

Change Your Image, Change Your Life by Sandy Dumont

Sometimes we continue to dress from habit and never realize that we have moved on and become a far more sophisticated or successful person. Unfortunately, we are judged by the way we look, and many women continue to wear the staid blazer jackets and white shirts they wore at university. This *collegiate* look shouts that you are an inexperienced greenhorn, and you are likely to be treated as if you are not very high-placed nor informed in the working environment.

The way you look announces the outcome other people can expect from you. You may be highly talented and capable, but if your image doesn't shout this to the world, you could be dismissed by others before they get to discover how dynamic you are. When you change your image to conform to the person you are deep inside, you CAN change your life! The problem is, most people's True Self is buried under years of habit.

That's what happened to 39-year-old Elizabeth, who approached me and was crying. I could see that it was difficult for her to speak. "No one ever told me I was chic before," she sobbed. This wasn't a sad occasion, and I had heard it many times before, so I remained silent and let her speak. "I took your workshop to look

better," she told me, "but it has gone far beyond that. I feel like a different person, and people treat me differently. Today when I was shopping, the sales woman in the boutique told me I looked very chic." Elizabeth was smiling and crying from happiness. She gave me a big hug and thanked me profusely.

It is not only women who get stuck in a collegiate look. Men often continue to wear baggy khakis and a blazer with an outdated-looking tie. Their look is replete with a boyish-looking hairdo. Presidential candidate John Edwards actually had a haircut that may have been worth \$500. In earlier years he had very collegiate "straight bangs" across his forehead. This look may have given him an edge in the courtroom because there is a certain naiveté and innocence attached to a collegiate look. However, in the business world, it decreases credibility because your persona shouts greenhorn.

Changing your image is like changing countries. There's some culture shock involved. When you've been used to hearing your own language and speaking it quite

easily, it is disconcerting to have to pay very keen attention in order to understand what others are saying. They might even dress differently, in which case you may feel you are out of step with everyone else. Those who are reluctant to change may feel that everyone else is out of step.

It's the same with image. We are used to the same old face in the mirror, and when serious changes are made, it is sometimes disconcerting. Most of the people in my group image workshops think that everyone else looks fabulous with their new look, but that they do not. The new colors are not for them, the lipstick is too bright, or they like the new ties that are suggested but are reluctant to toss out the "powerless" ones.

Change of any kind requires repetition. This is as true for learning a new habit or task as it is for image changes. In most cases, it takes about a week to get used to a new hairdo, new makeup, new colors or new clothing styles. However, it only takes a day to get used to compliments. And, ultimately, that is what convinces

most people to stick with it. It is all too easy to go back to our comfort zone, but unsolicited compliments from strangers as well as friends eases the discomfort of facing that stranger in the mirror.

In a sense your image is a Power Predictor. It announces whether or not you have authority, credibility or success. Think you know what looks good on you? What makes you look dynamic or successful? Think again! My thirty years' experience suggests that most people choose colors and styles from the "heart and soul" and not from the results in the mirror. Ultimately, we can remain very objective about others, but it is nearly impossible to be objective about ourselves. If you are ready to make a big change with your image, seek advice from an expert or from a trusted friend. When you change your image, you can change your life! ■

Sandy Dumont is an internationally-known image consultant and is a pioneer in the field of color and image. She has been featured on TV, radio and in print throughout the world. Visit her website for information about her online consulting: www.theimagearchitect.com.



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