

INSIDE > OUT

DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER—WISE WORDS WHEN THEY FIRST appeared in print back in 1860, but of little comfort in a surfable world where profile photos have replaced handshakes in the first-impression department. With 200 million people on LinkedIn, 350 million on Google Plus, 500 million on Twitter, and over a billion on Facebook...headshots matter. *Does yours say the right thing about you?*

Probably not. But between work and personal commitments, who has time to worry about a headshot? You're not some egomaniac. Odds are, you've accepted the fact that you've got a face for radio. Besides, if someone's going to judge you because you've got an amateur-looking, outdated headshot, so be it! It's their loss. Or is it?

Professionals of all types and at every level rationalize the abdication of their personal brands. We're not talking about image here—that's something that can be put on, like a tailored suit, a great pair of shoes, or an expensive watch. Your personal brand, on the other hand, **is something you put out.**

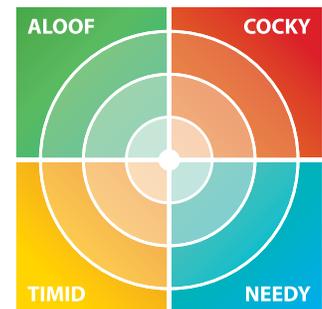
Whether it's razor sharp or disappointingly dull, your headshot is the leading edge of your personal brand—your value proposition to the world. So why the urge to neglect? Inconvenience and cost are the usual reasons, but they're just scapegoats for otherwise normal people who'd rather be under an IRS audit than in front of a camera. The simple fact is, most of us are embarrassed by the way we look in pictures, so when the need for a headshot becomes all but unavoidable, what do we do? We sell ourselves short, cutting off our noses to spite our faces by investing as little of our time, our money, and ourselves in the process as possible. How else could so many confident, good-looking professionals end up looking like they're selling mannequins instead of themselves? The ego, it seems, is not without a sense of irony.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Whatever our perceived imperfections, looking good in front of a camera begins on the inside. Let's take it from the top—starting with your brain. Believe it or not, there's a mathematical formula for a winning headshot: $(c + a)^{YQ}$, where c is confidence, a is approachability, and YQ is the exponential power of an authentic personal brand. For some, this simple equation will come as a relief; for the rest of us who struggled with high school algebra (or simply can't remember that far

back), don't panic. It's not rocket science.

The one twist is the fact that confidence and approachability have a push-pull relationship...one that becomes more pronounced at the extremes. It can help to visualize this interplay as a target divided into four quadrants, where the farther away from center you move along each spectrum, the less effective your headshot may be. How much is confidence is enough? How much approachability is too much? Hard to say, but one thing is sure: It's not about finding the bullseye, it's about finding your bullseye...the right balance of $(c + a)$ and letting your YQ amplify it for the world to see.



THE DEEP END

If you've been enjoying the cerebral nature of our discussion so far, a word of warning: **touchy-feely stuff ahead.** This is the point where we move out of your head and into your heart...the real domain of the personal brand—the YQ in our formula for a winning headshot. Unlike confidence and approachability, which can be faked if need be, YQ is the constant—not just in our equation, but in every aspect of our lives. It's an assertion rooted in a belief that the fundamental things that define us as individuals don't really change—it's our perceptions that do. Ideally, time and experience bring us closer to our own truth, but most of us waste too many of the irretrievable seconds of life isolated from the source of our true potential.

Here's a quick exercise: When you think of the word 'greatness,' who comes to mind? Is it because he or she is supremely talented? Because they put in more hard work than anyone else? Because they were simply in the right place at the right time? No. Success may be had in various combinations of the three, but great-

ness springs from another place entirely: the frictionless expression of the authentic self.

In many ways, being great is no different than being photogenic—both can be achieved by anyone brave enough to look deep inside. Have you ever felt... even if only for a fleeting moment...like things seemed to “flow” or fall into place, that you could make things happen? It wasn’t luck. It wasn’t fate. It wasn’t simply having a good day. It was you, getting a taste of greatness from the source without even knowing it. Imagine if you could hardwire yourself into that place and operate with effortless intensity all the time. Some people do. They’re no different from the rest of us—they’ve just figured out how to get out of their own way.

NEVER ODD OR EVEN

It doesn’t matter which direction you approach it from—whether a professional headshot is your objective and personal branding is a means to an end, or vice versa, you can’t get there without connecting with the authentic self and boosting your YQ. What’s all this have to do with headshots? Follow the breadcrumbs:

- Today’s professional needs a winning headshot.
- A winning headshot as $(c + a)^{YQ}$ —confidence with approachability raised to the power of YOU.
- Your personal brand is an active force...either propelling you forward or holding you back in all aspects of your life.
- The positive impact of a personal brand is a function of its authenticity.
- Authenticity is the foundation of greatness.



Michael Cavotta is a professional headshot photographer and certified personal brand strategist based in Cleveland, OH • Copyright © 2018

mcavotta@mac.com / michaelcavotta.com