

**Dress to impress:
Use your wardrobe to inspire confidence, enhance words**

Janet Ellen Raasch

Janet Ellen Raasch is a writer, ghostwriter and blogger (www.constantcontentblog.com) who works closely with professional services providers – especially lawyers, law firms, legal consultants and legal organizations – to help them achieve name recognition and new business through publication of keyword-rich content for the Web and social media sites as well as articles and books for print. She can be reached at (303) 399-5041 or jeraasch@msn.com.

Before we even open our mouths to speak to a new acquaintance, that person has already formed a positive or negative impression of us – based simply upon our appearance. Even the best of oral statements might not counter a negative first impression.

Research shows that positive or negative impressions are created by what we say (our actual words -- 7 percent), how we say it (our tone and enthusiasm -- 38 percent) and how we appear (our dress, body language and grooming -- 55 percent).

“Verbal communication is important, but non-verbal communication is huge,” said Dana Lynch. “Lawyers often spend a lot of time planning *what they are going to say* in the boardroom, the courtroom or at the networking event. To make the best impression, they should devote at least as much attention to *how they appear*.”

Dana Lynch is a certified image consultant with Elements of Image (www.elementsofimage.com). She spoke on “How to take the stress out of getting dressed” as part of the July program of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Legal Marketing Association, held July 13 at Primebar in downtown Denver.

Lynch shared her top five recommendations for dressing to impress:

Wear tailored suits and jackets. “Jackets are your friends,” said Lynch. “A well-tailored suit or jacket makes both men and women appear psychologically ‘bigger’ and more impressive at first glance. Suits and jackets do not need to be old-fashioned and boring. There are many modern and interesting cuts and fabrics out there.

“The research is conclusive,” said Lynch. “People in suits are perceived as more credible, authoritative, knowledgeable, influential, persuasive and stable than those dressed less formally. Aren’t these all qualities clients are looking for in a lawyer?”

Don’t show too much skin. “The eye is drawn to contrast and skin often contrasts with the fabric being worn,” said Lynch. “You do not want those you are meeting with to be

distracted by skin showing on other parts of the body. You want that contrast to be your face and the focus to be on your facial expression.

“This is especially true for women professionals,” said Lynch. “Do not wear sleeveless tops. Do not hint at or show cleavage. Do not wear short skirts. Take a clue from men. Do they show up at the office in tank tops – or even short-sleeved shirts? Don’t disadvantage yourself in the professional ‘power game’ by showing too much skin.”

Do wear hosiery. “This is a natural extension of the ‘don’t show too much skin’ guideline, said Lynch. “Study after study shows that women with bare legs are perceived as less authoritative, less credible and less successful than women wearing hose. Men wear stockings to the office and to court; so should women.”

Avoid open-toed shoes. “People really notice shoes,” said Lynch. “Make sure that your shoes are good quality and in great condition. Men’s shoes should have hard soles -- not black rubber, which can really ruin the look of a suit. For women, closed-toe pumps are classic. In the summer, you can stretch the boundaries with a ‘peep’ toe or sling-back.

“Believe it or not, many people are distracted by toes,” said Lynch. “Avoid open-toe shoes. You want nothing to distract from your message. Of course, you should avoid sandals and flip-flops in the office. They are much too casual.”

Draw attention to your face. “Choose shirts and accessories that direct attention to your face,” said Lynch. “Men wear neckties for exactly this purpose. Women can wear scarves or necklaces. Earrings should be posts or hoops of an appropriate weight. You want colleagues to be focused on your face and words – not distracted by your earrings swinging or your large bangle bracelet clanging on the table.”

Lynch also suggested paying close attention to impeccable fit, pants length (neither too short nor too long) and consistency of image from day to day. Do not follow trends blindly. Use ‘trendy’ items to judiciously update a classic wardrobe – and to enhance your personal style.

“Finally, hold up your head, look people in the eye and smile,” said Lynch. “The three elements of image are dress, grooming and body language – and a smile is an important part of body language.”

As a certified image consultant, Lynch helps professionals create an external image that reflects and enhances their internal capabilities. She helps her clients define their personal style based on personal preferences, body type and professional requirements. She audits her clients’ wardrobes to determine what works and what does not. She develops shopping lists to “fill in the gaps” and acts as a personal shopper.

After Lynch’s presentation, managers from the men’s and women’s fashion departments at Nordstrom in Cherry Creek predicted trends for the fall season – illustrated with outfits that they brought from the store.

“For men, we are featuring two-button suits with flat-front pants,” said Matthew West. “You would be hard-pressed to find a three-button jacket or pleated pants anywhere – even though they set the standard ten years ago. Lapels and neckwear are also thinner. If you have these pieces in your wardrobe and want to keep wearing them, take them to a good tailor and have them taken in.”

“Women will find suits this fall in many different shades of grey – as an alternative to black,” said Marin Dornseif. “Brown has been missing from our racks for quite a while. Many of these tailored suits feature subtle feminine touches – like a hint of lace at collar or hem. Also, under these jackets, professional women will wear softer tops with more ‘forgiving’ cap or flutter sleeves.”

Impressions are made by what we say, how we say it and how we look. Make sure that the way you are dressed supports – rather than detracts from – what you will say.