

Nancy Stevens, Image Consultant

FYI: Nancy Stevens

A fresh new look is rewarding...

Rewarding staff with an image make-over can have a lasting, long-term effect, as well as being a fun yet relevant alternative to existing staff benefits. Nancy Stevens, a workplace stylist discusses the impact.

The clothes employees wear to work form part of the culture of an organisation, as people naturally conform to a subconscious workplace dress code. But how many people from outside of your organisation see your employees? What impact is casual wear having on your workforce? And how can you ensure employees are projecting the right image? There has been an increase of companies tapping into image consultancy as a staff benefit. It isn't all 'Trinny and Susannah' or 'Gok Wan'. Image consultancy is suited to both men and women and involves on a basic level demonstrating how to make the most out of themselves using the correct colours and styling; for example when I give presentations to businesses, I provide professional dress basics and guidelines. I also talk about wardrobe management, and strategies and tips in selecting, caring for and updating the clothes and accessories that create your professional image.



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Image consultancy as a staff benefit results in a 'win-win' situation. Staff feel invested in, they end up with a solution that can impact other areas of their lives, and businesses are gaining more productive, confident, happy, smart-looking employees. Some employees are even investing in their own appearance via salary sacrifice schemes. In any form of business, office-based, or otherwise, image consultants can help employees to understand the messages you send to customers, prospects, superiors, and peers when you are appropriately and inappropriately dressed. Clothing can achieve credibility and self confidence through a polished appearance and

help develop professional presence. Image can also be enhanced without losing personal style.

This may sound like a benefit for just the ladies but actually men are taking just as much of an interest. At a recent presentation I did at a Bedford-based business centre, Bedford iLab, there were more men present than women. Unusually the men were much more receptive and open to different ideas. One managing director agreed that productivity had slipped so significantly due to casual dressing standards, he was going to enforce a proper dress code in the office.

We all have "off days" but businesses cannot afford to have this attitude or lack of dress sense taken into the office. As I survey City workers on the Tube in the mornings, I am dismayed at how little we obviously value ourselves in terms of how we present ourselves. Cheap suits, scuffed

obligatory white shirt and wonder why we look like waitresses. For the chaps, is the grey suit with the white shirt and blue tie really saying anything about you or are you conforming to the stereotype that all office workers are boring?

One area I advise on frequently is wearing the right colours. This is often underestimated, particularly in the workplace. It can literally make or break your look. Psychologically, colour makes us feel better and if we feel better, we look better and then it has a knock-on response into all aspects of our lives. Black is such a negative colour and puts a barrier between us and whomever we are talking to. Through colour analysis sessions I'm able to demonstrate very quickly that most British people who are pale skinned cannot and should not wear black. It is totally draining of their complexion and makes some look like they need a blood transfusion! Never a good look. If skin does have an olive hue, then black IS fine but still needs colour to work with it.

In the early 90s I worked for one of the Big Six Solicitors in the City and deliberately wore red to work as I wanted to be noticed in the sea of black and navy. And noticed I certainly was and more often than not was complimented by Partners and some very senior ones at that. It never ruined my chances of promotion and people remembered who I was. So take a good long hard look at your staff and ask yourself the question; if you met one of them for the first time, would you do business with them?

and unpolished shoes, scruffy and unkempt hair, no make up for women, bare legs and bitten fingernails. Our European counterparts wouldn't be seen dead without a sharp haircut, well-tailored suit, crisp shirt or blouse, legs in stockings, manicured hands (and that's just the men!), a subtle foundation and a lipstick to compliment your skin tone.

In the corporate world a suit is generally the acceptable mode of dress and this becomes a sort of uniform, something we can hide behind, a plate of armour. Nobody wants to stand out from the crowd so we don the black suit with the



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