

Get a Killer Smile for Your LinkedIn Picture

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by Sara Grillo

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With more advisors turning to social media during the pandemic, your LinkedIn profile picture has to be killer. I'm going to start with some smile basics, and then I'll describe specific types of smiles and how to pull it off.

Smile basics

Smiling is something we do all the time, but when asked to do it for the camera it causes problems. But the smile is the most powerful aspect of your LinkedIn profile picture (headshot), so you need to overcome those problems.

Eyes

Eyes should always be looking right at the camera, even if your body isn't pointed directly at the camera. Not looking straight at the viewer has a disconcerting effect; yet I see people doing this all the time.

If fatigue, illness or dehydration show in your eyes, reschedule the photo shoot.

Minimal distractions

The smile should be the most dominant feature of the picture. Add too many other elements and it takes away from the power of the smile. This is one of the only times I advocate for boredom.

Opt for a plain, understated background for your social media headshot. Stand in front of a plain wall and don't let the photographer talk you into a pattern. I've learned this from experience.

Here are other distracting elements to avoid:

- Speaking at a podium – Forgive me, but this is so presumptuous. Who are you, Queen Elizabeth?
- Bookshelf – Oh please. Is this *Masterpiece Theatre*?
- Outdoors – Maybe. If there is too much going on in the background, then it violates my rule about keeping things simple. If you opt for an outdoor background, make sure it is something upper-crusty, like a plush orchard, so people will think you golf with the rich.
- Hands clasped underneath the chin – I remember when I was three my mom used to get pictures of me like this. Remove your hands from your face – this is not a glamor shot.

Cropping

Advisor LinkedIn headshots are all over the place when it comes to how they are placed within the space LinkedIn allots for the picture. You know, that little "circle thing" where you can upload your photo?

Sometimes there is too much suit. The suit or shirt should not be the focus of the picture. If your picture goes as low as your waist level, it goes too far. The "circle thing" should intersect with the tip of your shoulder. That way you are displaying three to six inches of the top of your suit instead of having the picture look like an advertisement for Brooks Brothers.

On the other hand, sometimes there is not enough suit displayed in the picture. People feel vulnerable showing their necks. But don't cut it off at your Adam's apple. It may cause you to look like a head suspended in midair.



The Jedi forces

Use the force, Luke.

No matter what expression you make (I'll get to those next), make it look natural and relaxed. If you smile with too much force, it distorts your features.

A while ago, I upgraded my LinkedIn picture. Remember how I was pregnant for nearly five years in a row? This was going to be the big photo shoot year. Then the pandemic happened, New York closed down, and quarantine ruined my life.

When I was posing for my picture I noticed that my face looked weird. My cheeks kept bunching up like a chipmunk, forcing my eyes to get all scrunched up. It didn't seem like a relaxed version of my face. Instead, I opted for a half smile and voila!

Much better.

Finished product here.

Observe the forces exerted in your face while posing for pictures:

- Don't bite your bottom lip to make the smile less big. It's too forced and makes you look like you have an overbite.
- People extend their jaw downwards in an effort to make their faces appear longer. This results in a surprised expression on their face. They look like Fred Flintstone. I want to say, "What's so funny? Did I not get the memo?" Not a good look for an advisor.
- Try to make your face the same on both sides. People sometimes will smirk lopsidedly or raise an eyebrow. For an advisor this is not the vibe you want to create as it is an unsettling expression that may convey distrust.
- Involuntary tensing. If you are nervous or just fatigued from holding a particular expression for too long, your face may start to tense up or even twitch. This always used to happen to me during prom photos because either my parents or my date's parents always had to go camera happy. Take a breath, close your eyes then open them.

Expressions

Put some thought into which expression you think fits your brand and personality the best, and then draft a mantra to repeat to yourself as the photographer clicks away. I apologize in advance to all you LA Laker and Chicago Bulls fans.

Smize



I like this one for an advisor picture.

Smile with your eyes, or “smize”, to show that you are serious with a soft side. In this expression, the eyes take care of the smiling while the mouth participates minimally. Make a neutral expression with your mouth, and then squint just with the bottom edges of your eyes. Mouth stays relaxed, with perhaps a slight upturn at the corners of the lips.

Say to yourself, “This one will be for the cover of *Barron’s*.”

Smirk



This is the expression I am making in my LinkedIn picture and that is because I am a highly snarky, irreverent person. If you are the “what you see is what you get, folks” type that doesn’t want to appear to be trying too hard to impress, then this expression is for you.

Here’s how to smirk: clamp your teeth first, and then contract your cheeks a little bit. Have your eyes look distant as you gaze into the camera (like you don’t care).

Say to yourself, “I’m so baaaaaad.”

Disney’s Aladdin



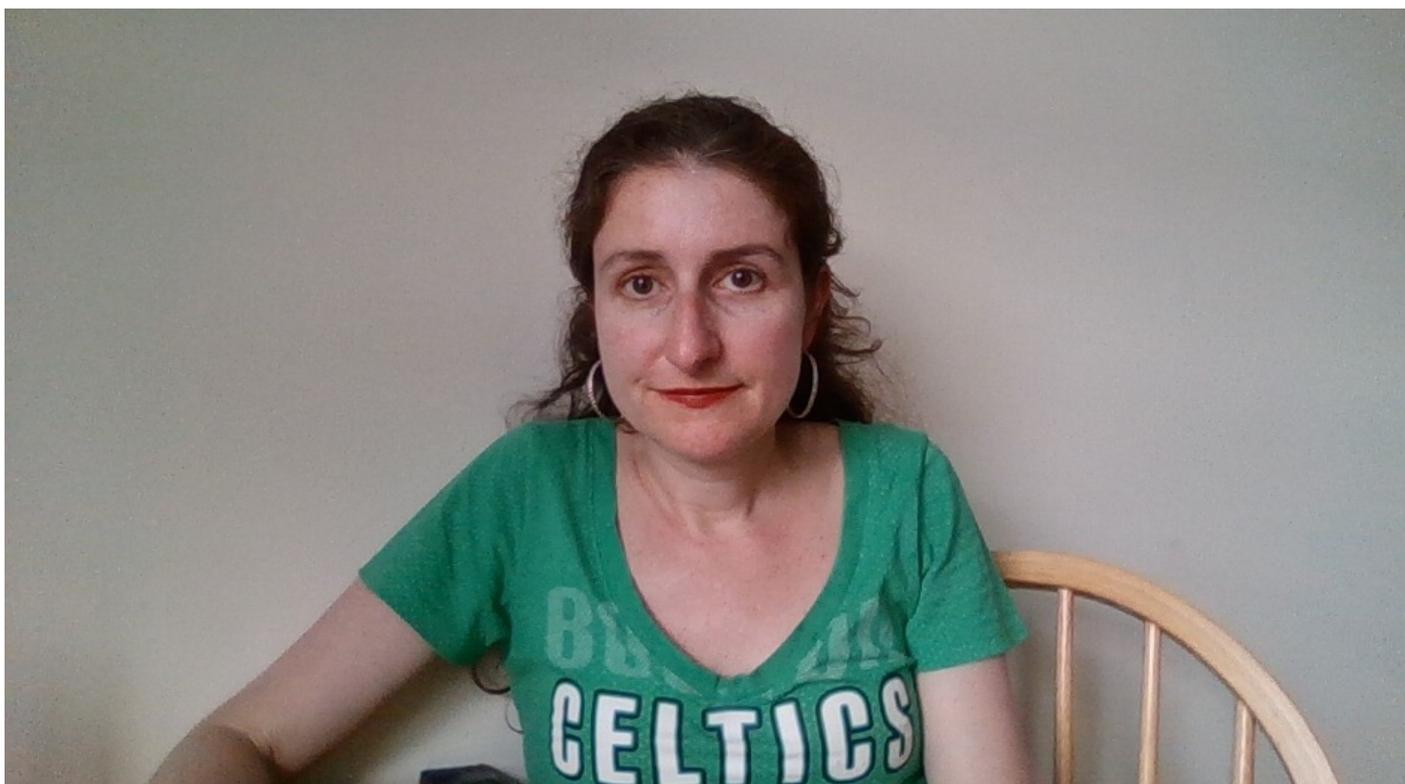
You know how in the Disney movie, Aladdin flashes both rows of teeth when he smiles?

You may be the type that likes to put a big ole' smile on your face, almost as if you are laughing about something. If that's you, then so be it! If your brand is lighthearted then this is a good fit. The good thing about this smile is that it may make you appear more trustworthy because it's so genuine.

You flower children!

Say to yourself: I'm just in total paradise computing my clients' 2020 RMDs!

Barely there



I do see these often. It's the kind of wistful, polite smile that doesn't convey too much emotion. It's serious and conveys that much desired credibility. It's not going to earn you any big points. However, you have little to lose, either.

This is a closed-mouth smile. No need to activate eye forces. Just make sure you don't look like you are about to cry.

Say to yourself, "This will be over soon."

Sweet Pea



This is an easy smile in which your lower lip forms a lower case "u" while your upper lip is basically straight. Eyes are static. It nicely elongates the face. This expression conveys warmth and softness.

Say to yourself, "Nothing." I just want you to think of something or someone you love being behind the camera.

Sara's upshot

Send me your profile picture if you want my opinion, and join my membership and learn how to take care of all aspects of your social media beyond just your pictures!

Sara Grillo, CFA, is a marketing consultant who helps investment management, financial planning, and RIA firms fight the tendency to scatter meaningless clichés on their prospects and bore them as a result. Prior to launching her own firm, she was a financial advisor.