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<http://mentalfloss.com/article/74310/8-fake-it-til-you-make-it-strategies-backed-science>

8 "Fake It 'Til You Make It" Strategies Backed by Science

Trying to fake your way to success seems dubious at best and delusional at worst. And yet, there is plenty of science that proves you can actually fool yourself and others into becoming more successful, finding love, and increasing your happiness. Researchers have found that "acting" a certain way allows your brain to "rehearse" a new way of thinking and can set off a desired chain of events in the future. Here are eight scientifically-backed strategies for "faking" your way to a better job, relationship, and mood.

1. SAY CHEESE

Scientists have found that if you want to lift your mood, you should force yourself to smile. [A 2012 study published in the journal *Psychological Science*](#) trained 169 university students to hold chopsticks in their mouths in order to force particular facial expressions (one neutral, one a standard smile, and one a genuine smile, which engages the eye muscles as well as the mouth muscles). Once the participants learned the correct expression, they were given stressful multitasking activities to complete, such as tracing a star with their non-dominant hand while looking at a reflection of said star in a mirror. The researchers found that the subjects with both the genuine and the standard smiles had lower heart rates after performing the task than those with the neutral expression, indicating they were less stressed.

According to [Psychology Today](#), a similar study that asked participants to either "raise their cheeks" (forcing them to smile) or "contract their eyebrows" (making them frown) while judging images of neutral, happy, and angry faces found people had a more positive reaction to the images when smiling. What's more, the positive benefits of these [forced smiles lasted for four minutes](#).

2. STRIKE A POWERFUL POSE

In her [much-publicized 2012 TED talk](#), Amy Cuddy, a Harvard Business School social psychologist, shared her findings that adopting a powerful posture can affect your body chemistry. In her study, she had subjects adopt either a power stance—with their chest and head lifted and arms propped on their hips—or a meeker pose—hunched over with their arms crossed—for two minutes. The people who maintained power poses showed a decrease in the stress hormone cortisol and an increase in testosterone, a hormone related

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to dominance and confidence. "Our nonverbals govern how we think and feel about ourselves," Cuddy concluded. "Our bodies change our minds."

3. PRETEND YOU KNOW THE ANSWER

A 2012 study published in *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* found that [expecting to know correct answers can actually improve our test-taking abilities](#).

Psychologists asked two groups of participants to answer a set of questions on a computer. One group was told the answers would briefly flash on their screens before each question—too quickly for them to read the answer, but supposedly slow enough for their subconscious to register it. In reality, the flashing "answers" were a random series of letters and numbers. Meanwhile, the other group was told the flashing screen simply signaled the next question. In the end, the group that thought they were seeing the answers got the most questions right. This advantage may have evolved from our primitive survival tactics, reasons *Scientific American*, as expectation of a change in the environment "triggers physiological changes that prepare the body for the impending confrontation even before the predator comes into sight."

4. DRESS FOR THE JOB YOU WANT

Researchers at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management found that wearing particular clothes associated with certain positive qualities helped [improve the wearer's performance](#). In the 2012 study, individuals were instructed to don white coats described either as "lab coats" (the kind worn by doctors and scientists) or as "artistic painters' coats" (which were actually identical to the lab coats) while they performed a task; in order to demonstrate that the coat had to actually be worn to make a difference, a third group was merely shown a lab coat before being asked to perform the task [\[PDF\]](#).

The three groups were asked to examine four sets of two pictures for differences and write what they found down, a test that was designed to test their sustained attention. The researchers found that people wearing the "lab coat" found significantly more differences in the same amount of time than the "artists," meaning that their attention was heightened while wearing the coat. This led the researchers to conclude that dressing for success "depends on both the symbolic meaning and the physical experience of wearing the clothes."

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5. LISTEN TO HAPPY MUSIC

When you're in a funk, probably the last thing you want to do is turn on some Pharrell. But recent research found that forcing yourself to listen to happy music and consciously trying to become happier can actually lift your mood. In a 2012 study published in the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 167 college students were asked to listen to 12 minutes of "happy" music. One group was told to try to actively boost their mood while listening, while the second group was instructed to listen without trying to alter their mood. The first group reported much higher levels of positive mood after listening.

A tandem study by the same researchers had 68 students listen to happy music during five lab visits over the course of two weeks. Again, half the group was told to try to become happier during this time, while the other half was told not to attempt to change their mood. The students who made an effort to be happy reported higher mood levels than those who just listened to the happy music. "These studies demonstrate that listening to positive music may be an effective way to improve happiness, particularly when it is combined with an intention to become happier," the researchers conclude.

6. MIMIC GOOD LEADERS

Say you've just been promoted to a position with job requirements that are outside of your skill set. New research shows that the best thing you can do is mimic someone else around you who displays the required skill sets, even if your first inclination is to worry about appearing like a fraud. Of her research, professor of organizational behavior Herminia Ibarra writes in the *Harvard Business Review*, "By viewing ourselves as works in progress, we multiply our capacity to learn, avoid being pigeonholed, and ultimately become better leaders. We're never too experienced to fake it till we learn it."

7. FEIGN ROMANTIC INTEREST

Richard Wiseman, a psychology professor at the University of Hertfordshire in the U.K., split roughly 100 participants at a speed dating event in Edinburgh in 2012 into two groups to test what he calls the "As If Principle" (if you act "as if" you are a certain way, you'll come to feel that way). One group was instructed to behave as they normally would on their dates, while another was told to pretend they were already in love by gazing into each other's eyes, touching hands, and whispering secrets. All participants were then asked how close they felt to their various partners (on a scale of one to seven) and whether they would like to see each other again. On average, those faking romantic interest reported that they felt one point more intimate with their partners.

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Forty-five percent of this group also said they would like to see the other person again, while only 20 percent of the “normal” speed dating group reported the same. Wiseman told the *Telegraph* of his study, “The assumption was that the emotion leads to the action or behaviour but this shows it can happen the other way around, action can lead to emotions.”

8. FAKE CONFIDENCE TO GAIN INFLUENCE

It turns out that in group dynamics, early assertiveness becomes self-enforcing. In a [2013 study](#) published by the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, researchers randomly assigned three groups of college students the task of writing two paragraphs on either their job ambitions, their duties and obligations, or their commutes. They then formed same-sex teams using students from each of the three groups and instructed them to brainstorm a hypothetical startup company.

Afterwards, everyone took a survey in which they rated the extent they respected and admired the other members of their team. The researchers found that the individuals who had written about their ambitions enjoyed a higher rank in the group pecking order and were perceived as being more assertive and proactive than those who had focused on their job duties or commutes. By just shifting your thoughts to your goals, the research suggests, you can project a more capable, confident persona.

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