

Your Wardrobe Affects How People Perceive Your Personal Brand

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Some people enjoy experimenting with clothing choices to reflect their personal brand. Others couldn't care less what they wear and focus more on business and let the results speak for themselves.

The reality is, the way you appear drastically affects the way others perceive you. First impressions are often based on appearance, and it's hard to reverse people's opinions based on an instantaneous visual assessment.

Your care in choosing your attire reflects your professionalism and the esteem in which you hold those around you -- whether in the workplace or at a social or business event.

Clothing choices used to revolve around reflecting a certain environment, whether it be corporate, social, or informal. Now our attire choices are more a reflection of our personal brand, regardless of those environments.

While the focus is no longer solely on environment, it still remains a factor in attire choice, though hard and fast rules no longer exist. Dazzling ties, fashion forward shoes, ornate and colourful eyewear, dazzling pocket squares, and flamboyant purses and dresses are now common at social and business gatherings.

Regardless of your clothing choices, you must feel comfortable with them. If you are more focused on how you look instead of how you communicate with others, you have likely made the wrong clothing choice. You should be comfortable and focused on the business at hand instead of worrying about the impression your clothing is creating.

Simple, Individual Approach

Some key factors in choice of professional attire are:

1. Who is your audience?
2. What is the environment and office culture?
3. What is impression you want to give?
4. What are you comfortable with?

It is easy to imagine that you appear a certain way based on your image of yourself. This can lead to age inappropriate attire choices that may detract from your professional and overall presence -- not to mention spending a lot of money on garments and accessories you may never feel comfortable wearing.

Simple, understated elegance makes a powerful professional statement, as does your ability to be age-appropriate in your attire. Here are a few things to consider when choosing professional attire to reflect your personal brand:

- Your goal is to first draw attention to your eyes and demeanor, not a flamboyant garment or accessory. Ideally, people will remember you as well-dressed but their main impression was based on how well you engaged them -- and those around them.
- Keep everything well-maintained, including keeping purses, shoes, and heels highly polished. Attention to details is indicative of your approach to business and can make a huge difference when making a first impression.
- Fabric, fit, quality, and comfort are the keys to dressing well in any season.
- Navy blue, black, taupe, charcoal, white, burgundy and forest green are all classic colour selections. Lighter colours are generally best in spring and summer while darker colours work better in the fall and winter.
- Suits should never change colour or shine -- indoors or out. Be careful with linen because it wrinkles quickly in high humidity and you don't want to enter a meeting or restaurant looking as if you have just fallen out of a dryer. On cooler summer days, tropical weight wool blends are perfect.
- Accessories such as scarves, ties, pocket squares and socks can offset the uniform-like severity of some conservatively cut suits. Certain accessories such as ties also convey the respect you hold for the occasion and the person with whom you are meeting.
- Save athletic wear for the gym.
- It can be more efficient (time-wise and financially) to invest in several high-quality pieces that you can dress up or dress down for a variety of occasions. This is a case where the adage "quality not quantity" will always win out.

Shoes: Keep your feet on the ground

Shoes should be polished and properly maintained, with solid soles and heels to enhance support and appearance. Shoes are often the first thing people notice because they tend to glance downward before making eye contact.

Here are a few pointers when it comes to picking the right shoe for you:

- Running shoes, hiking boots, Blundstones or sandals with a suit are rarely acceptable.
- Investing in high-quality leather shoes will not only help to make a great impression, but they will also last longer.
- High heels can get uncomfortable when walking or standing for prolonged stretches. You don't need to resort to "sensible shoes" although many premium and mid-range brands are engineered to look and feel great.
- Flip-flops are not acceptable for office wear or meetings outside the office.

Making wise and elegant attire choices may seem like a thing of the past, however, you can help control how people perceive you. Always remember, dress for the job you want, not the job you have.