Power Stance: Powerful You
A Simple Scientific Tip (that works!) for Improved Presence in your Interview

Think about your standard posture when you’re waiting to go into an interview. Are you hunched over looking at your phone? Are your legs and arms crossed? If so, you may be hurting your chances of getting that job.

Those postures and others that involve curling into yourself or making yourself smaller, are considered “low-power poses”. In contrast, “high-power poses” are about making yourself bigger: standing like Wonder Woman or Superman or a runner crossing the finish line victorious with arms raised above head.

In a recent Ted Talk, Amy Cuddy talks about the way these “poses” can alter your hormones and thus change the outcome of a situation, especially in evaluative or social-threat situations, like a job interview.

The Science: Dominance versus Stress
Testosterone and cortisol correlate with dominance and stress respectively. High powered leaders usually have high testosterone and low cortisol, so they are dominant but not very stress-reactive. Certain people are more prone to holding these stances, or naturally have higher levels of testosterone and lower levels of cortisol, and thus rise to power more easily.

Cuddy found, however, that adjustments in posture and other non-verbals can actually help people ‘fake it ‘til they make it’, and better yet ‘fake it until they believe it.’ Through lab experiments in which individuals were asked to hold a pose for two minutes without knowing why, Cuddy found that people who held high-power poses for two minutes experienced a 19% increase in testosterone and 25% decrease in cortisol from their base.

In contrast, those who held low-power poses for two minutes experienced a 10% decrease in testosterone and
a 17% increase in cortisol. The high-power posers were willing to take risks when offered, while the low-power were not.

The Real Life Experiment: Performing in an Evaluative Situation
Cuddy wanted to find out if these chemical changes could actually make a difference in an evaluative situation so she experimented with these poses before sending individuals in for an intense, five minute recorded interview.

When judges watched the interviews, and ranked who they’d want to hire and why, the individuals who held the ‘power pose’ were significantly better received than those who held low-power poses. In fact, those were the ones the judges wanted to hire.

It had to do with their presence during the interview, not the quality of their answers. Those who held the power poses were confident, authentic, comfortable, enthusiastic, captivating, and passionate. As Cuddy explains, “they were bringing their true selves” to the interview.

The Application: Being Powerful Before & During your Interview
To be clear, you don’t want to hold a power pose during an interview. You would risk coming across as too dominant, casual, or overconfident.

The idea is to provide the chemical reaction for yourself before you go into the high stress situation. However, there are a few things to keep in mind about your posture during your interview that will help you keep being the powerful, confident you that you just made yourself:

Try to keep your posture open. Don’t cross your legs or arms. Keep your shoulders back.

Avoid touching the back of your neck. This is a protective move and a very low-power pose that can quickly increase your stress level.

Some movement during the interview is good. Adjust your body position, lean forward or back slightly, or move your hands from your lap to the table, so that you don’t come across as stiff and your posture doesn’t seem forced.

Silly or simple, we recommend you give it a try: be a Wonder Woman or a Superman for two minutes prior to interviewing. It’s potentially the most effective, and easiest, interview prep you can do. In addition, we still recommend you make time to more traditionally prepare for your interview (see our website for tips).

Find two minutes in your car, on the elevator or in the restroom prior to your interview to strike a power pose, and you can change the chemicals in your brain so that you perform to the best of your ability. Sure, it may sound a little ‘hocus-pocus’, but what have you got to lose?