

Professional Sabotage in Business

...and, more importantly, how to avoid it! It's often the little things in life that make the biggest impact. And some of these little things, with regard to our grooming and personal attire, assist with completely sabotaging our personal image.

Think about the first time you meet a new client or someone who may be influential in the success of your career or business. What do they see (and therefore think) about you? What do you see (and therefore think) about them?

Here are seven sure-fire ways to sabotage yourself in the eyes of a prospective client:

1. *Wear Ill-fitting Clothing*

If it's **too big** it looks like you borrowed it from your older sibling. The Human Resources Manager of a major finance company shared her perceptions on fit with regard to recruiting graduates, "On paper the qualifications are outstanding! The moment they enter the room for the interview, powerful first impressions are made. One candidate wore a suit that was clearly too big for him. The shoulder seams hung over like verandahs and the sleeve length was clearly too long." Quite obviously, the suit was borrowed for the interview. The perception formed by the Human Resources Manager was that the candidate did not see it as important enough to put more effort into his presentation for the interview. So perhaps he would not go the extra mile for the company's exclusive clients either? Her comment to me was "our clients expect the best – our staff need to look it."

And the other end of the scale is wearing clothing that is clearly **too tight**. The perception it creates is that you have borrowed your younger sibling's clothing or grown out of your existing wardrobe.

2. *Wear Outdated Clothing*

If you are still wearing the same gear you purchased over five years ago, you may be falling into this category! Please don't misunderstand me - some classic items are timeless and must be kept as basics in your wardrobe. However, most of it will have become dated. The damage this does is that you may be perceived as having outdated ideas as well as clothing. If you are working in an innovative industry, you can't afford to look dated. Even classic clothing can have evidence of a current trend that won't be right in five years time.

3. *Neglect your Hair*

The face is the communication centre. Be conscious of:

- The overgrown mop – keep regular hair appointments for a trim. Rebook every 4 - 6 weeks at least.
- Dandruff – on a dark suit this spells disaster!
- Regrowth – if you are using colour, keep at it.
- Product – take care not to overdo the styling wax and spray.

4. *Wear Worn Out Clothing*

If it's pilled, falling apart and worn out, you send the message that you are too! Scruffy, dirty shoes and broken or missing buttons are a sign that you haven't got the time and you just don't care. This is a perception you can't afford.

5. *Be Inappropriate*

If you are not dressing appropriately for the occasion or your clothing is sending a mixed message, it will be very confusing for people to know how to judge you. For example, women wearing flimsy party shoes may not be taken seriously in business.

6. *Forget About Grooming*

- Fragrance – when it's overdone it comes across as quite tacky and cheap, no matter how expensive the perfume. Fragrance is designed to support and enhance you, not to overwhelm.
- Bad breath – the remnants of lunch or coffee can be quite offensive when you are in close proximity to others. Eeuuww!
- Finger nails – chewed nails will give the impression that you are a stress-head! Grubby, unevenly clipped or filed nails send a message that you just don't care.

7. *Wear Inappropriate Accessories*

When you choose to do this, it's a direct reflection of your current position in life. Others will form the opinion that you can't afford a new bag, are resistant to change or just can't be bothered! Some accessory disasters you may choose to avoid:

- Cheap or worn briefcases or handbags
- Tinted or dated glasses
- Cheap digital watches
- Cheap costume jewellery with half the gold worn off
- 20 cent plastic pens

Action Item:

1. List 4-5 words to describe how you would like your clients and colleagues to perceive you. Now review what you wore to work yesterday. Does it fit the 4-5 words you just wrote down?

This article is an excerpt from 'Apprentice to Business Ace' – your inside out guide to personal branding available in leading book stores and also at www.imagequest.com.au