

## Fashion makeover has worked wonders

When it comes to fashion, I am among the silent majority of modern businessmen who can't tell Hermes from Hilfiger. Frankly, that was never a source of shame for me. I figured that I knew enough about business clothes to look OK without seeming ostentatious. Then I found out that there's more to dressing for success than making sure your socks match.



Mark Fulton

I used to think there was nothing more comforting and friendly than a nice brown tweed or plaid sport coat. The professorial look was perfect for my role as a business coach, I reasoned. So I filled my closet with variations on the brown theme. Naturally, I also included the

requisite blue blazer and gray suit.

My collection of ties tended toward earth tones with subtle patterns. In addition to several white button-down shirts, I owned some others in really nice yellow, blue and green pastels.

That was before my ill-informed ideas about proper business attire were torpedoed by an image expert. Sandy Dumont, owner of Image-inations, a Virginia Beach personal branding and image consultancy, gently revealed to me just how sartorially challenged I was.

After meeting Sandy in a business networking group, I agreed to accept her invitation to attend a personal branding makeover in her studio. I warned her that I wasn't going to relinquish my fashion habits easily, because I know what I like.

Her informative personal image workshop included: a brief lesson in how great masters such as da Vinci used color to influence our reaction to their paintings; a scientific demonstration of how our brains deal with color; an explanation of faulty color theories; and clear guidelines for how to combine ties, shirts and suits to project a dynamic image for every occasion.


While sitting in a director's chair under bright lights and watching in a mirror as Sandy held up various swatches of color near my face, I became a true believer. It was amazing how bright, gem-tone colors made my face look more vibrant and how pastel colors made me look anemic. Sandy gave me a small card with colored squares as a handy guide for shopping.

On my next trip to the department store, I purchased a black suit, several red, burgundy, gold and navy blue ties, some blue-striped and French blue shirts and a couple of "powerful" jackets. Now I know how Superman feels when he dons his blue and red skivvies.

The first time I wore a Sandy-inspired outfit, a number of people remarked how nice I looked. This has happened on several other occasions. For a guy who never before got compliments on his clothing, my newfound dressing modus operandi has helped me feel a lot more confident about my appearance.

I am still far from being a men's-fashion maven. Nevertheless, I now have a passing understanding of the power of color. I can put outfits together that suit my purposes for meetings, presentations or business luncheons. I can even give my wife intelligent feedback when she asks that vitally important question, "How do I look?"

American writer Ambrose Bierce once described fashion as "a despot whom the wise ridicule and obey." The way you look shouldn't matter when it comes to being hired, promoted or selected for an important task—but it does. It is axiomatic that we do judge a book by its cover. Since first impressions are formed in the first 30 seconds after meeting someone, I've decided to stack the deck in my favor.

Sandy Dumont's e-book, *Business Dress for Men*, will be available on her Web site, [www.image-inations.com](http://www.image-inations.com), on April 30. 

*Mark Fulton is a leadership coach, writer and speaker in Hampton Roads. For more information about his leadership-coaching practice, CoachCare, visit [www.coachcare.com](http://www.coachcare.com) or call 533-9650.*