

Power Dressers

Author Rachael Osman-Chin
Saturday 11 August, 2007
Section: My Career

You are what you wear - at least in the office, where good presentation pays off, writes Rachael Osman-Chin.

The idea that appearances count for a lot in the workplace is often met with denial and resentment. Even, it would appear, from those who pay **image** consultants to help them look better.

"I tell them, 'Darling, I don't make the rules. I'm just the messenger, so don't shoot me,'" says Jon-Michail, the founder of **Image** Group International.

"Like it or not, this is the office environment and you better learn the rules of the game quickly. If you don't you will be shark bait."

"A lot of us have university degrees these days, but there is still this arrogance, this chip on the shoulder that leads many people to think if they've 'got it from the neck up', they shouldn't bother about the neck down."

There are many reasons. Some people resent having to spend large sums of money on work clothes. Some wish to be judged solely on their work performance. Others view the pressure to conform to a corporate **image** as an affront to their individuality.

In 2005, the Commonwealth Bank faced a public backlash over its new staff dress guidelines, which recommended women not wear shiny stockings because they made legs appear fat, that men trim their nose hair and that anyone who wore glasses should update their frames every year. There was even advice on what sort of bras women should buy.

But was this outrage simply a reaction to the expectation that modestly paid bank tellers should spend so much on their grooming or was it also railing against something we know to be true?

Four years ago an American study found that it pays, literally, to project a professional **image**. Judith Waters, a psychology professor at Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey, sent out identical CVs containing either an unkempt "before" photograph or a highly groomed "after" shot of hypothetical job applicants to more than 300 American companies and asked them to determine a starting salary for each. The companies nominated starting salaries 8 to 20 per cent higher for the post-makeover applicants.

For further information on this article and the coaching programs available please contact:



Image Group International
Asia Pacific Head Office
Tel: (+61 3) 9820 4449
Email: info@imagegroup.com.au
Website: www.imagegroup.com.au
©2007

According to Jon-Michail, it's not about political correctness.

"If you get the job because you are really good, even though you look sloppy, I can guarantee you that you are selling yourself at a discount," he says.

So what does it cost to look the part at work?

"You should invest about 10 per cent of your annual income in your appearance," Jon-Michail says, adding that this includes grooming products and hair styling.

He insists it's money well spent. "Even with a small budget you can create value."

It typically costs more for men to set up a corporate wardrobe. Both **image** consultants agree that men working in a corporate environment should expect to pay \$1000 to \$1200 for a suit and they should ideally have at least three or four pure wool suits.

Women, generally, need more, because the more colour there is in a wardrobe, the more combinations you need "so as not to look like you are wearing the same thing all the time". If a woman is happy to stick to subdued colours, she could get away with three or four good quality suits, a couple of business dresses and some jackets.

"Setting up your wardrobe can be a bit scary for the first or second year but by the third year a man may only need to buy four new shirts and a woman may only need to buy four new tops, one more suit and a new pair of shoes."

she says...

Small business entrepreneur Amal Ahmad spends \$500 to \$600 for each outfit, including shirts and shoes. This may not seem extravagant but she replaces her entire work wardrobe every six months. "To do this I must have more than one suit and replace them quite often," she says. "I match these suits with a really good quality shirt. I choose to do this rather than pay \$1000 for just one suit." Ahmad is very disciplined with her spending and shops for new work clothes three times a year.

he says...

Corporate consultant Robert Kirby works in change management with large companies. "A lot of executives will pay \$2000 to \$5000 for a suit," he says. He prefers to spend \$1000 to \$1500 on a classic suit, \$250 a shirt, \$250 for shoes and \$150 for each silk tie. Colour is also key. "I'm tall with big shoulders," he says. "If I wear a black Armani suit, which I have, sometimes people are intimidated. So I wear more teal, charcoal grey pinstripe and light blue or baby pink shirts."



For further information on this article and the coaching programs available please contact:

Image Group International

Asia Pacific Head Office

Tel: (+61 3) 9820 4449

Email: info@imagegroup.com.au

Website: www.imagegroup.com.au

©2007