



Successfully

DRESSING

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ress for success. For me, this is akin to fingernails on the chalkboard. It evokes memories of an obsolete, cookie-cutter answer birthed in the 1980's which outlined the quintessential business image for men and women. Please remove 'dress for success' from your vocabulary. I would prefer to have you consider the concept of *successfully dressing oneself*. Whether you are working in a business casual environment or a suit and tie environment, understanding the nuances of image can greatly enhance one's ability to be more productive. For over twenty-two years, I have worked in the image and fashion industry. I am often astounded at the various mindsets which compel people to purchase clothing that does not serve them well. When working with our corporate clients and presenting workshops, it is a great pleasure to help organizations grow their presence by teaching some fundamental elements of creating image. The objective is to help groups and individuals understand that they are not simply getting dressed. They are authoring a story. It is being read by everyone with whom they come into contact. The manner in which an ensemble is created is in actuality creating syntax telling the world who you are and where you are going.

Most people want to be understood. A conflicting message blocks opportunities for understanding. You can look amazing and still be incongruent with your intended message. Looking good is irrelevant. Creating an image that is authentic and appropriate to you is the true objective. It requires a level of expertise and talent to understand and translate one's story. Our society has become quick to assess, decide and act; often relying on perception. Within three seconds of meeting someone, we are capable of creating an entire story about them simply by what we see. Because approximately eighty percent of the population are visual learners, most people believe what they see, not necessarily what they hear. *Offering a point of difference and a clear message supported by our image are key components in creating rapport*. In a competitive market place, one cannot afford to have a first impression 'disconnect' with a prospective client or the prospective talent they hope to attract.

Successfully dressing oneself today is about relevance and context. Who are you? Why do you matter? Who is your audience? Why do they matter? Are you authentic? Does your image support your message?

We are dynamic beings. What worked for us 5, 10, or 15 years ago might not work for us today. Here are five questions that I ask prospective clients:

1. Has the model of your business environment or lifestyle changed from the time you first began to "problem solve" your way of dressing?
2. Do you sometimes feel that you have a closet full of nothing to wear?
3. Do you find yourself unsure or less confident in certain circumstances?
4. Have you avoided special events or networking opportunities because you did not feel you had the appropriate attire?
5. Have you failed to change your thought process and attitudes towards purchasing clothing in the past 5 to 10 years?

If you have answered yes to any of these questions, you may need a paradigm shift. Formulas you once created to manage your wardrobe may be obsolete. If you are frustrated with the shopping process, it is highly probable that your problem solving model has created more problems for you than solutions.

Here are *five tips that may help you* get started with creating a more authentic image.

1. Create a clear statement about yourself. It should encompass your key character traits.
2. Weed out all items in your wardrobe which are not relevant to your statement
3. Create a budget and acquisition plan.
4. Be patient. Only make purchases that are relevant to your message and your plan. Acquire items as your budget permits. Do not fall into the trap of making purchases in order to 'get you by'.
5. Be disciplined. Only purchase items that you feel are a step up from what you already possess.

Prepare yourself. Understand clothing purchases in a new light. Realize your purchases as investments. Consider the cost of opportunities lost by continuing to purchase clothing that is not clearly reflecting your message.

You may wish to seek the help of an experienced image consultant who is not compensated for selling clothing. A highly trained consultant will be able to help you create solutions that will best suit your budget as well as your personal and lifestyle driven needs. ●