

Partners who had powerful faces in college lead profitable law firms

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Law firms are more profitable when they are led by managing partners who have faces that look powerful, according to a study in the current *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

Appearance matters a great deal when it comes to judging people—this includes clothing, posture, hairstyles—but the real window to judging people is the face. Previous studies have shown that West Point cadets whose faces projected dominance were more likely to become generals than cadets with less dominant faces, Senate candidates whose faces were judged more competent than their opponents won three-quarters of their races, and the more powerful the faces of CEOs of Fortune 1,000 companies looked, the more profits that their companies earned.

Law firms are interesting because the head of the firm—the managing partner—usually work their way up through the ranks of the law firm. This means that a law firm's leader is selected after substantial experience with the lawyer's legal work, people skills, and suitability for the managing partner position. Having a powerful face should play a much smaller role than when leaders are hired away from other firms, where first impressions might play a large role.

Nicholas Rule of the University of Toronto and Nalini Ambady of Tufts University had people judge photos of 73 managing partners from the top 100 US law firms for dominance, maturity, attractiveness, likeability and trustworthiness. Half of the judges rated current photos downloaded from law firm websites. The other half rated photos from college

yearbook photos, which on average were taken 33 years prior. Law firm profits were obtained from public records.

Ratings of dominance and facial maturity together formed a measure of power, and this facial power measure was a strong predictor of law firm profitability. Power in the managing partners' faces predicted profit margin and overall profitability of the law firms. Not only did facial power in the current pictures correlate with profitability, but facial power in the decades-old yearbook pictures was nearly as effective at predicting profits.

Surprisingly, human warmth in the face—likeability and trustworthiness—was uncorrelated with law firm profits.

The powerfulness of a leader's face at a law firm seems to translate into profits for the whole firm. And the critical elements of power are present in the face more than 30 years before it is a reliable marker of leadership effectiveness.

More information: The article "Judgments of Power from College Yearbook Photos and Later Career Success" in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* is available free for a limited time at spp.sagepub.com/content/early/.../385473.full.pdf+html.

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