



The sartorial entrepreneur

Here's how to look like a winner — even if you're not Donald Trump

This week we're breaking from our normal Q&A format to discuss something of the utmost importance: your appearance.

Okay, maybe it's not the most important thing. But Mom was right: First impressions matter. And the impression your appearance makes on customers, investors, business partners and others is no laughing matter. "You're a walking résumé," says Chicago image consultant Anna Wildermuth of Personal Images Inc.

It takes only five seconds to sum you up. Wear a ring on your left hand? You're married. Sporting a \$5,000 suit? You're single (or very rich). Don't wear a lot of black? You probably have pets. The bottom line: What you wear, and how you present yourself, is important to your business.

So to help you look good, we rounded up some of Chicago's top sartorial experts. Here's what to keep in mind the next time you're staring, dully, into your closet.

Ties

"Depending on what industry you're in, your tie should speak to your audience," Ms. Wildermuth says. That doesn't mean you should wear baseball or football ties if you're in the sports industry. It means if the audience is more conservative, stick with traditionally patterned ones that are subtle and dark (think grays, blues and blacks). If you're speaking to a more creative or artsy audience, go with bolder colors, like green, purple or gold.

Shirts

If you're successful, you can wear whatever you want. Donald Trump wears a lot of pink because, well, he's Donald Trump. But you're probably not there yet, so sticking with low-key colors like white and light blue will make you appear stable and reliable. And choose the right fabric — 100% cotton, not polyester or rayon — otherwise you'll look cheap.

Your shirts, of course, should always be impeccably pressed. And keep them clean.



Jewelry

If you're married, wear your ring. Not because your spouse tells you to, but "because it shows that you're honest about who you are," says Ms. Wildermuth. Your watch also makes a statement. Make sure it's not too big and clunky — that's shouting "I've made it." Go with something shiny and modest. That says you're dependable.

Hair

You wear this every day, so it says a lot about who you are. For men, shorter is better because it can make you look smarter and more professional. And don't overdo the gel, because you'll appear self-centered and immature. For women? Keep hair away from your face. That's distracting.

With these basics in mind, remember to let your garb represent your business philosophy. Here's the ideal outfit for messages you're trying to project:

"I'm creative"

Wear brighter colors and more dramatic patterns (but no leopard print — it's tacky). You can also spice up the suit-and-tie routine by losing the jacket and adding a sweater. Remember it depends on your industry — creative clothing in the arts is different from creative clothing in plumbing.

"I'm intelligent"

Wear rimless glasses (Woodrow Wilson-style), conservative colors like grays and navy and elegant fabrics such as light wool or gabardine, which have flawless stitching.

"I'm approachable"

For men, choose warm colors like camels and browns and lightly striped shirts. For women, don a jacket instead of a more formal blazer.

As a budding entrepreneur, maybe you're more concerned right now with business plans, getting funding and HR issues. And, of course, all that stuff matters. But remember: It's important to always look the part, too.

Now go shopping.

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