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Beware of the fast-food approach to buying clothes

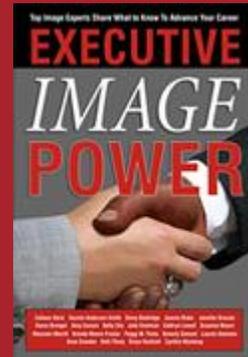
You pass a window display of colourful tops, "For only \$9.99, and if you buy 3, save an additional 50%" The temptation seems too good to resist, especially when your "helpful" shopping buddy says that you've got nothing to lose. Should you buy it? Not necessarily.

Once that piece of clothing is taken off the svelte mannequin (where it is invariably pinned from behind to fit perfectly), how will it survive in the real world of wearing, stretching, soiling, washing and storing? Apart from asking the usual questions—What does this go with? Where might I wear it? You need to road test clothing before you buy.

According to Lisa Armstrong, Fashion Editor for The Daily Telegraph, the question is really about the garment's "recovery rate". "If the silk top you're lovingly fondling is as thin as tissue paper," she warns, "chances are it will look like a rag by the time you get it out of the bag at home."

I always coach clients about checking check seams, zippers, hemlines and washing instructions. Here are my top 8 road test tips next time you are tempted by that great deal.

1. Check the label. Anything between 2 and 10% Lycra means the fabric has some give, which helps the fibres retain shape.
2. Grab a hand full of fabric and scrunch it in your hand to test for how easily the garment wrinkles or creases.
3. Factor in the cost of dry cleaning if you're buying something delicate, white or a light colour.
4. Put the garment on. Take it off. Put it on. Rate it out of ten for ease and state of garment (and you) at the end. Note: It's a bad sign if you have to call in the sales clerk to help you get out of a garment.
5. With pants, skirts or dresses, sit down, stand up, sit down and stretch your arms over your head. Is it creased and disorderly? Are you? Is your underwear on show when you're seated? Your stomach under siege?



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6. If fluffy, feathery or furry, try it on with something dark. If it leaves traces (or you start sneezing) put it back.

7. Check the buttons and the buttonholes (cuffs included!) Zip and unzip the zippers, pull the seams gently to make sure nothing pulls apart.

8. Justifying is another bad sign. If you are thinking to yourself, "This will work as long as I'm wearing a jacket/sweater over top of it" or "if I'm wearing the right underwear," or "if I'm only visiting my other-in-law" you probably won't enjoy wearing it much.

Buying quality ensures that clothing lasts and avoids what some have coined the "fast food" approach to fashion. Road-testing your investment doesn't qualify as garment abuse. It means being a good shopper and a responsible consumer. It also saves you from "recalling" your own clothes once they leave the security of a mannequin and are worn in the real world!

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