

Look the Part

by Bradley Richardson
Monster Contributing Writer

Whether you're going to the bank for a loan or to the local auto shop for an oil change, you should look the part. While it's nice to think appearances don't matter, they usually do.

I'm not talking about dressing up or staying in fashion (although I highly suggest it), and this is not a diatribe on how casual Fridays and T-shirts represent the decline of Western civilization. I'm simply saying you are more likely to command respect and get what you want if you're dressed appropriately for your surroundings.

If I'm going to get my car serviced or buy tires, I don't wear a suit. I put on jeans, boots and a cap. I want to be taken seriously by the person with whom I'm dealing. I may be as knowledgeable as the mechanic, but he will make instant assumptions about me based upon my appearance. If I'm in a suit and look as though I don't even pump my own gas, how seriously will they take me? By the same token, if I'm going to the bank to talk with someone about a loan, I don't wear shorts and a cap.

Appearance Equals Message

This really hit home with me at one National Speakers Association Annual Convention. I was listening to a speech by one of the nation's leading sales experts. The audience was made up of sales trainers and sales consultants -- people who make their living teaching others how to make more sales, improve relationships with customers and present a professional image to customers.

Half the room seemed to fit the image of someone a major organization would hire to help their sales staff become more effective. They were dressed casually, yet professionally and tastefully. They were neat, well-groomed and reasonably fit.

The other half of the room was a different story. There were men in sweat suits, others wearing pants about to explode at the seams, and a handful of toupees that looked like they used to reside on forest animals. Now don't get me wrong. You won't find me on the cover of *GQ* anytime soon, but I try to appear tastefully current and professional.

Would I feel confident putting some of these people in front of my sales staff or clients as an example of what to do? Sadly, the answer is no -- regardless of the information and skills they offer. Many people would tune them out and question their credibility, because their appearance was inconsistent with their message of professionalism and success.

Maybe you've heard the saying, "Don't trust a skinny chef." You should look the part. Although looks and appearances aren't everything, first impressions can count for a lot. It's very difficult to overcome a poor first impression, regardless of your knowledge or expertise.

Smart Stuff to Remember

- Appearances do matter.
- Don't underestimate the power of a first impression. People make assumptions about you based upon your appearance at your first meeting.
- You are more likely to receive better service, command more respect and get what you want if you are dressed and speak appropriately for your surroundings.
- Your appearance should be consistent with your message.