

# Projecting the Right Image

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An effective image has the ability to enhance one's presence and influence other peoples' perceptions. Image is especially important for creating a positive first impression.

Bringing consciousness to the image we project can make the difference between inspiring confidence in others, building confidence in ourselves, and losing a client's or colleague's trust. A certified image consultant can help an executive in any industry build a positive image, drawing from the executive's natural strengths.

"It's important to understand that improving your image is not the same thing as a make over," explains Anne Sowden, AICI CIP (Certified Image Professional) and President of Here's Looking at You.

"A make over focuses on the appearance only. It does not take into account who the person is, the industry they work in, where they work (e.g. Toronto vs. Calgary), position, personality, lifestyle and so on - all essential considerations for creating the most appropriate and authentic image."

Building a strong image is a complex process and must address three key areas:

## 1. Appearance

From head to toe - clothing (style and fit), shoes, hair, fingernails, and all other aspects of grooming.

## 2. Behaviour

How to act in the workplace - at a job interview, in a meeting, in a videoconference and so on.

## 3. Communication

- a. Verbal - the words we choose, how we say them, tone of voice, etc.
- b. Non-verbal - posture, facial expressions, body language, etc.

Ms. Sowden explains how she addresses each client's unique needs. "I don't have an exclusive with specific shops because each client has very different requirements. For instance, someone who travels for work requires fabrics and colours that mix and match and travel well. Also, what one wears in the US is different from Europe."

## Projecting the Right Image *continued*

"But it's not just the clothes I consider," explains Ms. Sowden, "I also help traveling clients develop cultural sensitivity."

Lifestyle is also an important factor.

"Someone who has five minutes to get ready because they have children who need to get to school is going to require easy, wash-and-wear clothes and outfits they can put together quickly," says Ms. Sowden

"The most important consideration of all," asserts Ms. Sowden, "is authenticity. An effective image consultant spends time getting to know his or her client. We are not out to make our clients into someone they are not; our job is to enhance who they already are."

Ms. Sowden adds, "It's less about the clothes and more about the gestalt - the overall effect of everything put together: clothes, style, manner, attitude and, above all, reinforcing authenticity."

## Remember the Importance of Etiquette

"Etiquette seems to be something many of us have left behind," laments Ms. Sowden.

Barbara Pachter and Marjorie Brody define etiquette in *The Complete Business Etiquette Handbook* (unfortunately out of print) this way: "Etiquette is a set of traditions based on kindness, efficiency and logic that have evolved overtime. They give you a structure in which to operate. Think of them as rules of the game."

Ms. Sowden sites the hand-written thank-you note as an example. "It's something that takes little time but speaks volumes to the client. It shows you care, that you put in effort. When people are used to getting mostly bills in the mail, a hand-written thank-you note will set you apart."

Ms. Sowden explains that an effective image consultant will observe a client's manner as much as appearance. "When I work with someone, I start with appearance because that's the quickest way to show results. But it is also a quick way to observe how people act. For instance, after shopping with one client, I debriefed him on what I observed in his exchange with the sales clerk and then asked him how he felt at the time, and how he could handle the same situation differently at the next occasion."



"Most clients are not aware of their behaviour, and most are eager to change when they realize there's room for improvement," says Ms. Sowden.

A few of Ms. Sowden's top etiquette tips:

### 1. Always say thank you

Small gesture, large impact.

### 2. Make a strong connection

Offer a confident handshake. "No wet fish, no bone crushers, do the web-to-web handshake and squeeze gently, make eye contact and smile," advises Ms. Sowden. Say your name clearly and make sure you get the other person's name right.

### 3. Listen

Never interrupt people. Give your full attention and open your mind.

### 4. Write an effective e-mail

Even if you do not know the recipient's name, always start with a greeting. Always include your name and contact info, especially for first-time connections.

### 5. Leave an informative voicemail

Make sure the messages you leave are clear. What are you calling about? Leave your name and phone number twice.

## The importance of having an image consultant

You do not get a second chance to make a first impression. This expression points to an experience we all understand: when you walk into a room, people see your dress, your body language and your general manner before you speak. And they form

snap judgments on those initial data inputs. So, you need to make sure you are equipped with the tools necessary to portray a confident and capable image. An image consultant can help you leverage your strengths in order to project the most authentic and most able version of yourself.

When looking for an image consultant, it is best to go through the Association of Image Consultants International for properly trained and accredited consultants with specific education and experience. ■

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