

# Act the part to get the role

Dressing for success is one fashion cliché that holds true in corporate life

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YOU make what may be a lasting impression within the first 30 seconds of meeting someone — even before you open your mouth.

A woman who teeters into a meeting in pink high heels, a tight pink skirt, and a pink top that shows cleavage is better suited to the sex industry than someone who wants to be considered a professional.

Similarly, a man who wears sunglasses on his head, thick-soled shoes, a cheap tie and short sleeves, is a person with little or no ambition.

In South Africa, too many people underestimate the importance of really good shoes and a good leather handbag or briefcase.

But boardroom conduct could also be a minefield for the new executive who may overdress and sit intimidated for the first few meetings.

Managing your professional and personal image and knowing the right business etiquette puts you on the right professional path and helps keep you at the top.

The way you dress, walk and speak is enhanced by a sound sense of good business etiquette — the way you cooperate with colleagues and interact with clients.

You look confident if your posture is upright, and if you walk slowly and deliberately and pronounce your words clearly and carefully.

Big words do not show intelligence; they often indicate arrogance. Use words that your target audience will easily understand.

Business etiquette aims to make people feel comfortable and important.



The cornerstone of image is impact, which could be translated as:

- Integrity — act in an honest and truthful way.
- Manners — never be selfish or undisciplined.

- Personality — your values, attitudes and beliefs.

- Appearance — present yourself to your best advantage.

- Consideration — put yourself in someone else's shoes.

SUITS YOU: A professional person who looks the part will gain the trust and respect of colleagues

Picture: CORBIS

discussed. Don't try to be perfect; admit it if you made a mistake, because honesty is respected.

If you project an air of integrity and implement what you say, you will succeed.

Many people also don't know how to end a conversation, particularly with someone their senior.

The best way to end a conversation is to summarise what has been said, then pause in case the individual wants to respond, then after that say thank you and leave.

In the case of a phone conversation, the one who phoned should end it.

If you're the boss, always be dignified and considerate by refraining from criticising or reprimanding someone in front of others because it shows insensitivity.

If you are not introduced to people after joining a new organisation, you should introduce yourself, stating why you are introducing yourself — for example: "I am the new marketing manager."

Those still working their way up the corporate ladder should avoid office parties and pop in for a little more than 20 minutes, greet everyone then leave.

When you enter a room, pause and observe who is in room. It also allows others to notice your presence even before a word is spoken. Don't talk loudly, and avoid smutty jokes.

But most of all, observe how the most successful people in your organisation dress and conduct themselves, and then try to emulate them because it's important to fit into the corporate culture. — Van Wyk is CEO of Johannesburg-based training organisation BizTech

- Tact — think before you speak.

There is no such thing as an "awkward silence" — every pause in a discussion should be embraced.

Practise listening skills by using that pause to reflect on what has been