

# Creating an impact at work – appearance

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## **Purpose**

This exercise aims to make it clear to a client how their appearance can have an impact on an outcome.

## **Description**

If your client is seeking promotion at work and feels they are doing a great job, but that their talent is not being recognized, ask yourself whether your client looks the part of the new role. It is a strange phenomenon that people who look like they will get on in an organization are often the ones promoted, but they are not necessarily any more able than those who are passed over! It may seem grossly unfair, but it is a fact of life that many of us are greatly influenced by what we take in visually – as the packaging industry knows only too well!

Those of us who are at all visually influenced regularly make some massive assumptions about people and their state of mind from their appearance. Just think of comments like ‘You look very smart today – are you off for an interview?’. Or you look around the office and feel somebody is unlikely to rise through the ranks much beyond their current position.

## **Process**

Let’s imagine that your client is aspiring to the role of financial director (FD). Ask them to imagine a conference

room full of FDs. In the room there are one or two who stand out as looking particularly successful. Ask your client to describe *in precise detail* what these people look like. If your client is female, she should imagine a room full of female FDs, and if male, then male FDs. Prompt your client. For example, ask them what their hair is like – modern, conservative, on or off the face, well styled or not, recently trimmed, etc. Go through every item visible – suit, shirt or top, tie or jewellery, make-up, socks/stockings, bag and shoes. Prompt on quality, fit, level of maintenance, textures, colour and appropriateness of each item for the workplace and the culture they work in. Write down the ‘recipe’ for your client. Ask your client to imagine that they are working in the costume department of a film production company and ask what they would change for the audience to be able to distinguish between the more senior FD and the less senior financial controller.

The absolute key to creating a successful professional impact through appearance at work is *consistency* and a *high level of maintenance*. Wearing a smart suit for the important meeting and just a shirt and crumpled trousers for the rest of the week becomes ‘play acting’.

If you can see that your client doesn’t ‘look the part’ and you feel they need a little more professional help than you are able to offer, do suggest that they consider seeing a professional image consultant/coach. However, image consultants, like any profession, do vary enormously in their experience and expertise so do suggest that your clients ask about experience and training. A national and international list of highly trained consultants can be found at [www.houseofcolour.co.uk](http://www.houseofcolour.co.uk). Also ask if the sponsoring company is willing to pay – it is a relatively small investment for developing and retaining talent.

### ***Example***

Jeremy is an IT team leader and we had a number of objectives to cover, including confidence building, assertiveness and management skills. At our second meeting, he was wearing a short-sleeved open-neck shirt – as before, yet walking

round his department I noticed a number of people in suits and nobody else wearing short sleeves. The company agreed to finance a day on image and we found the colours, styles, textures, etc. that gave Jeremy a greater appearance of authority. His first investment was several long-sleeved shirts and a few ties, which he has worn consistently. The change of image has contributed towards Jeremy's assessment of his confidence going from 20 per cent to 80 per cent over a six-month period and he is now being groomed for promotion.

### **Pitfalls**

Sometimes people link their appearance to who they think they are. A coach can help them to see the impact their appearance has without it appearing as personal criticism.

### **Bibliography**

Everett, L. (2004) *Walking Tall: Key Steps to Total Image Impact*, London: Lesley Everett.