

Get a Grip

THERE'S SCIENCE BEHIND A HANDSHAKE.

HERE'S HOW TO DO IT WITH DIGNITY AND STYLE

By James E. Guyette

A handshake doesn't speak, but it says a lot of things nonverbally. On the golf course, a handshake can communicate key nonverbal messages that go far beyond the condition of a fairway. "It's a first impression, and it's hard to get around that," says Tom Kastler, superintendent at the Club at Runaway Bay in Runaway Bay, Texas.

For superintendents meeting potential new employees, an applicant with a wimpy handshake can be quickly squeezed out of the hiring process. Kastler has some gripes about the proper grip, and he offers up two rules of thumb for golf course greeting. "I don't like somebody who tries to crush all 20 bones in your hand, but I also don't like the 'wet paper towel' handshake," he says.

The four-fingered handshake is a particular peeve — an example of soggy salutation that Kastler considers "pretty wormy" in a business setting. "That wears me out," he says.

The experts agree. A study by psychologists at the University of Alabama has scientifically proven what most people already know: A firm handshake helps make a solid first impression for both men and women.

"A person's handshake is consistent over time and related to some aspect of his or her personality," according to William F. Chaplin, the study's lead author. "Those with a firm handshake were more extroverted and open to experience, and less neurotic and shy than those with a less firm or limp handshake." Chaplin adds that the measure of a handshake is its strength, vigor, eye contact and completeness of grip.

Not surprisingly, men typically have firmer handshakes than women — but women who shake with determination do have a hand up on those who don't.

"Women who are more liberal, intellectual and open to new experiences were found to have a firmer handshake and made a more favorable first impression than women who were less open and had a less firm handshake," Chaplin reports. "For men, the opposite was found. More open men had a slightly less firm handshake and made a somewhat poorer impression than less open men."

Thus for men, it's apparently best to be slightly less open during that debut handshake. It's all in the touch, according to Kastler, who also advises against the high five, low five or any other form of fancy fingerwork.

"If they start to move that direction, I just follow them. It's kind of like a dance," he says. "But most people will not do that at a job interview."

That's right. And make sure that it's your hand doing all the shaking. "Hugs and kisses are taboo in the

business arena," according to Etiquette International, a business manners consulting firm based in New York.

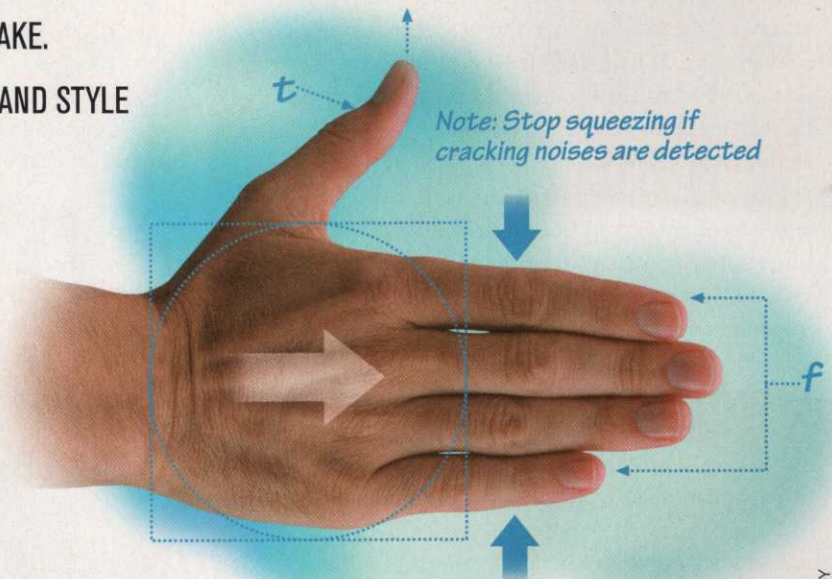
The company advises that for a good handshake:

- Keep the fingers together with the thumb up and open.
- Slide your hand into the other person's so that each person's web of skin between thumb and forefingers touches the other's.
- Squeeze firmly.

A proper handshake, says Etiquette International, is firm, but not bone crushing; lasts about 3 seconds; and may be "pumped" once or twice from the elbow and then released after the shake, even if the introduction continues.

Oh yeah, if you suffer from clammy hands, the company suggests a form of Brut force: "Spray them with antiperspirant at least once a day." And carry your drink in your left hand.

Guyette is a free-lance writer from Cleveland.



DAN BEEDY