



[DR. SHIRLEY'S CAREER CORNER]

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Your professional image: Credibility or crisis?

Several weeks ago, I conducted a training program for an organization that had recently implemented a new dress code. Though the program went well, many of the organization's employees (those not attending the training, of course) rebelled against the dress code. "Why the need for such a thing?" was the comment of many. In fact, management received feedback regarding the dress code that was unbelievable. Based on the comments, it seemed as though professionalism as it relates to attire and grooming had just about disappeared from that work environment.

Individually, your overall appearance can be your best friend or your worst enemy.

It is a fact, based on years of research, that your overall professional image significantly impacts the image of your organization. Unfortunately, there is a profusion of sloppy, unpressed, inappropriate and in-poor-taste attire worn by so many in today's workplace. Perhaps the idea that you never get a second chance to make a first impression has gone by the wayside. So, what is the status of your dress and grooming — one of credibility or one of crisis?

Organizations, both large and small, must be keenly aware that the appearance (attire and grooming) of all employees is directly related

to the overall company image and how clients and others perceive the total enterprise. Fortunately, during the past few years, many companies have begun to recognize, again, the power of image and the fact that an employee's individual image can either serve as a positive reflection or a negative one.

Individually, your overall appearance can be your best friend or your worst enemy. At times, clothes are the only visible clues to your personality. Even when other indicators are more apparent, your appearance continues to make a statement. Consider the times when you know that you are dressed appropriately, that you are projecting the type of image the company wants to present. How do you feel? I'll bet that you feel great. Your attitude is positive, self-esteem is high, people have confidence in your ability and judgment, you're less vulnerable to intimidation, and your "look good, feel good" frame of mind comes through in everything you do.

Contrary to popular belief, you don't have to spend a million dollars to be attired professionally and appropriately. Ladies don't need a perfect figure, nor do gentlemen need a perfect physique. What you do need to be concerned about is what is appropriate and in good taste for your specific professional line of work, the type of clothing that compliments your body type and colors that are flattering as well as suitable for the workplace. Most importantly, you should be willing to change, coupled with the desire put your "best self" forward in every situation.

In general, a quick check in the mirror each day should be enough to tell you if you're on the right track. If you look like you're dressed to go somewhere other than to your job, you probably aren't dressed appropriately for work. Also, ask what messages the clothes you are wearing will send. If your response is "not really professional and in good taste," perhaps you should go back to your closet and change.

The way you dress, how you're groomed, your overall demeanor — these factors taken together are your visual communication. When you're dressed inappropriately, the fight for credibility is so much harder. Consider that your appearance "talks." Many times your dress and grooming are speaking so loudly that others have difficulty listening to what you have to say. Bear in mind that your look of confidence, of competence and of credibility can give you the opportunity to demonstrate your capabilities. As Shakespeare once said, "the apparel oft proclaims the man."

When it's all said and done, the bottom line is that a well-polished image gives you a psychological and competitive edge and earmarks you as a professional. I certainly hope you agree with me when I say that one of the most important goals of a professional is to, indeed, look like one.

For more information on Dr. White's programs and publications, including her book "Dress to Win: 10 Steps to Maximum Personal Impact," please contact her at (225) 769-2307 or visit www.successimages.com. □