the alleged agreement develops problems similar to those in the blind man and the elephant.

In the case of patients, bedside manner, professionalism and sincerity are far more important than appearance. Sick people shift their frame of reference. In the face of pain and debilitation, patients believe that people are doing their best to help. They seek solace in the words and hope from the deeds. The person who is well and in full possession of his faculties looks at each encounter on many levels.

Preparing for my meetings today, I have on a clean suit, well pressed shirt, tie of the correct width and pattern, clean (but unshined) shoes, trimmed (but unmanicured) nails, fashionably wind blown (but uncoifed) hair and thoughtful positions on the issues. The armor is in place. Let the meetings begin.

H. William Strauss, Editor
The Journal of Nuclear Medicine