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How To Look More **AUTHORITATIVE**

By Wendy Lee

In a perfect world, substance would win over style every time. However, the truth of the matter is that you must look the part if you want to get ahead. When all your energy is focused on just carrying out your daily tasks, it is very easy to let your wardrobe slip into a state of disrepair. Before you know it, your work clothes are tattered, too small, or out of style.

If your clothes don't convey the message that you are competent, ambitious, self-confident, reliable and authoritative, nothing you say or do will overcome the negative signals emanating from your apparel.

The sad fact is that people will indeed judge you by your clothes. If you want to advance in the workplace, to be promoted, to look like someone with authority, then start looking the part!

A. Dress That Says, "I Mean Business!"

1. Wear straight lines in your garments

One of the easiest ways to project a no-nonsense, serious look, is to wear garments with straight lines. Curved lines convey fun, informality and relaxation. Blouses with lapels and sleeves project more authority and competence, compared to something sleeveless and with ruffles and lace. Similarly, striped ties will send a more authoritative message than paisley patterned ones.

Soft garments drape over your body, giving it a casual and relaxed feel; whereas those that are boxy and stiff project a formal outlook. So, choose something that is skewed towards boxy and stiff to increase your value in power!

2. The little touch that counts

Attention to details can make a difference to change you from a mediocre look, to someone that looks polished, professional, put-together! Wear cufflinks. Carry a briefcase instead of a purse. Pick pearl earrings over plastic ones. These items can help you exude power and confidence and thereby projecting an authoritative impression to others.



3. Dark Suits win hands-down

Black, dark grey, dark blue are strong authoritarian colours. If you want to project an image of strength and power, these are the colours you should start with. You may stray from these three colours, but keep the suit dark.

For jackets and suits, the darker your colour, the higher your level of professionalism. The stronger the colour, the more powerful the wearer will possess.



4. Be Well-Heeled

What's a powerful woman's shoe? The undisputed dark coloured, closed toe, 1-2 inches pumps. Clients DO notice your shoes. So, your shoes must not look as if mice had just nibbled on it. Heels are preferred for ladies, but it should not be so high that you trip on every other step. 1-2 inches are good. For men, opt for black polished dress shoes. The rule of thumb is that your working shoes should not look overly sexy, overly athletic and overly frumpy. And yes, this also means you should never wear Crocs.



5. Show Less Skin

Power up by covering your skin. All things equal, a longer-sleeved shirt has more power than a short-sleeved shirt, a knee-length skirt has more power than a mini-skirt, wearing pantyhose is more powerful than bare legs, all because more skin is covered. **A general good rule of thumb when dressing for power is "Raise the necklines; lower the hemlines."**

B. Behave Like You Mean Business!

1. Stand Tall and Speak Louder

When it comes to authority, having height helps. So stand straight! The squarer your shoulders, the more stable people will perceive you to be. Gentleman - Place both feet a little further than each other. Ladies - move a few steps around to claim your space. You are now sending a visual image 'I am the boss!'

And when your body is straight, this will help you speak a little louder. Higher-volume projects higher authority, but you should increase only your volume, not your pitch. If your pitch goes up at the end of the sentence, it will look as if you are asking a question. This will make you sound as if you are seeking for approval and make you seem less authoritative.



2. Chunk Your Words and Eliminate Disclaimers

Present your ideas to your clients confidently. Use short, concise sentence. A chunk of words can be a phrase or a short sentence. This will help you eliminate filler words like um's and ah's. Pause between points and take your time to finish whatever you intend to say. And never start your sentence by apologising, ex: "I am not sure if this is ok..." or "I may be wrong..." This will only show your weakness and insecurities.

3. Connect With Your Eyes and Smile Confidently

Linger your eye contact a few seconds longer and give a warm smile when you are talking to people. Eye connection makes what you say important and make the person you are talking to feel important. People will remember you and warm up to you when they sense you have paid attention to them, and have a sincere interest in them.

4. Lower Your Pitch

"I'll be back," says Arnold Schwarzenegger, in his low-pitched, deep voice. Imagine if he has said it in a shrilled, high-pitched, voice, it would convey a totally different message altogether.

Low-pitched deep voices command respect and suggest leadership qualities, whereas high-pitched voices are associated with weakness and submissive behaviour. Arnold sounded authoritative, powerful, domineering, someone you would listen to.

Ladies, while it is true that most males are more attracted to feminine, soft-spoken women, if you are in a leadership position, I'd suggest you lower down the pitch of your voice. People will take you a bit more seriously and attend to you more.



Wendy Lee is the President of MABIC (Malaysian Assoc. Of Brand & Image Consultants) and a director at BrandImage International Institute (BII). She is also the author of Best Selling Book - Up Your Value! and a firm believer that with Style...there must be Substance!

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