

B U S I N E S S F O R U M

LOOKING GOOD AT WORK DEPENDS ON WHAT COLOR SUITS YOU

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You're wearing a suit, so you should look good. Right?

Maybe not.

A suit in the wrong color can be detrimental to your appearance on two levels. First are the results in the mirror. It may not be becoming and may clash with your hair or your skin. Remember George Bush in the pale gray windbreaker he occasionally wears? He appears weather-beaten, tired and much older than he is. Imagine Bush in a suit the same color. It is not the picture of a powerful man. You also may recall the image of silver-haired Bill Clinton in a camel jacket. He wore it once, and the results were jarring.

The second negative result of the wrong color is on a psychological level, when the colors you wear send out negative messages. Can you see Laura Bush clad in a leopard print dress or Jennifer Lopez in a matronly brown dress?

According to a recent study of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, a lack of color knowledge may be costing you money. The bank reviewed economic studies to find possible links between looks and wages. The study's conclusion: A worker with below-average looks tended to earn significantly less – on average 9 percent less – per hour than an aboveaverage-looking employee. Those with above-average looks tended to earn 5 percent more than their average-looking colleagues. The economists working on the analysis concluded that society values workers with good looks and pays them for it.

What does it mean to "look good" on the job? You might be surprised. My 30 years of research suggest that it has nothing to do with looking "beautiful" or "handsome." It has everything to do with looking polished and professional. In particular, it has to do with being dressed in a professional manner and in colors and styles that flatter you.

Colors send messages, and you can use that to your advantage. You must choose them first and foremost to flatter the skin. It is a mistake to think that you can rely on your instincts or personal taste when choosing colors. Without color knowledge, it is difficult to produce results that are consistently positive. A few colors are universally positive, such as navy blue. However, it is necessary to select the proper shade of navy blue for your skin. In general, if you have gray hair, avoid gray-toned navy blues.

Red is another "universal" color that has strong positive connotations. But keep in mind that orangereds are less flattering to the skin than blue-reds.

What message does the popular but not recommended color gray send? It suggests old and gray, sad and gray or tired and gray. Worn alone, gray simply sends out a negative message, so it must be combined with a tie in a dynamic color. Women can negate gray's dreariness with a colorful accent, which can include lipstick.

Our sense organs can function only by means of comparisons. For example, the eye accepts a line as long when a shorter line is presented for comparison. The same line is taken as short when compared with a longer line.

Color effects are similarly intensified or weakened by contrast. A color that seems perfectly fine may suddenly look absolutely dreadful when compared with a better color.

Color knowledge is important when choosing wardrobe colors, as well as hair and makeup colors. Unfortunately, many books on the subject of color analysis contain dated information. For example, all the color books in my library suggest that because of my light skin and hair, I must wear pastels. In reality, most blondes look pale and washed out in pastels, and I am no exception.

The most expensive suit in the world won't help you look good if it's in the wrong color or style.