

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

© 2004 Dow Jones & Company. All Rights Reserved

TUESDAY, JULY 13, 2004 - VOL. CCXLIV NO. 8 - ★★ ★★ \$1.00

The Jungle / Focus on Recruitment, Pay and Getting Ahead ♦ By Kris Maher

QUEER EYE for the Job Seeker?

So far, no reality show follows the hapless job seeker who mixes plaid and pinstripes and flunks a luncheon job interview by drinking from the finger bowl.

Such blunders may be extreme, but no one can deny the importance of making a solid impression on a hiring manager or boss. Luckily, an army of image consultants is ready to assist people who feel an image tuneup might be the key to a new job or a promotion.

The popularity of TV makeover shows, which include "Extreme Makeover," "How Do I Look?" and "What Not to Wear," has increased the profile of the image-consulting profession. Consultants, who can help you shop for a new work wardrobe, suggest a new hairstyle or fix your slouching posture, are getting more calls than ever. "Since the makeover shows, it's become more mainstream," says Anna Soo Wildermuth, president of the Association of Image Consultants International, in Dallas.

The association has 500 members, 400 of whom are in North America and typically charge between \$75 and \$250 an hour. Ms. Wildermuth estimates that there now are close to 1,000 image consultants in the U.S., and more are setting up shop as a result of the popular TV programs. About 75% of clients in her practice seek to gain an edge in their careers.

When Joyce Levin felt stuck in her nursing career four years ago, she decided her image needed a change. She hired Jill Bremer, an Oak Park, Ill., image consultant who helped her purchase new clothes in a new set of colors. "When I met her I looked like a 'before' picture," says Ms. Levin, who was used to wearing her nurse's uniform to work. "I was tired of looking the way I did."

Ms. Levin spent \$500 for three sessions with Ms. Bremer, in addition to about \$700 on a one-day shopping spree. "She changed my



life," says Ms. Levin, who says she felt more confident during job interviews and landed a succession of new positions. Today, she is an injury claim trainer for State Farm. "I think outdated clothing and especially outdated hairstyles communicate out-of-date attitudes and rusty skills," Ms. Bremer says.

Ms. Bremer typically helps clients thin out their closet and keep only clothes that are stylish, fit well and com-

plete their coloring. She also makes suggestions about a new hairstyle and new eyeglass frames. In addition, she will evaluate the overall impression that a client makes by studying his verbal communication and use of body lan-

guage. She sends some clients to cosmetic dentists and vocal coaches, but unlike some consultants, she has never referred a client for cosmetic surgery. In picking an image consultant, you should check references and find out about his or her specialty. Some focus primarily on shopping. Others, such as corporate-image consultant Danit Ran Schreiber in Rye, N.Y., work more on business-related issues. Ms. Schreiber, a lawyer and former head of an ad agency,

Consultants, who can help you shop for a new work wardrobe, suggest a new hairstyle or fix your slouching posture, are getting more calls than ever.

plemen their coloring. She also makes suggestions about a new hairstyle and new eyeglass frames. In addition, she will evaluate the overall impression that a client makes by studying his verbal communication and use of body lan-

says she typically works with lawyers and people in advertising and finance to enhance how they communicate visually and verbally. This may involve helping someone eliminate a habit, such as fidgeting or not making eye contact, with "bet-

ter body gestures," but can include advice on making presentations.

Laura Bigaouette, 44 years old, sought advice from Ms. Schreiber when she left a position as a director of marketing at a consulting company to start up her own coaching business in Larchmont, N.Y. "I said to her I am not comfortable outside of a black suit," Ms. Bigaouette says. During consultations, she picked up tips on clothing and ways to soften her corporate image.

Watch out for image consultants who promise too much too soon. Beware of anyone who says they can make you look like someone who doesn't even share your body type—or guarantees you a promotion. Instead, be prepared for incremental change. "It's not an instant fix," Ms. Wildermuth says.

While anyone can call herself an image consultant, the AICI offers training and three levels of certification. You can locate image consultants and learn about their backgrounds through the association's Web site at www.aici.org.

Certain image consultants work with an equal number of male and female clients, but some use slightly different approaches for each. Debra Lindquist, a Denver image consultant, says she often eases men into the shopping part of her advisory session with what she calls "sport shopping," to break men of the habit of buying the best thing they spot in a particular store.

Ms. Lindquist, who works with a palette of 3,000 colors when she consults with clients, says men also need a lot of help choosing the appropriate tone of beige to wear during the summer. She cites one notable job seeker as an example: presidential aspirant John Kerry. "He will often wear tacky pants that have a golden cast that don't support his hair color," Ms. Lindquist says. "He would be better off with a stone color."

Please e-mail comments to Kris.Maher@wsj.com; to see previous columns, go to www.CareerJournal.com.