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Jill Haney Cincinnati.Com » Jill Haney Last Updated: 6:45 pm | Sunday, December 21, 2008

Here's how to look sharp at the office

By Jill Haney • Enquirer contributor • December 21, 2008

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My readers and clients often interpret the idea of managing their image as "spending money" and can be resistant to having to spend to enhance their image. With almost every conversation of mine lately involving some discussion of the dismal state of the economy, I thought it would be a good time to discuss ways to improve one's image with little or no cost.

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Over the next two weeks, I will be offering suggestions in three areas of image that can be inexpensively improved yet pack a serious punch: appearance, body language and organization.

When it comes to our appearance, yes, money often needs to be spent. But let's focus on image improvement on a budget. First and foremost, men, iron your shirts, including your golf shirts.

Why? I see men wearing golf shirts to work that look as though they picked them up from the dirty laundry pile and threw it on as they were walking out the door. This rumpled look is

extremely unprofessional. I have previously noted how I don't think that golf shirts are the most appropriate pieces of a business casual wardrobe; if you can walk the dog in it, play a sport in it or work out in it, it shouldn't be worn to work. Having said that, I know some of you are die-hard golf-shirt wearers. So, if you wear them to work, make sure they are ironed.

Women, dress in traditional business colors of black, blue, grey and brown. These colors look best when combined with pops of other colors, such as deeper shades of red, blue, green and purple. Think jewel tones, not pastels. Pastels should be avoided as they diminish power and wash us out and send the message of being passive, romantic and weak, especially as we age. These are not attributes that are appreciated in the working world.

Men, use caution when wearing all black at work, whether in a suit or pants and dress shirt, as this can send the message of being domineering or threatening. Dressing in blue and gray, especially in suits, are better choices. Just as women need to add touches of color to keep their wardrobe interesting, so do men. Add pops of color with ties. Ties in red, blue, green and yellow are best. Ties should stand out from

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your shirt and jacket and should help frame your face, so it is best to not match your tie to your dress shirt.

Shoes are a reflection of our social status, so make sure that your shoes are shined and, if needed, resoled. Resoling shoes is much less expensive than buying a new pair of shoes. Also, men need to match their socks with their pants unless the pants are khaki in color, and then the socks should be matched to the color of the shoe. Women should avoid thick, clunky shoes that weigh you down. I like to call them military heels, and they are not flattering to anyone. Opt for a fresher look with a classic pump with a heel. There are many comfort lines that offer professional and stylish pumps. I like to add a jolt of color and style with shoes. A deep wine-colored shoe or animal print can elevate the look of a classic, solid suit.

Women, if you are feeling that your wardrobe is looking a little tired but are short on funds, perk it up with a new shade of lipstick. Whether a lipstick from CVS or Saks, a little color packs a powerful punch and can improve our look. A neutral shade with hints of pink will be flattering on all women. Speaking of lipstick, remember to wear makeup to work. If you don't wear it, now would be a good time to begin. A little mascara and lipstick go a long way. Never underestimate the power of a polished face. The goal at work is for our face to be the focal point so that people will listen to all of our innovative and fresh ideas. What better way to frame our face than with a little makeup?

Jewelry is a must to help complete a professional appearance for men and women. Earrings can add to or detract from our overall image. Wear earrings that are conservative, yet powerful. I like small hoops that have interesting detail, but the key is for the hoop to be small. Hoops that are too large can be seen as too sexy and distracting. Studs are nice alternative but need to be interesting. Avoid dangly earrings such as chandelier styles as these are too romantic for business.

Men, you can complete your look with the nicest quality watch that you can afford. Business is not the time to be wearing your sporty Timex. A large faced watch in stainless steel is always appropriate with business or business casual attire. A sleek, leather strap in black or deep brown works as well.

Next week, I will continue with suggestions on how to upgrade your image with little or no cost by using confident body language and organizing your work space.

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