The Best of the Clothing Chronicles

The Articles My Readers Told Me Helped Transform the Way They Dress

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Message from Diana

Back in the fall of 2000, I had a problem.

The part time image consulting business I’d started a few years earlier was rapidly growing by word of mouth, and I had more clients than I wanted to work with. I was trying to scale back on my speaking and one-on-one consultations so I could spend more time with my then 3 and 1 year old daughters, yet my phone wouldn’t stop ringing. I was getting frustrated. So were my clients.

So I decided to turn to the internet for help. My goal was simple: to find someone else to refer my clients to! Since there weren’t many image consultants in Central Virginia where I lived at the time, I figured I’d let prospective clients know about a good ezine they could subscribe to instead. I typed “image consultant” into the search engine and started visiting websites. I signed up for as many ezines as I could – 40 or 50 – figuring that one or two of them would have the writing style and information I sought.

I waited and waited and waited ezines to start rolling in. But of the 40+ I subscribed to, I only heard from three. Two from Boston, one from Chicago, all catering to their local clients.

Not exactly what I was looking for.

So I came up with an idea: instead of doing so many one-on-one consultations, I’d start a membership site with image information, have readers pay for access, and give away free excerpts to get people to join the membership site. That way, I could help my clients and maybe others who were looking for the same sort of resource.


Style Made Simple became Fashion Savvy in 2001, and I stopped the membership site in 2004 to focus on other things. But ten years and nearly 400 issues later, the Clothing Chronicles is still going strong, with tens of thousands of readers from 170+ countries around the world. These 25 articles are those my readers said helped them the most.

I’m honored and humbled to be welcomed into so many inboxes around the globe, and thank all of you for making The Clothing Chronicles one of the most widely-read image ezines in the world.

Here’s to the Next 10 Years!

Diana Pemberton-Sikes
FashionForRealWomen.com
Why to Update Your Image

Change Your Clothing, Change Your Life
Issue #161, January 6, 2005

Can changing how you dress REALLY change your life?

We see variations of the story often enough in the movies, in everything from My Fair Lady (1964) to The Princess Diaries (2001), but could such a thing REALLY happen to the average woman on the street?

Absolutely.

I've seen it firsthand several times, both before and after I became an image consultant. And like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon, the transformation never ceases to amaze me.

The first experience came on my first job out of college when I was working as a clerk in the sales department of a four-star luxury hotel in Houston, Texas. The sales department was responsible for booking blocks of rooms for conventions, major sporting events, wedding parties, and the like, and consisted of five sales managers and three clerks.

The episode started when one of our sales managers, Linda, turned 30. Her birthday was on a Saturday, and when she left work the Friday before, she looked like she always did. When she returned the following Monday, however, she looked like something out of a fashion magazine.

Gone was the "big" hair so popular at the time (mid-80's); in its place was a sleek, chic bob. The "Dynasty"-inspired shoulders she liked had been chucked in favor of form-fitting tops and jackets. And the trendy skirts of varying hem lengths she always wore were replaced by knee-length styles that flattered her figure and legs. She went from fashion victim to trendsetter literally overnight, and left all of us wondering what she was up to.

It began evident very quickly.

Within a matter of weeks, her bookings skyrocketed. She was constantly on the phone, and it seemed like every client who came to the office was there for an appointment with Linda.

When one of the local television stations showed up unexpectedly to do a story, Linda was the one sent to be on camera. By the end of that first month after her birthday, she had become the top sales person -- a title she held until she was wooed away to become Director of Sales at another hotel a few months later.

All because she upgraded her image?

Well, yes and no.
The untold story here is that on the eve of her 30th birthday, Linda took stock of her life and didn't particularly like what she saw. She was single, earning around $30,000 a year, renting an apartment, and driving a 6-year old car.

What she wanted was to be married, making twice as much, owning a house, and driving a new car.

So she sat down and tried to figure out the shortest path from Point A to Point B.

She started by writing down specific goals. For a husband, besides the usual criteria of good-looking, fun, and smart, she wanted a guy who was at least 35, making a six-figure income, and who had a good standing in the community. For her career, she wanted to be a top producer, with an eye on becoming Director of Sales. She also wanted a new car within six months, and to be a homeowner within two years.

So for her birthday, Linda's mother gave her a session with an image consultant to get her pointed in the right direction. Like the push that sends a row of dominos falling one right after the other, the makeover became the first step in Linda's journey to achieving her goals.

Her new polished look instantly caused people to treat her with more respect. This quickly boosted her confidence, which made it easier for her to make more sales calls. The calls generated more leads, which lead to her closing more sales. The higher her numbers, the more attention she got. The more attention she got, the more in demand she became, which soon lead to job offers from rival hotels. She accepted one, and her new, more prominent position lead to higher exposure in the community, which put her in contact with a handsome young stockbroker who proved to be her ideal mate. She married him shortly before her 32nd birthday. They settled into a new house that they bought together.

And all this happened because she decided that to have the life she wanted, she needed to start by looking the part.

So what does this tale have to do with you?

Since the first of the year is traditionally a time of reflection and planning, perhaps Linda's story might inspire you to give more than the cursory nod to your New Years' resolutions this year.

Perhaps, like Linda, you're at a crossroads in your life. Whether you're seeking a new direction in your career, your lifestyle, your love life, or something you just can't pinpoint, perhaps a new look might help catapult you to a new playing field and new opportunities.

Or maybe you're happy with the status quo but have something exciting on the horizon this year, like a reunion, a major function, or a significant birthday that warrants a closer look at your appearance. If you start reworking a few things now, you'll have the new look down pat when the "big event" rolls around.
Now what I’m suggesting doesn’t have to be drastic OR expensive. Try a new haircut or new glasses. Get makeup lessons. Add a few power pieces to your wardrobe, like a jacket, a briefcase, or a watch. Drop the credibility crushers like bows, nose rings, or blue fingernails. Resolve to be consistent in your manner and appearance.

Or, if you really want to make an impact, hire an image consultant to help you flush out your image goals. You can probably find one near you at the Association of Image Consultants International website.

Don’t tell yourself you’ll start the transformation AFTER you reach some milestone, because it will take you that much longer to reach it.

Why?

Because most people, whether they like to admit it or not, have little imagination. They can’t go into an empty room and imagine it beautifully decorated. They can’t look at a blank piece of paper and envision a spine-tingling, page-turning novel. And they can’t look at you dressed one way and guess how you’d look dressed another. You have to paint the picture for them. And you do that through your appearance.

So make this year the year you finally upgrade your image. Like Linda, you’ll quickly discover how dressing the part can put you that much closer to your goals.

Good luck!
What Clothing Reveals About Your Background
Issue #271, April 12, 2007

Whenever I’m in a crowd, I like to watch people. Young, old, rich, poor, thin, thick - you name it, crowds always provide entertainment. For within that cluster of bodies, you can learn much about the people in them, from the well-mannered to the insecure to the natural leaders among us.

It's almost spooky. Once you begin to see the connection between the clothing and the person, you can begin to read people like a book. You don't just have to rely on what they say, which can often be wrong; you can glean information from the entire non-verbal package to get a more accurate picture.

Here are a few of the most common "types" of people I see:

Neat Appearance

Since most children aren't neat and tidy by nature, a neat and tidy appearance as an adult is often the result of years of training at the hands of stern parents -- or years of wearing a uniform to school or in the military. Or, it could be the strong desire to be the antithesis of a sloppy parent. Whatever the reason, it points to an uncommon discipline that often translates into a strong work ethic and a habit of following through.

Sloppy Attire

Clothes that are too big, too small, stained, frayed, or unkempt, usually imply that the wearer lacks discipline and isn't into details. It can be a result of growing up in a household where dressing well wasn't a priority, or it can be a show of rebellion against a stern upbringing. Often, the sloppiness is also reflected in a cluttered work space, a dirty car, and an unkempt house. But it doesn't necessarily mean the person is sloppy in everything; many of these folks tend to be exceedingly meticulous in one or two areas, excelling beyond average. They would enjoy more success, however, if they were better rounded instead of so tunnel-visioned.

Fashionable, But No Common Sense

Ever see someone following fashion at the expense of common sense, like wearing bare legs in the dead of winter or sandals in the snow? It means she's insecure and is blindly following the trend to garner attention, feel important, and bolster her self esteem. I know, because I used to do this myself as a teen. I loved the attention and was sure everyone who stopped to stare was in awe of my fashion savvy. Little did I know they were merely stunned by the extent of my lemming-like behavior. Yes, people judge you by how you look so it's important to look nice. But when you blindly follow things without stopping to consider the ramifications, you mark yourself as a dupe. As the old saying goes, "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything."
Sloppy Attire, Status Accessories

What do you get when you mix sloppy clothes with a status handbag, watch, or shoes? A wannabe - as in "I wannabe seen as rich, but I don't have the class to pull it off." Okay, that's a bit snarky, I'll admit. But relying on status symbols to give cachet is a sure sign of an aspirant, not someone with real money. The truly rich don't have to rely on labels to show wealth; they do it with luxury fabrics, expert workmanship, and uncompromising fit. They don't put on sweat pants and tennis shoes with their Prada handbag and call it a look. Neither should you.

Eye-Popping Displays of Flesh

Plunging necklines, low-rise pants, and high cut skirts are all trendy, but not necessarily a smart choice. While there's no substitute for properly-fitting clothes, there's a fine line between showing off your figure and flaunting your body. "I like my clothes tight enough to show I'm a woman, but loose enough to show I'm a lady," Mae West once said. Times haven't changed. Men still view women who show excessive skin as potential bedmates; women who are more modest tend to be viewed as more appropriate life mates. Dress according to your goals.

Right Event, Wrong Clothes

People who wear clothes that are inappropriate to a situation are often viewed as unschooled. If they don't know what constitutes proper business attire or cocktail attire, for example, others assume that their education is lacking. It's usually the truth. What's the difference between getting an A and a C on a test? More studying. What's the difference between the "A" crowd and the "C" crowd? More studying.

These are just a few of the characters I encounter in crowds; you may notice the same or different. But the result is the same: how you dress reveals so much about you that may not even realize it.

So study a few people next time you're in a crowd to see what you can glean. Then, take some time with your own appearance to determine what you're revealing to everyone else. If you don't like what it's saying, change it. You may be delighted with the results.
Do Your Clothes Make You Invisible?
Issue #272, April 19, 2007

People have long been fascinated with the idea of being invisible. From the old "Invisible Man" movies and TV series to Harry Potter's invisibility cloak, there's something alluring about being able to walk around unseen, to observe how people would behave if you weren't there.

The thing is, you don't really need to BE invisible to have people treat you like you are; you just need to dress in certain ways and they'll act as if you're not there.

I was reminded of this just last week on an outing with my children.

It was spring break, and my little ones were off from school and restless. I called my sister, LeAnn, and we decided to brave the chilly, windy weather and take our kids to the Philadelphia Zoo for some fun. After hours of strolling around and seeing the animals, petting the goats, and feeding some ducks, we were ready to go. But we weren't ready to go home; instead, LeAnn wanted to go to the mall. So in jeans and with wind-swept hair, we headed to the King of Prussia mall.

Now there are malls, and then there are MALLS. The King of Prussia mall, second largest in the United States after the Mall of the Americas in Minneapolis, falls into the latter category. It has the usual mall stores, like Gap, H&M, and Banana Republic, but it also has luxury retailers like Versace, Tiffany's, and Louis Vuitton. The mixture creates two distinct levels of clientele: those who dress like they can afford to shop at the luxury shops, and those who dress like they have no business venturing into that corridor of the mall. In our casual attire and still smelling a bit like the pachyderm house, we qualified for group number two.

In many of the discount stores, it didn't matter. We received cordial greetings and decent service. But in Neiman Marcus and Bloomingdale's, we were ignored. Or at least we were until my younger daughter started playing with a jewelry display, drawn to the pretty baubles like a crow to a shiny object. Then I rated a very crusty look from the well-coiffed woman behind the counter.

It was nearly the same in Charlotte Russe, a trendy discount chain store largely aimed at the late teen/early twenties crowd. While the staff was friendly, their teenage shoppers weren't. Trolling behind my preteen daughter and niece, I had two shoppers step right in front of me like I wasn't even there and not apologize, and then I had to listen to the dramatically impatient sighs of a 16 year old who must have decided that the 30 seconds I spent looking over an accessory display was 25 seconds too long. The only way she could have been more obvious is if she'd put her hand on my back and shoved.
All in all, it was an interesting exercise that demonstrated yet again how quickly people "judge a book by its cover" -- or in this case, by what we wear. Want to be invisible? Just wear something that's not up to the level of attire of the crowd you're with and they'll ignore you like you're not even there.

It's been a while since I've gotten a "You SO don't belong here" look, and I might have been insulted if I hadn't found the whole thing so telling. If I'd been properly groomed and dressed semi-formally in a nice skirt or pants and heels, I would have been treated well wherever I went. But because I wasn't, I was ignored or barely tolerated by some.

Now obviously, my life isn't over because someone gave me a dirty look. I'd have been dead long ago if looks could kill. But it's always interesting to see how people interact with each other, and how strangers can impact your day - or even your self esteem -- with just a smile or a frown.

Have a good-looking guy smile and flirt with you for no apparent reason? It could be a good day. Have a bad-looking woman look you over like you just slithered out from under some rock? It could set the tone for a bad day. Have people give you crusty looks all the time? It's enough to give you a complex.

All based on how you dress.

So think about that the next time you're tempted to throw on "any old thing" and head out the door, or if, like me, you go one place and end up at another: people judge you by how you dress. So if you want to make an impression, dress to impress. Otherwise, you may become all but invisible.
The Best of the Clothing Chronicles 2000-2010

The Image Domino Effect
Issue #304, January 11, 2008

What if you could change something about your image, like your hair or clothes or accessories, and have it impact your life? What if, with one small change, you could suddenly find your situation going in a very different direction?

Sound impossible?

It's not. In fact, I've seen it happen so often over the years that I continue to marvel at people who insist that what you wear isn't important. Why, with one well-executed costume change, you could go from sidekick to leading lady overnight - with all the accompanying benefits.

For example:

One of my clients has a beautiful figure that she felt she needed to flaunt, particularly in the workplace. A sales rep who liked low-cut tops and thigh-high skirts, she had a high closing rate with men, but a nearly non-existent record with women; she insisted they were jealous of her. When I finally convinced her to try a still-flattering yet more modest approach, it opened a floodgate of orders from women and she literally doubled her income overnight. Not long after that, she found herself in a serious relationship for the first time in years; she'd resigned herself to short flings and one night stands, because that's the kind of guys her previously skimpy attire attracted.

The lesson: If you want people to admire your body, flaunt it. If you want people to admire your brain, cover up.

Another client came to me because she was ticked off that she'd been passed over - AGAIN - for a promotion by someone with less skill and experience. We reviewed her wardrobe and outlined her goals and added a few "power" pieces: tailored jackets, good-quality leather accessories, and a no-nonsense hairstyle. She got the next promotion. Then she got promoted AGAIN a few months later, nearly tripling her salary. She was also elected chapter president of a prominent industry association.

The lesson: Dress for the job you want, not the job you have. Repeat as often as necessary to get where you want to go.

A stay-at-home mom with a profitable hobby was invited to speak at an industry function and was in a panic over what to wear. She was hoping for more exposure in the industry and wanted to look professional but not corporate. I had her dress in semi-tailored attire. It worked. Her stellar content and professional appearance lead to a dozen more speaking invitations and - much to her surprise -- a spokeswoman position for a national retail chain.

The lesson: When you're standing in the spotlight, you never know who's looking. Dress to impress.
So are all of these stories coincidental?

Hardly! I could tell dozens more, all of which end far beyond the initial expectation of just looking better.

Why the success?

Because dressing appropriately does MORE than just open doors; in our all-too-casual-society, it makes you stand out and be remembered. In fact, for many people, making the decision to dress correctly is like toppling the first domino in a chain: it has rapid, far-reaching effects.

Why?

People are looking for leaders and role models. If you look good, they'll notice. If you look good and are smart, they'll follow you. If you look good, are smart, and have good people skills, "the sky's the limit" as they say, because it's an irresistible, all-too-uncommon combination.

Think about it: how many people do you know who are pretty but vapid? How about smart but anti-social? What about fun but unattractive? We all know people like that. How many times have you thought, "Oh, she'd get so much further if she'd only dress better/get her degree/stop being so cynical (or whatever)?" It's because the more pleasing characteristics you have, the more in-demand you become.

Just as in showbiz, where a "triple threat" (someone who can act, sing, and dance) usually gets more work than someone who has only mastered one art form, so will someone who's attractive, smart, and a good communicator enjoy a more profitable, fulfilling life than someone who is less skilled.

So as you start this New Year, with all the promise that it holds, think about what you want this year. For many people, their list might include things like:

- Lose weight
- Quit smoking
- Regular exercise
- Get a better job
- Make more money
- Get out of debt
- Invest more
- Buy a house
- Find a meaningful relationship
- -- Etc.

In other words, many people want to look good, feel loved, and have financial stability. Nothing wrong with that. But - hmm. Interesting. If you go back and look at the three stories I told you earlier, you'll notice how looking good increased the financial stability of each of the women mentioned.

It can do the same for you.
Start with critical assessments of both your person and your situation. If you don't like something about yourself, make a change. Lose weight; get a new haircut; whiten your teeth, or whatever. If you keep getting passed over for positions or duties you want, ask yourself why. Do you lack the necessary skills? The appropriate appearance? The ability to communicate effectively? Then fill in the gaps by taking classes or upgrading your image.

Follow through. Get it done.

Within a short amount of time, you'll be astounded by the impact a few changes to your image will make in your life.

"You have the life you have because of the decisions you've made," a mentor once told me. "If you want a different life, make different decisions."

It's true.

So if you're ready for your life to go into a new, better direction, start with how you look, because that's the first thing people see. Then upgrade your core competencies and work on those people skills. By this time next year, you could be leading a very different life.

Try it yourself and see!
Why it Pays to Be Attractive
Issue #336, April 16, 2009

"There are no ugly women, just lazy ones."
--Helena Rubenstein

Not long ago, I noticed that the non-profit I’d worked for in Houston in the 90’s had FINALLY gotten around to putting up a website. As I clicked around, noting how many of my former co-workers were still there after all these years (it was a fun place to work), I saw that the Director of Fund Raising, Millie, had recently retired so she could spend more time with her husband. Her RICH second husband, that is, the one she'd landed at age 73. Seeing her photo by the announcement, I chuckled and thought, "You go girl!"

Why?

Well, as my mother used to say, being attractive PAYS.

Research has long supported this. Attractive people get more attention from their teachers at school, enjoy more interest from the opposite sex when dating, and are typically paid more than their less-attractive counterparts. As much as we may rail against the unrealistic ideals of human perfection in our society, the truth is that those who most closely resemble it are often richly rewarded.

Millie has certainly benefited. A striking, "handsome" woman with dark hair and beautiful skin, Millie is a consummate professional who has always taken time for grooming and exercise. Her carefully chosen wardrobe has allowed her access to the highest echelons of society for decades, and when she was hired at the non-profit, her large starting salary sent ripples of discontent throughout the organization. Still, she's had her challenges. One of her children was born disabled, and she lost her first husband, James, her college sweetheart, after 45 years of marriage.

But her visibility within her community combined with her dedication to looking good meant she wasn't alone for long. She remarried within 4 years. While lots of women joke about marrying "first time for love, second time for money," Millie actually married quite well both times - to prominent attorneys who adored her.

So what does this have to do with you?

Well, just as looking good and striving for excellence can lead to all sorts of exciting opportunities, regardless of your age, so, too, can neglecting your appearance and "settling" for things lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Our lives often reflect how we feel about ourselves.

So if things aren't going the way you'd like right now -- job, finances, relationships, or whatever -- maybe it's time to take a good, long look at yourself in the mirror. Maybe it's time to get back to basics. Maybe it's time to reinvent yourself.

Because how you look can literally change the trajectory of your life.
If that sounds a bit dramatic, consider this:

According to recent news reports, many middle-aged Americans are turning to plastic surgery to "nip and tuck" their way back into a competitive job market. Face lifts, implants, and injectables are among the most popular procedures performed by plastic surgeons these days, with many patients seeing the move as "an investment" in their futures. To be competitive, you need good experience AND a good look.

That's the current job market.

In the dating world, the best-looking people have long enjoyed the biggest selection. When you see a good-looking guy with a plain-looking girl, what do you think? That she has a great personality or is spectacular in bed, right? Gorgeous girl, ugly guy? He must be filthy rich. Otherwise, how could they be so mis-matched? Silly, yes, but that's how we think. When people set up their friends on blind dates, they tend to match people of equal looks together (a "10" with a "10" or a "5" with a "5"). And when someone strays in a relationship, one of the reasons most often cited is that the partner has "let him/herself go" - they no longer look like they did when the commitment was made.

So what can you do to "get back in the game" if you find yourself sidelined in the attractiveness department?

Well, thinking back to my friend Millie, you can:

1. Get in Shape

Being physically fit has many benefits, including feeling great and extending your life. All the double-takes from guys isn't bad either. If you haven't exercised in a while, ease back into it slowly and commit to a schedule. Once you start seeing results, you'll be hooked!

2. Attend to Your Grooming

Get a great haircut, perfect your skin care routine, try some makeup lessons, get a manicure and pedicure, and attend to any necessary hair removal. Yes, there's some work involved, but the payoff's worth it.

3. Upgrade Your Wardrobe

Millie had a small but expensive wardrobe when we worked together; the pieces were well made and fit her perfectly. Everything was chosen with care. She could dictate correspondence, meet with contributors, or dine with socialites at a moment's notice any day of the week. "Dress down" was not part of her success vocabulary.

4. Build a Network

There's an old saying that you should be able to reach anyone in the world you want to talk to -- President Obama, Queen Elizabeth, George Clooney, or whomever - in 3 phone calls, based who you know and who the people you know know. Because of her massive network,
Millie would be my first call in many instances. But networks aren't just for connecting with celebrities; they're great for finding work, mates, and others who share your interests.

5. Get a Life

Between her first husband's career climb and their disabled child, it would have been really easy for Millie to slip out of the social scene to focus exclusively on her family. No one would have blamed her. But she never completely cut herself off like that; she always had SOMETHING going on that was "just for her." She led the annual High Holiday musical at her temple. She worked for local political campaigns. She volunteered for her favorite charities. She kept her interests alive and by doing so, remained connected, vibrant, and interesting.

So what's the bottom line?

Being attractive pays. When you take the time to look good, you feel good, and that confidence shows. It also creates a domino effect. So take stock of your situation, take a good look in the mirror, and get yourself on the path to your goals. Who knows where they may lead?
How to Update Your Image

Clothing Capsules
Issue #50, October 25, 2001

Ever gone to your closet in the morning and wished that somehow, someway, closet elves had visited in the night and left you with a whole new set of clothes?

Well that’s precisely the result you get when you start using clothing capsules. They’re the easiest, simplest way to extend your wardrobe, and once you understand how they work, you’ll be amazed at what’s in your closet.

Now I’ve talked about clothing capsules before. But since it’s been awhile and since this concept bears frequent repeating, I’ll describe the process again, then give you an excellent resource (at least I think so!) that you can turn to for further study.

A clothing capsule is a group of 5-12 pieces (jacket, skirt, slacks, etc.) that work in combination with each other. They can be complimentary colors, of the same color, have similar elements, or be of the same pattern.

For example, let’s say you have a:

- White blouse
- Black skirt
- Blue jacket
- Red pants suit
- Black turtleneck

...and that you normally wear the white blouse with the black skirt and blue jacket, and the black turtleneck with the red pants suit.

When you use clothing capsules, you “break up” your tried-and-true combinations to create other fabulous ensembles. For example:

- White blouse, red pants suit
- White blouse, black skirt, red jacket
- White blouse, red pants, blue jacket
- Black turtleneck, black skirt
- Black turtleneck, black skirt, blue jacket
• Black turtleneck, black skirt, red jacket
• Black turtleneck, red pants
• Black turtleneck, red pants, blue jacket

So now, instead of two combinations, you have ten. Same number of clothes, eight times as many combinations. It’s a *fabulous* way to make a little go a long way.

Or as to quote an old Aboriginal saying, “The more you know, the less you need.”

So why don’t more women use clothing capsules? Good question! I think there are a couple of reasons:

1. Most women are so used to wearing certain clothes in certain combinations that they never stop to think about mixing and matching with other items in their closet.

2. They buy clothes on impulse, not as part of an overall plan. When you buy a little of this and a little of that, you only have a little to work with.

Once you start to view your wardrobe as the investment it is, you start making smarter choices. Just as you put together your career plan or investment portfolio with calculated diligence, so too, should you design your wardrobe for maximum return.

Unfortunately, the media make it easy for us to overspend and make mistakes. With the latest “must haves” and “what’s hot and what’s not” lists, it’s so easy to put aside logic when it comes to our appearance. Don’t do it.

Instead, start with a plan.

First, arrange your closet by types of clothing, hanging all jackets together, all skirts together, all blouses together, etc. Break up the suits, and mix up the sweater sets.

Secondly, start wearing your clothes in completely different combinations, like those described above. Mix a brown skirt with a blouse that has brown dots, for example, and trying pairing the jackets from some suits with the skirts or pants of others.

Finally, make note of what you could use to extend your wardrobe even farther: belts, scarves, jackets, etc. By process of eliminate, these become YOUR "must haves".

So how well do clothing capsules actually work? Very well, particularly when traveling.

Here’s a comment I received from a *Wardrobe Magic* reader recently:

"I am going on a weekend retreat this weekend, and I have to tell you – those capsules of yours are amazing! I actually had to ‘downsize’ my suitcase! Boy do I wish I had known about these years ago - it would have made packing so much less tortuous!"

Laura Broughton, Teacher
La Porte, Indiana

Try clothing capsules…they work!
The Cost Per Wear Formula
Issue #81, July 18, 2002

In watching a fashion piece on celebrities recently, several of the stars complained about a situation that most women only dream about: getting to wear clothes only once. Between parties, premieres, and TV appearances, these famous gals are photographed so often that being seen in the same thing twice instantly draws negative comment.

Which is precisely why many have turned to the second-hand market, making "vintage" clothes all the rage and instantly adding class to any garment that's not from the current season.

So what's the lesson here?

Being mindful of your clothing budget is ALWAYS in style.

Whether you have a lot or a little to spend, knowing how to get the most for your money is smart as well as savvy. If you understand the TRUE cost of clothes, you'll buy smarter, wear longer, and put less clutter in your closet.

So how can you determine the TRUE cost of clothes?

Well, part of it is in looking at the price tag, certainly. But that's not the whole story.

To determine how much a garment ACTUALLY costs, you also need to consider:

1. The style
2. The fabric
3. Wearability
4. Upkeep
5. How often you'll wear it

So how does this translate into real life?

Let's say that you're in the market for a new jean skirt. Nothing fancy—just something that's comfortable that you can run errands in on the weekend. You're looking for machine-washable denim.

You find a mid-thigh number for $36, an ankle-length wrap around with a prominent designer's name on the back pocket on sale for $78, and a simple knee-length design for $60. Which is the best value?

It depends.

If you've got decent legs and live in a moderate climate, you could probably wear the thigh-high number year 'round, with everything from T-shirts to cable knit sweaters. If you don't
have great legs or live in a very cold climate, you'll get limited wear from a skirt of this length.

The designer skirt, while chic this season, will probably be "out" this time next year. If you live in a hot climate, it won't see much use in summer, and the wrap around style calls for a body-conscious top.

The simple knee-length design would probably go with many different tops, and be suitable year 'round in many different climates. Paired with a cotton blouse or turtleneck and a simple jacket, it could also take you to the office in a respectable business casual.

So which one is the best value?

If you were to go into the future and look back, here's what you'd probably find:

**Thigh-High Skirt**
Price: $36
Worn: 10x per year for 2 years = 20 times worn
Cost Per Wearing:
\[ \frac{36}{20} = \$1.80 \text{ per wearing} \]

**Designer Skirt**
Price: $78
Worn: 5x
Cost Per Wearing:
\[ \frac{78}{5} = \$15.60 \text{ per wearing} \]

**Knee-Length Skirt**
Price: $60
Worn: 30x per year for 2 years = 60 times worn
Cost Per Wearing:
\[ \frac{60}{60} = \$1.00 \text{ per wearing} \]

Now I didn't factor in the cost of laundry detergent, water, and electricity, for the sake of simplicity, but I think you can see what's happening here: the price tag doesn't necessarily give you the TRUE price of the garment.

You need to know how much you anticipate wearing the piece to determine if it's a good value for you.

Often, we spend the MOST money on the things we wear the LEAST—like apparel for special occasions, important functions, or entrance-making events—and the LEAST money on the clothes we wear the MOST, like work attire, casual wear, and everyday accessories. It's a very bad habit, and one that's costing you plenty.

Unfortunately, most women don't look at it that way. They want to "look nice" for a grand event, so they put their money there. Then they buy inexpensive pieces for their everyday wear, and when they fall apart, replace them often.
Here's a typical example:

**Cocktail Dress for Party**
Price: $100
Worn: 1x
Cost Per Wearing:
\[\frac{100}{1} = \$100\text{ per wearing}\]

**Coat Dress for Work made of acrylic**
Price: $50
Worn: 10x
Cost Per Wearing:
\[\frac{50}{10} = \$5.00\text{ per wearing}\]

Total spent: $150
Average Cost Per Wearing:
\[\frac{150}{11} = \$13.63\text{ per wearing}\]

Here's a savvier approach:

**Cocktail Dress For Party found at consignment shop**
Price: $25
Worn: 1x
Cost Per Wearing:
\[\frac{25}{1} = \$25\text{ per wearing}\]

**Coat Dress for Work made of wool**
Price: $125
Worn: 8x per year for 5 years = 40 times worn
Cost Per Wearing:
\[\frac{125}{40} = \$3.12\text{ per wearing}\]

Total spent: $150
Average Cost Per Wearing:
\[\frac{150}{41} = \$3.65\text{ per wearing}\]

Same budget, same items—much different results. One will cost you a bundle over time, one will allow you to put a bundle away—so you can continue to dress well for years to come.

So does that mean that you should NEVER have fun and buy whimsical pieces on occasion? Of course not!

Everyone needs a little “mad” money to splurge on fun things every now and again. But the key words here are A LITTLE and EVERY NOW AND AGAIN.

The largest part of your budget should be spent on good-quality classic styles that mix and match well with your existing wardrobe. If you stick with the basics, you'll have tons of
options and be able to add sparkle and flair in other ways—like through your hair, makeup, and accessories.

Remember: you don't have to spend a lot to LOOK like you HAVE a lot.

Invest in the clothes that you wear everyday and be creative and stingy on everything else. Your budget will thank you for it!

Need a more thorough discussion of the Cost Per Wear formula and ideas for looking great on a budget? Pick up a copy of Wardrobe Magic to discover how easy looking fabulous can be!
How to Shop In Your Own Closet
Issue #118, November 13, 2003

Let's say that you see an outfit in a magazine or store window that instantly calls to you, "Buy me, buy me!"

What do you do? Do you:

1. Go online or into the store and buy it then and there?

2. Give yourself a few days to think it over?

3. Look at the price tag, curse the stars that you weren't born rich, and put it out of your mind?

Or do you going shopping for it in your own closet?

If you said one of the first three options because you have no idea what the fourth one is, I believe I can save you both money and a few choice words to your forebears. For once you start learning how to REALLY wear everything you own, not only will you save money, you'll learn to make smarter choices when you shop.

So how do you shop in your own closet?

By taking the picture of the outfit you like (whether it's from a magazine or just a mental snapshot), and heading to your closet to see if you can re-create the look from the pieces you already have. You may not be able to replicate the exact ensemble, but you may find that you can approximate the look by using a blue jacket instead of black one, for example, or a pair of ankle straps instead of a pair of sandals.

Or you may find that you need to buy one thing to pull it all together instead of six things to start from scratch. Either way, you'll probably find that you can evoke the new look without buying it all from head-to-toe.

Now this presupposes, of course, that you actually KNOW and can see the contents of your closet. Many women can't. In fact, they can barely squeeze one more hanger onto the rack, let alone move them around freely enough to flip through their inventory. So they'll swear up and down that they don't have anything like what they're looking at, buy it, bring it home, and are completely shocked to find that they already have something similar.

One client I worked with was horrified to discover that she had FIVE copies of the same sweater when we went through her closet. She'd buy it, bring it home, and throw it on the top shelf of her closet with her other sweaters. Then, when she couldn't put her hands on it easily, would develop amnesia and go buy it again.

If you haven't cleaned your closet it a while, chances are very good that you have some duplicates taking up space as well. Take some time to cull through your belongings and organize your wardrobe. Knowing what you have to work with is the first step to putting...
together a wardrobe that works.

Next, take some time to flip through fashion magazines, stroll through the mall, or click around online to get some ideas of different ways to wear things. Rip out magazine pages, print off web pages, or make a mental note of the outfits that strike your fancy while you’re window shopping. Then see if you can replicate the look by shopping in your closet FIRST. You may be surprised by what you already have or conversely, by how poorly all that impulse shopping has served you over the years. Always strive to fill your closet with pieces you can mix and match easily for maximum wear.

Shopping your closet first is also a great way to put together your holiday wardrobe as well. Since those velvets, velours, and Santa sweaters are usually only pulled out this time of year, take inventory of your existing holiday pieces before burdening your seasonal budget further with unnecessary purchases.

Mix and match them in new ways, or use the picture pull out/print off/mental snapshot approach to see how you can transform your old favorites into current looks. A snazzy new pair of fishnets and a stylish updo may be all you need to take that five-year-old little black dress or red velour skirt from ho-hum to va-va-va-voom! Try it and you'll see.

Remember: Filling your closet with impulse buys is like eating a candy bar for dinner. It satisfies the instant craving, but always leaves you hungry for something more substantial. It can also blow your clothing budget as easily as a candy bar can blow your diet. So don't do it.

Instead, force some reason into the scenario. If you find an outfit "to die for", see if you can't recreate it (or parts of it) by shopping in your own closet FIRST. Not only will you save a bundle of money, you'll learn to get the most out of every piece of clothing you buy.

Or, to quote German designer Jil Sander, "Buy less, think more."

Need some help putting together a master plan for a wardrobe that works? Then grab a copy of Wardrobe Magic, to see how easy looking great can be.
Should You Wear Cropped Pants?
Issue #183, May 7, 2004

"I watched a fashion show last night," a reader wrote me recently. "They said you should never wear Capris. I am 5' 7", long legs, slim size 8. I understand that [they might not be flattering to everyone], but what about for me? I just ordered a pair online. Tell me, what do you think?"

I think it's an interesting question. For while low-rise pants tend to flatter very few women, cropped pants can work well on a variety of figures, provided they follow a few simple guidelines.

Before we get to them, however, let me define exactly the style I'm referring to, so that we're all on the same page.

Cropped pants, also known as pedal pushers, clam diggers, and Capris, are a style of pants that ends somewhere between the knee and the ankle, usually at mid-calf. They've gone in and out of fashion several times since the 1950's, and are currently enjoying renewed popularity.

They are not for everyone, however.

Because of where they hit on the leg, they can emphasize several things. For example:

- If you're petite, they can make you look shorter.
- If you're bottom heavy, they can make you look heavier.
- If you have short legs, they can make them look shorter.
- If you have thick ankles, they can make them look thicker.

Notice that I said, "can" in every situation. This isn't a given. Much of it depends on the color, cut, style of hem, and shoes that you choose.

Let's look at these one by one:

Color

Dark or muted colors will make you look smaller, light or bright colors will make you look bigger. Small prints work better on small bodies, large prints work better on large or tall bodies.
Cut

The most flattering cut for trim bodies of all heights tends to be flat front with tapered legs. This style elongates the body and offers a chic, uncluttered line - which is why it was favored by the likes of Jacqueline Kennedy and Audrey Hepburn during their summer vacations, and promptly copied the world over.

The least flattering cut tends to be the drawstring look with straight or flared hem. While many women choose this style for comfort, it creates a rectangular block of fabric from waist to hem, visually adding pounds and subtracting height. If you are petite, heavy, or have thick ankles, this style will magnify all of these things.

Style of Hem

The most flattering hem for most women is plain and tapered. The least flattering is flared with a cuff. The former will elongate, the latter will shorten and widen.

If you're a bit heavy and feel that a tapered hem makes your hips or upper thighs look bigger, try a straight leg style instead. Do NOT opt for a flared hem to try to offset your hips - unless you want to look the same size from hips to hem.

Shoes

For years, the ballerina flat was the shoe of choice to wear with cropped pants. In recent years, high heels, sandals, slides, and flip-flops have found their way on to the team as well.

Your best shoe choices create an unbroken line from hem to toe with minimal material that compliments -- rather than competes with - your pants. Shoes that are the same color as pants, white, or flesh-colored are all good choices.

Avoid chunky, heavy shoes, or shoes that compete with your hem. All of these will call attention to your feet, chop you up visually, and make you look shorter.

Cropped pants are a great warm weather alternative to shorts for those chilly nights, dressy casual occasions, or for women who just hate to bare their legs in shorts. They look great on women of many heights, sizes, and ages, provided they're chosen with care.

If you look for styles that flatter your figure and elongate your body, you'll look great AND stylish. So don't necessarily cross these off your list. Just take a little time to find the looks that work best for you.
The Best of the Clothing Chronicles 2000-2010

The High Cost of Dressing by Outfit
Issue #144, June 17, 2004

"My Nana's coming for a visit this week," I overheard one little girl tell her friend on a playground recently. "I got a special outfit to wear when we pick her up at the airport."

The sentence made me smile and shake my head.

Ah, yes. I remember those days.

Special outfits.

Special outfits for special occasions like dates, parties, or speeches. Or weddings. Or funerals. Or graduations. Heck, we even used to get special outfits for school or holiday pictures. In fact, we rarely went shopping for clothes; we went shopping for special outfits.

Then when the event was over, the outfit usually just hung in the closet as a reminder of what we'd worn when. New function? New outfit! Heaven forbid we should be seen in the same thing twice.

Sound familiar?

It's an expensive habit that can add up quickly, particularly if you've never shopped any other way. If you tend to shop by outfit, then what I'm about to reveal may hit you like the proverbial "ton of bricks."

Are you ready?

It's cheaper to plan and buy a wardrobe than to fill your closet with special outfits.

Let me put it to you another way: it's cheaper to plan a week of menus and go buy groceries than it is to eat out every night.

Now the second one seems obvious. If you take your family to a restaurant or through a drive thru every night for dinner, you could easily spend several hundred dollars in a week. The entrees, the beverages, the tips - it all adds up pretty quickly. If you've ever eaten out every meal while on vacation, you know this is true. And when you consider that a lot of families do this ALL THE TIME, it's no wonder everyone's squawking about the high cost of food.

So let's apply that same analogy to your closet. Let's say that instead of planning and buying what you need at the beginning of a season, that you buy a new outfit as needed every time something comes up. Buying outfit by outfit may seem cheaper than buying a bunch of clothes at once, but if you consider that when you buy a new outfit, you often buy new shoes, hosiery, and other accessories to go with it, you can easily see how costs add
up. That $40 "great" deal can suddenly become $200 worth of shoes and jewelry that doesn't go with anything else you own.

So what's a better strategy?

Well, first, to GET a strategy. To deliberately plan how you're going to spend your money on clothes.

Here are a few things to consider:

1. Your Lifestyle

Look at how you spend your waking hours over the course of a week. If it looks something like this:

   - Work - 60%
   - Social - 20%
   - Leisure - 20%

Then your wardrobe should consist of 60% work, 20% social (church, parties, visiting, etc.), and 20% leisure (running errands, watching TV, cleaning house) appropriate attire.

If you're a stay-at-home mom and your time is spent like this:

   - With Kids - 80%
   - Social - 10%
   - Leisure - 10%

Then your wardrobe should reflect this with 80% of what you wear appropriate to work with kids, 10% appropriate for social activities, and 10% appropriate for leisure time.

Adjust this according to your particular situation.

2. Your Budget

You should spend anywhere from 3-10% of what you earn on clothing. If you wear a uniform to work, you'll probably spend less (3%); if you're in a high profile position (defense lawyer, socialite, television personality), you'll probably spend more (10%). The average person should spend around 6%.

REMEMBER: This figure correlates to your household income and expenses. So if your household income is $50,000 per year, for example, you should allocate approximately 6% (or $3,000) to clothe EVERYONE in the household. If your household income is $100,000 per year, then you have $6,000 (6%) to spread among the family. This isn't per person, unless you live alone. This is per household.

Once you know what kinds of clothes should be in your wardrobe and how much you should allocate in your budget, see how your closet stacks up. If your lifestyle is:
The Best of the Clothing Chronicles 2000-2010

- Work - 60%
- Social - 20%
- Leisure - 20%

But your existing wardrobe is:

- Work - 90%
- Social - 3%
- Leisure - 7%

then it's no wonder you start looking for something to wear whenever you're extended an invitation, or that your errand clothes have holes in them because you wear the same two or three things all the time. It's because your wardrobe doesn't match your lifestyle.

So how do you fix it?

1. Fill in The Gaps

Go spend some of your budget to fill in the gaps so that your closet reflects your lifestyle.

2. Buy Mix-and-Match Items

Buy items that you can mix-and-match with other pieces in your wardrobe, not something that can only be worn one way.

All clothes from Coldwater Creek

3. Decide on A Color Scheme

If you look best in black, white, and blue, buy clothes in those colors and maybe only two or three more (like red, taupe, and green). If you lean toward a warm palette of gold, ivory, and brown, then buy clothes in those colors and maybe two or three more (French navy, camel, peach). Why? Because they'll mix-and-match with each other, as will your accessories. You'll get a lot more "bang" for your money.

4. Stick To Your Budget

Once you've determined how much you can spend on yourself for a season, make a list of what you need to fill in the gaps, and head to the store with CASH. No credit cards, checks,
etc. You’ll find yourself carefully considering each purchase, and be a lot less likely to impulse buy. The end result? You’ll only buy what you need.

Planning your wardrobe purchases DOES take time and a little practice, but can yield you great rewards. You’ll become better at working with what you already own instead of always assuming you need something new. Not only does this save you money, it also reduces all that closet clutter so you can actually see what you have so you can wear what you own.

Need some more help in coming up with a winning wardrobe strategy? Download a copy of Wardrobe Magic to see how easy dressing well can be.
Use Your Image to Make More Money

How Makeup Can Increase Your Income
Issue #124, January 15, 2004

A recent report by WGSN, a London-based fashion news service, revealed something that image consultants have known for years: that wearing makeup increases a woman's chance of getting a job more than the usual criteria of a strong resume, obvious intelligence, and a pleasing personality.

In fact, the article, based on survey results from 100 UK companies, reported that:

"One in four managers admitted they were more likely to hire a woman who wore makeup than one who did not, despite political correctness and the multitude of laws against workplace discrimination and equal job opportunities."

Shocked?

Don't be.

In fact, based on my experience in working with a variety of companies, I'd say those one-in-four numbers are low. That only 25% of those surveyed answered honestly while the others may or may not have. Chat with those same 100 managers informally - say after a few rounds at the pub, for example - and those numbers would be a lot higher, probably two-in-four or even three-in-four. Because what people say and what they think and do are usually two different things.

Marketers have known for years that slick packaging can make a huge difference in what people buy, whether it's cars, cosmetics, or candidates for a job. All else being equal, people will pick the shiny apple over the less shiny one every time.

Think I'm kidding?

Consider your own actions:

- When you buy fruit at the market, do you usually sort through the apples, pears, oranges, or whatever, to find the ones with the fewest blemishes?

- How about packages on the shelf? If you grab a box with a mashed-in corner, do you put it back and look for one with a better box?

- Or magazines? Have you ever thumbed through a glossy while waiting at the checkout stand, decided to buy it, then put the thumbed-through copy back on the rack in exchange for a pristine one from the back of the pile?
They're silly, everyday actions that we all do almost without thinking. We want value for our money and usually equate blemished packaging with inferior quality.

So why would it be any different when it comes to big-ticket items like houses, cars, or candidates for a job? All other things being equal, we tend to gravitate toward the one we find the most appealing.

Good or bad, right are wrong, you can argue the injustice of it all - or you can use this insight into human behavior to your own advantage and make out like a bandit. It's your choice.

Since you subscribe to this ezine, I'll assume that you're looking for ways to increase the effectiveness of your appearance and choose the latter.

Do how can you use makeup to increase your salary?

1. **Make Sure It's Current**

Like clothes, hair and makeup styles change roughly every six months. If you haven't changed the way you put on makeup in years, it's time to revisit this routine. Why? Because in business, outdated hair and makeup styles often suggest outdated skills as well. Definitely not the message you want to send if you're up for a new job or promotion.

2. **Make Sure It's Appropriate**

If you're in a traditional business like banking, law, or finance, you should opt for subtle and more muted colors than if you work in an "artsy" occupation like advertising or design. Bold strokes of face color might be admired in a design studio, but they'd be regarded with suspicion and alarm in a court of law, for example.

3. **Make Sure It's Not Overdone**

Tammy Faye. Dolly Parton. Dame Edna - er, I think you get the point. Dramatic is okay for television, but definitely not for everyday business. If you make up your face like you'd spackle a wall, then set down those brushes, back away from them slowly, and find someone to give you makeup lessons. Once you lose the mask, you'll be surprised at how your prospects increase.

What? You're just not a makeup kind of gal?

Don't despair. There are some very simple tricks you can use to increase your effectiveness without buying a lot of products.
For example:

1. **Use A Tinted Moisturizer**

There are several moisturizers on the market that tint your skin a bit and even out your skin tone, like a base makeup, without the additional layer. In fact, in warm climates and during warm weather, many women opt for tinted moisturizers instead of base makeup to give them the evenness without the heaviness.

2. **Use A Touch of Mascara**

Mascara is a fast, easy way to open up the eyes and brighten the face. Many women I know use only mascara before they head out the door every morning.

3. **Dust On Some Loose Powder**

If your skin is clear but tends to get a bit shiny, dust on some loose powder to absorb the oil and diminish the shine.

4. **Wear Lipstick**

The only makeup my mother wore at her wedding was lipstick, a dark red matte that made her look very glamorous. If you have nice lips and want high impact, try a dark color that works nicely with your skin tone. People will watch your mouth when you speak.

If you’re looking for an easy “edge” in your work this year, **take a good look at your makeup routine**. A current, appropriate style makes you look polished and puts you in a favorable light that others can't help but respond to. It could even increase your earnings.
How to Use Clothing to Establish Your Authority
Issue #196, September 8, 2005

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you thought you'd be taken seriously, but weren't? Like during a business meeting, in the classroom, at a community event, or in some other setting in which you were playing a prominent role? You went in thinking you'd make an impact, but then received either a tepid reception or were outright ignored. When all was said and done, you were left scratching your head, wondering what went wrong.

Sound familiar?

If so, you're not alone. I've seen men and woman both step in front of a group of people to teach, preach, demonstrate, or debate, only to be overlooked or dismissed. And almost every time, it was because of what they were wearing.

Or rather, what they weren't wearing: authority pieces.

Authority pieces are clothing items that establish credibility and point to your aptitude and include key elements like collars, sleeves, and jackets in firm fabrics and neutral colors. Authority pieces lend substance, then instantly fade into the background to allow your audience to focus on your words or abilities. With them, you're viewed as competent enough to command attention; without them, you're not. In fact, you may even be ridiculed or overlooked, depending on the situation.

Let's take a look at some of these elements in detail:

Collar

Since collars go around the neck, collared shirts and tops are generally among the most modest of garments. They cover up the torso, framing and forcing attention to the face. Collars have long been part of the well mannered person's wardrobe, and are still required today on private golf courses, on the polo field, and in traditional business settings.

Sleeves

The more skin you show, the less formal it becomes, and sleeves are no exception. While killer biceps might earn you respect at the gym, they'll pull attention away from your words (and perhaps draw envy) just about everywhere else. If you keep your upper arms covered, you'll have a better chance of keeping attention on your face.
Jacket

Jackets have been a part of the effective business wardrobe for nearly five hundred years with good reason: they command respect like no other garment. Whether you wear a power suit every day or wouldn't be caught dead in one, make sure your basic wardrobe includes one classically-styled jacket that you can put on any time you want to add gravitas, like meetings, presentations, semi-formal dinners, or even funerals. Whether you wear it over an expensive skirt or a t-shirt and jeans, a jacket has impact. Remember that.

Classic Skirt or Trousers

A basic A-line or pencil skirt in a neutral color that fits you properly can take you just about anywhere in the world you need to go, like a business meeting, a school board meeting, the ballet, or a bar mitzvah. A pair of neutral-colored classically styled trousers will do the same thing. They both offer simple silhouettes that cover appropriately and allow attention to return to the face.

Firm Fabrics

Firm fabrics like cotton, wool, ramie, and rayon lend substance to your apparel and to your silhouette. Clothes that hold their shape without being too sheer or too fussy will help reinforce your no-nonsense agenda.

Neutral Tones

Navy, black, brown, red, gray, and tan tend to draw more favorable responses from audiences than most other colors. Call them boring, call them uninspired, but they're still tops in winning people over. What? You want to shock 'em with your hot pink suit? You probably will, and they'll talk about it for weeks to come. But they probably won't remember what you said. So bear that in mind before you search high and low for a shocking pair of shoes to match.

If you want to be seen as an authority figure in your work, church, or community, you need to dress the part - especially if you don't have a commanding voice or presence to help you reach your goal. True, you may sometimes find yourself in impromptu leadership situations where you won't have time to plan your apparel, but when you do have that luxury, make good use of it. Choose simple, classic pieces that offer good coverage and force attention to your face so that others will heed your words. It's the easiest way to be taken seriously.
These Shoes Were Made for Walking
Issue #227, May 18, 2006

Last week's article about wearing tennis shoes with business attire spawned an avalanche of emails, both from readers who agreed with me and those who vehemently did not. I'd had a similar response the last time I wrote about this, back in 2001, but since I'd seen an overall decline of this odd combination, I was curious to see if, five years later, my readers were ready to let this one go.

Many aren't.

The responses ranged from (I'm paraphrasing to combine multiple comments):

PRO

• "At last! Someone is finally talking about this. Don't these people own mirrors?"

• "We've been laughing about this ridiculous American custom for years." (Readers from Milan and Paris)

• "Will you quit giving away the keys to the Executive Washroom?"

To:

CON

• "Tennis shoes with business attire is out? Really? What rock have you been living under? Everyone does this - it's mainstream."

• "I took a poll around our office and we all agreed that if we take them off the instant we get to our desks, it's okay. Besides, the only people who see us are sales clerks, doormen, and waitresses. What does that have to do with credibility?"

• "Give me a break! I can't imagine anything more painful than walking ten blocks every day in a pair of $15 shoes. I've endured years of back and foot pain and I'll take tennis shoes with business suits any day, so judge away. I don't care."

Interesting division, isn't it? I started to feel a bit like John T. Molloy (the 1970's "Dress for Success" guru) conducting an experiment with this topic.

Let me start by saying that I agree whole-heartedly that walking long distance in comfortable shoes is a must, particularly if you're prone to back pain and foot problems. That those shoes should be tennis shoes is where we disagree. I still say that a neutral-colored pair of flats is a much better choice for commutes.
Now I realize that a lot of people really like tennis shoes and wear them all the time. At the same time, this goes back to the article I wrote a few weeks ago that asked, "Can you go everywhere you need to go with what's in your closet right now?" If you're reaching for gym shoes to commute in with your more formal business attire, the answer is clearly "no."

There are plenty of good-looking, comfortable walking shoes at all price points to choose from, so don't simply assume that tennis shoes are the best, most comfortable choice without exploring your other options. You may be pleasantly surprised by what else is out there.

Brands most favored by seasoned travelers include:

- **Aerosoles**
- **Birkenstock**
- **Clarks England**
- **Dr. Martens**
- **Ecco**
- **Finn Comfort**
- **Hush Puppies**
- **Mephisto**
- **Merrell**
- **Naturalizer**

So why am I harping on this?

Well, I won't "give you the keys to the Executive Washroom," as one of my readers accused, but I'll jingle them a little to give you some "food for thought" as I take a closer look at some of these comments. Depending on your goals in life, you can do with the information as you see fit -- including agreeing to disagree with me.

- **"Everyone does this - it's mainstream."**

Take a closer look at those following this practice. It's NOT everyone. By and large, it's women who are thirty-five or older, mid-management level or below. There are always exceptions, of course, but you'll find that the majority of followers fit this
description. It's rare that twenty-somethings or executives wear this combination. Young women think it's too "old-ladyish" while most image-conscious executives know better than to mix very casual shoes with more formal business attire.

- "I took a poll around our office and we all agreed that if we take the tennis shoes off the instant we get to our desks, before we do any work, it's okay. Besides, no one sees us besides sales clerks, doormen, and waitresses, so how does that impact credibility?"

First, I encourage you to be VERY careful from whom you take your advice. If your source has the income and lifestyle that you want, by all means, listen up. But if she doesn't, look to the one who DOES and follow his or her advice instead. If you have your eye on the corner office, dress like the gal in the corner office (or better). She knows how to get there; everyone else just has an opinion.

Secondly, you're not invisible when you commute, not even to service or retail personnel. They judge you based on your attire every bit as much as you judge them. Since shoes have long been used as an indicator of wealth and status, from the elaborate sandals worn by the ancient Egyptian aristocrats right up until the designer brands so popular today, I think you'd be shocked by just how much those gym shoes reveal about you.

Have you ever heard the term, "well-heeled?" It was coined in the 16th Century when Venetian merchants brought back platform shoes from the Orient and they instantly became "all the rage." The towering heels kept their wearers inches above the mud and muck of the streets, but only the very wealthy could afford such shoes. Ever since, "well-heeled" has meant prosperous and well-dressed.

So what do your shoes say about you? If you mix very casual shoes with more formal attire, it says to many that you either don't know any better or that you can't afford more appropriate shoes.

"I can't imagine anything more painful than walking ten blocks every day in a $15 pair of shoes. I've endured years of back and foot pain and I'll take tennis shoes with business suits any day."

You're right - a cheap pair of shoes wouldn't stand up to such abuse, and neither would your feet. But tennis shoes aren't the answer for commuting to and from work. Invest in a good pair of walking shoes from the list above instead.

So what's the bottom line here?

Yes, tennis shoes are more comfortable to wear long distance than high heels. But so are well-fitting flats. If you invest in a pair of good, attractive walking shoes, you'll come out ahead in the long run. While tennis shoes are only appropriate for casual attire, a simply styled, good-looking walking shoe can be worn for either casual or business. You'll get twice the use from one shoe AND you'll look more pulled-together wearing them. You'll also enjoy better service from those you encounter along the way. If you don't believe me, just try it for a few days and see. I think you'll be surprised.
5 Ways to Create a Profitable Image
Issue #124, January 15, 2004

Recently, I happened to catch part of an E! Entertainment program called something like, "The 25 Hottest Red Carpet Stars." It showed some of the most beautiful women in the world as they counted down to number one. Uma Thurman, Selma Hayek, Nicole Kidman - all of the "usual suspects" were there. The youngest was Kiera Knightly, the oldest was Sophia Loren. Halle Berry was number one.

As I watched, it occurred to me that in addition to enjoying active careers and all but monopolizing magazine covers these days, many of the women on their list also happen to have lucrative fashion or beauty endorsement deals on the side. Catherine Zeta-Jones (Elizabeth Arden), Angelina Jolie (St. Johns Knits), Ashley Judd (American Beauty by Estée Lauder) - the list goes on and on.

Coincidence? Hardly! Everyone loves a winner. So when the red carpet reports show "who's hot" and "who's not," companies line up with endorsement deals, hoping to catch some of the stardust coming off the red carpet.

So what does all of this celebrity fashion have to do with you?

It emphasizes just how far a polished image can take you. There are TONS of celebrities out there, but only a handful dominates the magazine covers and endorsement deals. They're not necessarily the most beautiful or the most talented, though a little of both certainly helps. No, these are the ones who understand the power of personal packaging and are savvy enough to "make hay while the sun shines," or in this case, while the spotlight shines on them.

The question is, are you?

Are you harnessing the power of a polished image, whether you're climbing the corporate ladder or are far removed from that world? Are you taking the time to make sure your outside accurately reflects the quality of your inside? Or, like so many women, are you taking an expensive education or in-demand ability and putting it in a discount wrapper?

If so, you're doing yourself a disservice.

As shallow as it is, people DO judge you by how you look. In fact, since your clothing and demeanor reveal SO much about you, from your origins and education level to your probable income, others make snap judgments about you all the time - just as you do with them. If you look and carry yourself like a thoroughbred, others will assume you belong in the race or in the winner's circle. If you're unkempt and plod along obligingly, they'll assume you're a work horse and treat you accordingly - even if you have the talent and
instincts to lead the field. I've seen it too many times to count, even in industries or in positions where looks aren't supposed to matter.

So what can you do to harness this power and use it to your benefit, whether you're in the classroom, climbing the ladder, staying home with the kids, or enjoying retirement? Here are five steps to creating a profitable, "red carpet" image:

1. Make your Appearance a Priority

When you're young and into fashion, how you look may be your only priority. As you get older, however, other things take more of your time like working, raising kids, volunteer work, and the like. Often, we're so busy taking care of others that we lose ourselves in the process. We can justify dropping a lot on dressing our daughter for a special occasion yet balk at spending the same amount on ourselves. Or, if we've put on a few pounds, we put off updating our closets to reflect the new size. We accept the short end of the stick time and again until we look and feel like a work horse - and then we wonder why all we get is more work.

Remember: People treat you how you treat yourself. If you ignore yourself, others will ignore you. If you strive to look like a thoroughbred, people will respond accordingly.

2. Build a Style File

Start by flipping through a few magazines or catalogs or clicking around online. When you find looks you like and that are appropriate for your lifestyle, rip them out of the magazines or print off screen shots and start collecting them in a file. You'll begin to see a pattern of the types of clothing elements you like. You can also pick up some nifty styling ideas.

3. Shop in your Closet

Before you head to the mall, flip through your closet and see if you can duplicate any of the looks in your style file with what you already own. Your pieces may not look exactly like what's in the picture (you have a yellow shirt but the picture shows a blue one, for example), but try approximating the look as closely as you can. It's an easy way to look up-to-date without spending anything.

4. Clear the Clutter

If you're having trouble taking stock of your clothes or accessories because you have so much, get rid of the things you don't wear so you can see what you have to work with. If you're hauling around a bunch of stuff in your handbag, tote, or briefcase that you don't need, get rid of it. If every inch of your office or workspace is covered with papers that need to be filed or sorted, clear them out. If you routinely use your car for business or hauling kids and it's a mess, clean it up. In short, get rid of all the clutter around you that's bringing you down and zapping your energy. Once you clear the mess, you'll look and feel like you're in control - instead of totally out of control and incapable of handling more.
5. Strive for Consistency

Finally, strive to present a consistently polished image. Anyone can clean up for a special occasion. But if you make it a priority to consistently look good, you'll not only feel better about yourself, those around you will consistently treat you with respect because they'll know what to expect from you. Those red-carpet starlets don't JUST look good on the red carpet; they look good any time they're photographed, which makes their endorsement partners even more confident that they have the right person for the job.

So it should be with you. A polished image doesn't have to be expensive to be effective. If you strive for a consistent look every time you walk out the door, you'll be delighted by the response you get. Try it yourself and see.
How to Dress the Science Professor
Issue #170, March 11, 2005

My husband is a college professor with a doctorate in Bio-Chemistry. He usually reports to work in casual pants (like chinos and khakis) and a collared shirt. The students in his lab and classes refer to him as "Dr. Sikes."

One of his peers is a woman of similar training who often goes to work in t-shirts and pants that look like they were stuffed in a drawer. The students in her lab and classes call her by her first name.

Both professors log the same kind of hours and manage similar groups of undergrads. Yet while Robert is enjoying an escalating career that includes choice speaking gigs and an elected office in one of his industry associations, the woman is not really well known outside of the university.

Needless to say, she refuses to believe the difference in their profiles has anything to do with how she dresses. She cites "luck" and limited opportunities for women in science as the reasons for her stalling career.

In reality, there are so few women and minorities in the hard core sciences at the university level that those who are talented get noticed and can go far quickly - so long as they dress appropriately for the job. Unfortunately, in an industry that has long prided itself on being anti-corporate, most would say there IS no dress code.

They would be wrong.

There IS a dress code for academic scientists, just as there is in any industry. And with just a little observation, it's rather easy to uncover.

Let's look at the different elements:

1. Industry Norms

Most of the university scientists I know dress very casually, with t-shirts and jeans or khakis being the apparel of choice for many ranks from graduate students to assistant professors. Full professors, department heads, and M.D.'s tend to favor casual pants (like chinos and khakis), collared shirts, and status symbols like nice watches, pens, or briefcases. Most wear sports coats or jackets when speaking in front of large groups.

2. Comfort

This predominantly casual dress code reflects the fact that science can be a messy business. Whether handling chemicals, animals, or tissue samples in the lab, it's important to wear clothes and shoes that can withstand the rigors of the job, and that won't bring too much heartache if destroyed in the line of duty.
3. Peer Expectations

"... women who wear colorful clothes, jewelry, nail polish, and fashionable shoes don't cut it as 'geeks,'" reader Judith Haller wrote.

Sad but true, as any fashionista with a love of math or science can tell you. "Geeks" tend to see themselves as deep thinkers who are above the shallow trappings of clothes, and they'll poke fun at anyone who is overly attractive or who follows fashion too closely, often dismissing any success they have as "luck" or "a fluke." Alas, in an industry that prides itself on being "above" appearances, they can't seem to handle a woman being both beautiful AND brainy. Go figure.

So now that we've made note of what's acceptable in her industry, what's comfortable on the job, and what will garner both respect and snickers from her colleagues, let's make a list of what she might be doing on any given day:

- Working in the lab
- Teaching a class
- Writing, talking, or planning in her office
- Attending meetings
- Advising students
- Reviewing grants

Got a good picture of this gal in your mind?

Good!

Now let's take a page from Business Wear Magic and dress the professor.

Here's what I'd recommend:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appropriate Level:</th>
<th>Casual Tailored</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicates:</td>
<td>Approachable, flexible, knowledgeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Element:</td>
<td>A collar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now if visions of a buttoned down shirt or blouse just popped into your head, keep in mind that collars come in a variety of shapes and styles, including turtlenecks, polos, and even shirtdresses. The key element is the collar; the interpretation is unlimited.

For her day-to-day duties, she can opt for discount or mid-range separates in a handful of her best neutrals, like black, taupe, and navy. Since this particular woman happens to favor floral patterns, which are a bit "girlie" for her male-dominated industry, I'd recommend she keep them subtle and in short supply.
For those days when she'll be speaking at industry functions or participating in other high-profile events, I'd recommend she add a neutral-colored, simple-styled jacket for extra authority. A vest can also lend authority in such cases, as can a simple, classic dress.

As for her hair, which is graying and nearly waist-length with "Dynasty"-era bumper bangs, I'd recommend a shoulder-length, more controlled style. She might also consider covering the gray, since it makes her look about ten years older than she is (late 30's).

Finally, since she typically wears no makeup, I would recommend adding a touch of color, specifically mascara and lipstick, for high profile industry events.

With just these few little changes, I imagine several things would happen, including:

- Her students would stop calling her by her first name and start addressing her by her title.
- They would also stop dropping by her office to pester her for every little thing and become more respectful of her time.
- So would her peers.
- Her confidence would increase because of the elevated level of respect.
- With the added time and confidence, she would produce more.
- Her now-stalled career would begin to build momentum once again.

All of this because she took the time to dress appropriately for her job?

Yes.

In our hectic, fast-paced lifestyles, it's really easy to just put on anything and walk out the door, particularly when you have small children to attend to (as this gal does), and you work in a casual environment. And when many of your peers dress sloppily, it's easy to convince yourself that no one really cares how you look.
But our appearance conveys SO MUCH information about us, everything from how recently we bathed to how much we make to where we came from or where we're going, that to discount its importance is foolish. Being able to instantly assess someone as friend or foe is a survival skill we've unconsciously honed over thousands of years, which is why that sixth sense alerts us to danger when we encounter someone who is not as they seem.

This professor dresses like a college student, and then wonders why she's not treated like faculty. She wants to be approachable to her students, but then can't understand why they won't leave her alone. And when her fellow professors get together for a few beers after work to "talk shop" and exchange ideas, but don't include her, she gets her feelings out of pocket.

Appropriate attire will help define her role and set boundaries for everyone she meets. She'll be approachable, but not always available, which will make her time more valuable. People will respect her more, her confidence will grow, and her opportunities will multiply.

All because she took the time to dress appropriately for her industry.

So that's how I'd dress the science professor.

Would I dress a music, marketing, or interior design professor the same way? No. They're in different industries, with different expectations and norms. Knowing what's appropriate for your own industry is the key to dressing for success.
Accessorizing Secrets

The Basics of Jewelry
Issue #13, February 14, 2001

Jewelry has been used as a sign of wealth and class for thousands of years. While few of us can afford to have a vault full of precious gems, we can use what we do have to polish our look and further define our personal style. When made wisely, jewelry investments are money well spent, as they last for years, don't go out of style, and can still be worn even if your scale creeps up or down.

Types of Jewelry

- **Fine Jewelry** – Precious metals and gemstones with timeless appeal. Think diamonds, rubies, and emeralds (not to mention tightened security and insurance riders). Unfortunately, few of us can afford many pieces in this price range, and may count diamond studs, a string of pearls, and our wedding ring as the only entrants we own from this category.

- **Bridge Jewelry** – Semi precious stones, shells, natural woods, enamels, and porcelains giving a lasting, quality look at affordable prices. These are usually the best investment for your jewelry wardrobe.

- **Costume Jewelry** – Budget-friendly faux pieces can work with a variety of looks. Higher quality reproductions of fine jewelry can work well with your business looks, but flashy fakes are too distracting in professional situations. Lower end costume jewelry is an inexpensive way to follow the latest fads, but it does tend to break or discolor quickly.

If you can afford fine jewelry, then by all means, buy and wear it. If you can't afford it but would like to, never overlook the potential of a good estate sale or garage sale. Stop in at antique or consignment stores from time to time. Often, particularly with semi-precious stones, people don't know what they have or have any concept of value. If you hone your skills, you can pick up some really great bargains.

Wearing Guidelines

Most women tend to either wear too much or too little jewelry. If, like me, you have small children with a fascination for shiny things, it's easy to see why your good pieces might stay in your jewelry box. But if you've never been sure about the “rules” of jewelry or you've always thought more is better, here are some guidelines to help you navigate this aspect of your personal style:
• Scale the size of the jewelry to the bone structure of your face and body. Small pieces will make surrounding elements look larger, bigger pieces will make what's around them look smaller. A small woman will be swallowed by big pieces while small pieces will make a large woman look bigger. Remember the Principles of Balance.

• The style of jewelry should suit the style and personality of the garment. Pearls, for example, are classic, but can also create a romantic, Victorian mood.

• Jewelry should compliment—not compete with—your ensemble. A bold print requires bold, but simple, jewelry. Conversely, an exquisite and ornate necklace calls for a simple, elegant gown.

• When your top and bottom garments are different colors, create visual unity by repeating the bottom color in the jewelry items. White blouse, black pants, black jewelry, for example.

• If you’re wearing traditional business apparel, keep jewelry simple and elegant. If you can hear it or see it move, it’s not appropriate—it’s distracting.

• Keep rings to one per hand. If they’re beautiful, don’t make them compete against each other for attention. If they’re not beautiful, why wear them?

• Finger length is the determining factor in ring size. The longer the finger, the larger the piece needs to be. The shorter the finger, the smaller the piece should be. Again, remember the principles of balance.

The bottom line is this: jewelry should complete the ensemble. If your clothes are elaborate, you jewelry should be simple. If the jewelry is magnificent, keep the clothing simple. Only one element at a time should shine for maximum impact. If jewelry is your “thing,” then build a simple clothing wardrobe and allow your jewelry to be your signature item.
Over the weekend I happened to catch a popular actress promoting her latest movie on one of the morning talk shows. Since this woman happens to be an A-lister known for her fashion sense, I was a little surprised to see what she was wearing: a sleeveless floral print silk dress - and black leather boots.

Now I know this flimsy sleeveless top/leather boot combination is gaining in popularity. I've seen it several times in recent months and cringe every time because frankly, the aesthetic just doesn't work. In the actress' case, her whole ensemble smacked of an ignorance that I thought her well beyond, given her fashion icon status.

So what was wrong with it?

A couple of things:

1. While it happened to be relatively warm that day, it was still early March, which means that technically, it's still winter (she was also in New York). The boots fit the season; the dress did not.

2. Filmy sleeveless tops require skimpy shoes (like sandals or sling backs) for visual balance. Boots require weighty sleeved tops for balance.

3. Leather boots and silk florals don't have the same mood; leather boots call for heavier, more casual fabric; a silk dress requires lighter, more formal footwear.
Now true, this is kind of advanced stuff if you've never given the matter much thought before. But if you've ever seen someone dressed in a combination that just missed the mark for some reason, chances are the accessories didn't match either the season or the mood of the garment.

Here are a couple of combinations I've seen recently that further demonstrate this type of mismatch:

**Problem:** Summer floral dress, sandals, dark felt hat  
**Solution:** Swap the felt hat (cool weather) for a straw hat (warm weather).

**Problem:** Fine lace top, chunky turquoise jewelry  
**Solution:** Swap the chunky jewelry for finer, more delicate jewelry to match the mood of the top.

**Problem:** Cable knit sweater, jeans, flip flops  
**Solution:** Swap the flip flops for closed toe, cool weather footwear. P.S. Unless you live in the tropics, flip flops are NOT year 'round shoes.

**Problem:** Evening gown, strappy sandals, leather shoulder bag  
(I saw this on the red carpet at the Oscars a few weeks ago)  
**Solution:** Swap the shoulder bag for an evening clutch or minaudière.

**Problem:** Business suit, pumps, quilted flower tote  
**Solution:** Swap the fabric tote for either a leather handbag, tote, or briefcase. The quilted tote is too casual for the formal business attire.

See how this works?

Once you understand a little bit about clothing, materials, and levels of formality, flagrant violations all but leap out at you. Now true, there are no fashion police any more (do an online search for sumptuary laws to learn more), but there are still basic fashion tenets that, when followed, offer a pleasing aesthetic. When not followed, they give you a "what's wrong with this picture?" effect.

It's kind of like having people over for dinner and serving spaghetti, meatballs, and sauerkraut. Or barbecued chicken, potato salad, and escargot. How about egg rolls, won ton soup, and grits? What? Those combinations have you puckering your face in horror? That's because taste-wise, they just don't go together.
Neither do sleeveless tops and boots or evening gowns and shoulder bags. Our favorite food combinations are the result of thousands of years of cooking trial-and-error to determine which types of foods and seasonings compliment each other. The same is true with clothing and accessories. When you match your accessories to the color, fabric, season, and mood of your garments, you get a satisfying aesthetic. When you don't, you get people furrowing their brows at the combination, or worse yet, "dissing" your clothing ignorance.

So don't just slap on accessories without a second thought. Take the time to consider how well the pieces really work together. Do they compliment your ensemble, adding just the right "seasoning?" Or, like a scruffy bag worn with a sharp suit, do they give you that "spaghetti and sauerkraut" effect?

Think BEFORE you accessorize. It's the easiest way to polish your look - or ruin it completely. The choice is yours.

Need some other tips on how to accessorize? Download a copy of Accessory Magic to see how easily you can use accessories to define your style and stretch your budget.
Should you or shouldn't you wear hosiery?

It's a question that hits my inbox a lot from readers all over the world. They see women "going bare" in magazines and on the red carpet, but when they try to carry the trend over into their everyday lives, they run into pesky things like cold weather and disapproving bosses.

Or, as Kathleen from Ontario, Canada wrote me recently, "I was told by my 20-something co-workers that pantyhose are old lady-ish! I thought I was really out of touch."

So what's the story? Should you - or shouldn't you - wear hosiery?

It depends.

Basically, it boils down to a very simple concept:

The more clothes you wear, the more formal the situation. The less clothes you wear, the less formal the situation.

Want a polished power look that's all business? Wear hosiery. Want to let your hair down at a summer barbecue with your friends? Go bare. It really depends on the situation, as I said. Oh, and how great your legs are, of course.

Now I know many fashionistas who would argue this. Since the trend right now is to go bare, they'll go bare and suffer for fashion. That's their prerogative.

But frankly, hosiery has a lot of benefits that have been overlooked in this whole "dare to go bare" campaign, including:

- It can make your legs look better by hiding imperfections
- Control-top hose can make your tummy look flatter and your bottom look firmer
- It can wick away perspiration on your feet, extending the life of your shoes and making your feet smell less
- It can pull together elements of your clothes to give you a polished, finished ensemble
- It can help keep you warm

The last two reasons popped into my mind this week when I encountered two 20-something fashion devotees in different situations.
The first encounter was on Saturday night when my husband and I went out to dinner. While waiting a few minutes for a table to be cleared, we were joined in the waiting line by three college students, one of whom was dressed in a hoodie, tee shirt, knee-length skirt, and sandals. Oh yeah - it was about 32° F degrees outside (0° C degrees). The girl kept jumping from foot to foot, trying to warm herself. Later, sitting at a table near ours, she ordered hot tea and complained that she just couldn't seem to get warm. Gee! What a mystery!

The second occurred Monday afternoon when a chic brunette happened by my window. The young woman had her hair pulled back into a slick bun and her eyes were tucked behind a stylish pair of shades. She was also wearing a dark wool pea coat with a red muffler, a black wool pencil skirt, black vertically striped hose, and little black ankle boots. Even though ankle boots with skirts are usually hard to pull off, this gal nailed it with her hosiery. In fact, she looked divine. I wish I'd had my camera handy.

So what's the lesson here?

Don't blindly follow trends, particularly if they make you feel uncomfortable. While going bare may make sense for you, it's clearly not a trend for everyone - nor is it appropriate year 'round, unless you live in a warm climate. If it's hot outside and you're headed to a casual gathering, skip the hose if you want. If it's cold outside or you're headed to a situation where polish counts, wear hosiery.

Stockings have been around since the 300's (A.D.) in various forms and will likely be around a few more centuries. So take this latest "go bare" trend for what it is and do what makes the most sense for you. When will it end? Since a quick glance at the fall runways shows lots of hosiery in various flavors (sheer, opaque, patterned), my guess is this fall. As with all trends, only time will tell. Do what makes the most sense for you.
Understanding Shoe Aesthetics
Issue #219, March 23, 2006

Last Friday afternoon as I was driving along restaurant row on Main Street doing errands, I saw several young women who looked amazing - from the ankles up. Great hair, cute clothes, pretty jewelry, they had obviously spent a lot of time pulling themselves together for a Friday night on the town.

Too bad they ruined it with their shoes.

For many, it was the ubiquitous flip flop that caused the problem. For others, it was an unfortunate color or style choice. Then there was the girl who teetered on heels so high, she could only make teeny-tiny Morticia Adams-like steps as her (clearly annoyed) date all but dragged her along behind him. That there are so many fashion mishaps with this particular accessory can only point to one thing: a need for more education.

If you've ever been befuddled by shoe choices, here are some things to consider next time you're standing in front of mirror, mulling over which shoes to wear:

**Match the Mood of the Shoe to the Mood of the Outfit**

If you're wearing casual clothes, your shoes should be casual. If you're wearing formal clothes, your shoes should be formal. Shoes made of canvas, rubber, straw, or plastic are typically casual; shoes made of good leather or fine fabrics (satin, lace, tweed) are typically formal. Thick heels, cork heels, platforms, and wedge styles are typically casual; thin heels and simple silhouettes are typically formal.

*Note:* flip flops are *beachwear*, designed for use near sand and surf. They are too informal for most casual clothes. Save them for the pool, the beach, and your backyard.

**Strive for Visual Balance between Upper and Lower Body**

This is often ignored but instantly creates a "what's wrong with this picture?" feeling when you see it.
If your arms and shoulders are exposed (tank top, sleeveless top), you should expose more of your foot for visual balance (sandals, d'Orsay pumps, slingbacks*). If your arms and legs are covered (sweater and jeans), you should cover your feet for visual balance (pumps, loafers, boots). To cover or expose one part of your body without repeating it elsewhere looks unbalanced.

*Exception: workout clothes and tennis shoes

**Shoe Color Should be Darker than Hem Color**

For a pleasing aesthetic, old school rules say that your shoe color should be darker than your hem color. So a white dress with black shoes would look fine whereas a black dress with white shoes would not. Same goes for hosiery. Light or flesh colored hose with dark shoes almost always look better than dark hose with light shoes.

**Be Careful With Colored-Matched Shoes**

While matching your shoe color to your outfit color can be very stylish, it can also look strange, depending on the color, your body type, and the proportions of your outfit. If you're petite or have short legs, for example, visually "chopping up" your body with blocks of color will only make you look shorter, so be careful. Also, while matching red, blue, and black shoes can look very elegant, matching odd colors like lime, plum, or orange can look very costume-y and - dare I say it? - déclassé outside of a bridal party. Proceed with caution.
Wear White at Your Own Risk

White reflects light and makes anything it's on look bigger, including feet. If you have small feet or really like the summer-time feeling of white shoes, wear them. If you're self-conscious or don't want people looking at your feet, don't.

When in Doubt, Try Flesh Tone

A flesh-toned shoe in a simple style can see you through years of use. Not only will it visually elongate your legs, it will go with a variety of outfits. If you want to trim your shoe wardrobe to a bare minimum, invest in a dark pump and a flesh toned pump, slingback, or sandal, depending on your wardrobe and lifestyle. You won't regret it.

Only One Star per Outfit

Any ensemble should only have one focal point. If your clothing is complicated - artful construction, unusual fabrication, or dynamite color, for example - keep your shoes simple. If your shoes are "fierce," then your clothing should be simple to give your shoes center stage. Don't make interesting elements compete against each other for attention. Only have one star per outfit.

Comfort Counts

While there are TONS of cute shoes out there, only buy the styles that make sense for you. Don't stuff your feet into shoes that are too small, have heels that are too high, or that mercilessly bind and pinch. If they look great but hurt your feet or exacerbate an old injury, they're not for you. Keep looking.

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Finally, attend to any necessary grooming BEFORE exposing your legs and feet to public view. Get a pedicure and shave your legs. No exceptions. You want people to be delighted and amazed by your great shoes, not turn away in horror at your nasty toenails, cracked heels, or hairy toes. See to it.

Looking great from head to toe takes a little time and effort, but the rewards are definitely worth it. When you look good, you feel good, and when you feel good about yourself, it shows. **Try it for yourself and see.**
5 Common Fashion and Accessory Mistakes
Issue #241, August 31, 2006

After flipping through a few pre-shows on Sunday and reading Kat Giantis' Emmy show fashion review "hits and misses" on MSN.com this week, it occurred to me that many of faux pas that were cited in the red carpet analysis are the same ones I see every day on the streets around me. Over-accessorizing, poor fit, elements out of proportion - you don't need an awards show to bring these problems to light. All you need is a good eye and an understanding of what works for you and what doesn't.

So fire those stylists, take a good inventory of yourself, and wrap your brain around these five common fashion and accessory mistakes that happen both on and off the red carpet:

1. Elements Out of Proportion

If you're small, you need small prints, collars, jewelry, and the like. If you're big, you need big pieces. If you're medium-sized, go for medium-sized elements. The concept is simple and straightforward, yet you see women walking down the street all the time wearing pieces that either over or under-whelm their size. Huge bags hanging from miniscule wrists and shoulders. Delicate chains draped on voluptuous curves. What's up with that? Don't fall into this trap. Take stock of your body and match your clothing and accessory elements to your body proportions for a balanced, pulled-together look.

2. Over-Accessorizing

One of the big trends right now is piling on lots of necklaces or bracelets. It can look cute when paired with simple silhouettes to let the accessories shine. Unfortunately, it's easily overdone -- and almost everyone over-does it. They pile on necklaces, bracelets, belts, earrings, etc., creating a cluttered look that compels most people to look away instead of trying to make sense of it all.

Don't do that. Pick one focal point and stick with it. Don't look like someone draped you in accessories and you forgot to say "when." Or, as Coco Chanel once said, "Luxury lies not in richness or ornateness but in the absence of vulgarity." So show a little restraint before you cross the line into vulgarity with your accessories.
3. Ill-Fitting

If you can buy clothes off the rack that fit you perfectly, consider yourself lucky. Most women can't. They either buy to fit the largest part of their body and swim in the rest of the clothes, or they get it to fit one area and try to ignore the binding and squeezing that goes on everywhere else.

It can be a real challenge sometimes, particularly if you wear an odd size or, like me, you wear different sizes on top and bottom. Often, tailoring is required. If you spend a lot on your clothes, or if you regularly appear before audiences or on camera, insist upon tailoring. Or, if you can never seem to find well-fitting clothes regardless of how hard you try, consider having your clothes custom-made. It's not as expensive as you think and you'll be delighted by the results.

See the Professional Association of Custom Clothiers website to find a tailor near you.

4. Inappropriate Hair and Makeup

Wearing the same hair and makeup every day for every activity is like trying to wear the same shoe every day for every activity: it just doesn't work. Depending on what you're doing, you're either over or under-dressed. Pull your hair back and go light on the makeup when you're exercising to keep cool and not clog your pores; style your hair and powder your nose for work to look polished and professional; go glam for evening functions to match your head to the rest of your body. Again, it seems simple and straightforward, yet a lot of women who regularly agonize over what to wear never give a second thought to their hair and makeup. Don't be one of them. Think head-to-toe, not neck-to-toe - especially since changing your hair and makeup are cheap ways to give yourself a whole new look.

5. Skin Show

With hemlines up to here, necklines down to there, and other cornea-searing displays of flesh, some gals garner plenty of attention. Unfortunately, it's not always positive. When you blatantly and regularly call attention to the physical, many assume it's because you have little else to offer. Unfair? Of course! But there's a time and place for showing excessive skin, and work, school, children's activities, and religious services are not among them.
When I convinced one skin-showing, attention-loving gal I know to opt for appropriate clothes that flattered her figure instead of inappropriate pieces that flaunted her uh - assets, she later confessed that it felt like her IQ jumped 100 points overnight by how much better people treated her. It's no mystery why. People treat you how you treat yourself. If you put value on yourself, so will others. "Your dress should be tight enough to show you're a woman, but loose enough to show you're a lady," Hollywood designer Edith Head once said. I couldn't agree more.

It's easy to make mistakes with clothing that undermine your authority and derail your image goals. But it's also easy to remedy the problems. If you opt for pieces that fit your body and proportions and show restraint with accessories and displays of flesh, you'll soon find yourself with more fashion "hits" than "misses" in your life, including all the good things that go with being well dressed. **Try it for yourself and see.**
Grooming and Special Occasions

10 Easy Tricks for Beautiful Skin
Issue #62, January 24, 2002

It's that time of year: Winter.

If you live in the northern hemisphere and have somehow managed to escape the cold weather of the last few weeks, consider yourself lucky. Not only is it hard on the utility budget, it can be especially brutal to your skin.

Now somewhere in the back of your mind, you already know this. But if you've been too busy chasing kids, meeting deadlines, and trying to have a life in your spare time, “Adjust skin care for winter” has problem fallen to the bottom of your “to do” list.

Have no fear—that's why we're here!

Let's take just a moment to consider what you put your skin through this time of year:

- Biting cold
- Dry central heat
- Wood burning stoves and fireplaces
- Holiday libations
- Cold and flu season
- Re-circulated air

Is it any wonder that dermatologists see such an increase in dry-skin related problems during the winter? Of course not!

The key to success is to moisturize, moisturize, moisturize. Oh, and did I mention moisturize?

Now before your head starts filling with visions of slippery hands and shiny noses, remember that you can hydrate your skin from both the inside and the outside. Here's how:

1. Drink plenty of water. Mixing it with coffee, tea, hot chocolate, or scotch doesn't count. Drink it straight.

2. Limit caffeine and alcohol consumption. Both act as a diuretic, forcing moisture out of the body.
3. Bathe less often. Instead of showering every day, try every other day instead.

4. Change your daily moisturizer. That light, barely-there product you bought last summer just won't help you that much this time of year. Opt for a richer formulation, particularly if you have dry or mature skin, and/or live in a climate with low humidity.

5. Try a moisture masque. If your skin is particularly dry, use a moisture masque once a week during the winter months. These are sort of like the clay masques you may have used in the past (or in the summer), but they add moisture to your skin instead of stripping oil from it.

6. Spot moisturize. Have dry hands, feet, knees, or elbows? Use products specially formulated for those areas. You can find whatever you need at Bliss World.

7. Exfoliate regularly. Take time to get rid of your dead, dry skin once a week or once every ten days. But don't go overboard on this one, particularly if you have very dry skin.

8. Eat a well-balanced diet. Opt for fruits, meats, dairy, and grains instead of order in, take out, drive through, or delivered. Your skin—and your scale—will thank you for it.

9. Don't smoke. It may help you relieve stress and suppress your appetite, but it's also constricting the oxygen to your capillaries, and aging your skin with every puff (never mind what it's doing to the rest of your body!). Want to look 15 or 20 years older than you are? Smoking will do the trick.

10. Get plenty of sleep. As a mother of a two-year-old who has slept through the night precisely twice, I know that this is easier said than done. Still, try to get as much sleep as you can. Skin renews itself by building new skin cells while you rest, so regularly getting enough sleep will make you look (and feel) younger. Recommended dosage: seven to eight hours a night.

Finally, be mindful of your skin's needs when you travel. If you'll be going to harsh climates for work or play, check out the weather ahead of time at weather.com.

Need more tips and tricks on how to care for your skin? Pick up a copy of Beauty at Any Age and discover how easy looking beautiful can be.
Hair Color Ideas
Issue #351, April 22, 2010

What’s the best hair color for you?

The latest trend? The color you had as a teen? Something completely out of your gene pool?

It depends.

While it’s true that the right hair color can make you look younger, sexier, and more vibrant, the wrong hair color can make you look older, washed out, or even just plain weird. If you’re thinking about coloring your hair, here are some hair color ideas you need to consider BEFORE you “take the plunge”:

1. Let Your Skin Tone Dictate The Shade

Just as your skin tone determines which clothing and accessory colors look best on you, so does it determine which hair color looks best on you. If you have blue undertones, stick with hair colors that have cool undertones, like ash or black. If you have yellow undertones, try colors with warm undertones like caramel or auburn. If you ignore this and wear a warm tone next to cool coloring (or vice versa), the tones will clash and it will be obvious that you color your hair.

2. Stay Within a Couple Shades of Your Natural Color

While it’s fun to experiment with different hair colors, try and stay within a couple of shades of your natural color, particularly if you’re doing it yourself at home. Not only will you have a better chance of finding something that works well with your skin tone, you won’t have “buyer’s remorse” – or a big salon bill to correct it – by making a drastic change.

3. Try Highlights Instead of Full Color

Want a little color lift but not the commitment of all-over color? Try highlights around your face and on the crown of your head. The strands of color will give your locks depth and texture against your natural hair color.

4. Go Lighter As You Age

If you had very dark hair in your youth and want to cover the gray, opt for lighter shades as you age. So if your hair was black when you were in your teens and twenties, for example, try dark brown or even cinnamon highlights as the decades pass. Keeping your hair the same dark color into your 50’s and beyond will emphasize lines and wrinkles and make you look older, not younger.
5. Budget the Upkeep

Whether you color your hair yourself or go to a salon, you’ll need to re-color the new growth every few weeks. If you have dark hair and are going blonde, this may mean monthly appointments at the salon. If you’re adding subtle highlights, you might be able to stretch it to six or seven weeks. Whatever it is, know the cost going in and budget appropriately.

Finally, if you’re thinking about a new hair color but aren’t sure whether you really want to do it or not, visit a wig shop in your area and try on different colored wigs to see how various colors look on you. You may find one or two that you like…or you may find that you’ve avoided a costly mistake.

If you have any of these events on your calendar this year, you may be stressing out about where to find the “perfect” outfit. With all those eyes upon you, you want to look your best. And if you’re known for being a bit of a clotheshorse, you may feel compelled to give your audience the kind of ensemble they’ve come to expect from you.

But before you blow your clothing budget on ONE outfit that you wear for only a few hours, remember the smart woman’s mantra for clothes shopping: spend the most money on the clothes you wear the most, the least money on the clothes you wear the least. Don’t drop a lot of money on something that’s going to be worn once before it’s shoved to the back of your closet. Invest in your everyday items. Go cheap on everything else.

Now before you start thinking that I don’t understand your situation or your circle of friends, trust me, I do. I’ve been to social gatherings that run the gamut from small country weddings to big city charity events and have hung out with all sorts of people from housekeepers to surgeons. As the saying goes, “I know from status.”

And my advice remains the same: spend as little as you can on the clothes you wear the least. Even for special occasions.

Remember: high impact doesn’t have to mean high cost. All you need are a few sure-fire strategies that will allow you to make a grand entrance without spending grandly to do so.

Here’s how:

1. **Start With Your Own Closet**

If you’ve been to a few similar functions in the past, you may already have something on hand that will fit the bill nicely. Pull out those clothes sitting in the back of your closet and take a good look at them. Do you have something that can be worn “as is?” What if you changed the accessories? Added a different top? Paired the jacket with a different skirt? Wore your hair in a different style? What could you come up with? Just because you wore something one way doesn’t mean you have to wear it the same way again. Allow your imagination to wonder a bit and you may be surprised at the abundance that you possess.
2. **Borrow From Someone Else**

Don’t have anything that meets your needs? Who do you know in your size that might? Would they be willing to lend you their finery? Oftentimes, they will. If they spent a lot of money on special occasion apparel that’s just sitting in their closet, chances are they’d be more than willing to put it to good use. I’ve loaned gowns to friends many times over the years, and have borrowed just as many. Who wants to drop $200 on a cocktail dress for a function you need to attend when you’re 8 months pregnant with your 3rd child? Not me! The money is better spent elsewhere. Borrow if it all possible.

3. **Comb The Sales Racks**

When my 16-year-old niece refused to wear the beautiful, atypical $200 bridesmaid dress she’d worn for her aunt’s wedding last year to prom this year, my sister-in-law informed her that she would have to pay for her own prom dress. Undaunted, Kiley started combing the sales racks at the designer outlet mall not far from their home. The result? A sales rack dress beautiful enough to compete with her status-y friends’ $400 gowns – for the amazing low price of $14.99. Glance through the weekend circulars in your local paper for similar buys in your area.

4. **Shop Consignment Stores**

I never knew what a gold mine consignment stores were until after I was married and had moved away from home. While my mother always dismissed second hand clothing as being second rate, I knew I must be missing something when one of my early co-workers revealed that consignment shops were the secret behind her fabulous wardrobe. They allowed her to dress incredibly well on her $16,000 a year income.

**Have rich tastes but a peasant’s pocketbook?** Shop upscale consignment shops in your area. You’ll be astounded by the merchandise and bargains to be had. And since many of the clothes will still have their original tags still attached, the only thing you’ll be losing by shopping consignment is the hefty retail markup – nothing second rate about that. Shop often and grab when the getting’s good.

To find local shops in your area, visit [ConsignmentShops.com](http://ConsignmentShops.com).

5. **Shop Donation Sites**

Donation sites like Goodwill and the Salvation Army also offer some incredible bargains if you’re willing to do some sifting. Since a lot of people who clean out their closets either don’t know about consignment shops or can’t be bothered with the extra stop when they’re in disposal mode, you can benefit handsomely from their inertia. Wedding dresses, Prom
dresses, New Year’s Eve apparel – you name it – can all be had for next to nothing. This time last year my sister bought three prom dresses for $6 each and brought them home for her 5-year-old to play dress up in. Buy it, take it to the cleaners, and wear it like it’s brand new – for a fraction of what you’d pay at the mall.

So what if you decide that the event truly warrants something spectacular enough to spend a lot of money on? Then remember this rule of thumb:

**6. Buy Classic Separates**

Go for the long-term approach instead of the short-term quick fix. Basic, classic styles that you can mix and match for maximum versatility are a far better investment than a single, unforgettable garment. Well made basics will last you for years, and they can be instantly transformed by adding a snazzy necklace, a lace jacket, a trendy belt, or whatever. The best part? You’ll never be caught unprepared when you get a last minute invitation. Like the time my husband called me at 4 o’clock to report that a colleague had just handed him box seat tickets to that evening’s performance of a touring sold-out Broadway musical. Having classic separates on hand can mean the difference between looking good and having a great time…or sitting home with nothing to wear.

So what’s today’s lesson?

You don’t have to spend a fortune to look great for special occasions. Start with your own closet, borrow from friends, are hit sales and second hand shops to find what you need.

If you do decide that you want to spend some money on something new, spend wisely. Think beyond the single event you’re shopping for and stock your closet with clothes you can wear time and again in a variety of ways. It’s the only way to justify the expense.

**Remember:** *spend the most on the clothes you wear the most, the least on the clothes you wear the least.*

That way, you’ll be able to look good, spend wisely, and *dress well for years to come.*
How Inappropriate Attire Can Zap Your Confidence
Issue #89, October 17, 2002

While attending a recent dinner party, I again had the opportunity to observe the amazing effects wearing inappropriate attire can have on one's self-esteem. It turned a confident, educated, well-paid woman into an apologetic, shrinking wallflower. All from a person who had proudly proclaimed that she had no use for fashion.

Here's the story:

My husband Robert, a scientist, recently joined the faculty at the University of Delaware. As part of the welcoming festivities, we were invited to dine with the University President and his wife, along with about 50 other couples. The invitation called for cocktails on the veranda followed by a buffet supper on the lawn of their 18th Century estate.

I opted for a knee-length, short-sleeved black crepe dress, which I paired with sheer black hose and black pumps. I finished the ensemble with pearl earrings, necklace, and bracelet, and wore simple makeup since we were going to be outside. Robert wore a light gray sports coat with dark trousers, gray tie, and a white dress shirt.

We were dressed very similarly to most of the faculty there. In fact, the President's wife was dressed in a cream suit with black jewelry—the exact opposite of me—and as we went through the receiving line, she and I joked about looking like salt and pepper shakers. She made a point of stopping to talk to me twice more during the course of the evening, inquiring about my husband's background and again welcoming us to the University. By the time we left, we'd met several very nice couples, and my husband, a schmoozer from 'way back, had made some valuable contacts.

For one of his colleagues, however, the evening could not end fast enough.

“Dr. Jones” is also a recent addition to the faculty in the Biology department. As is common in the scientific community, she usually wears very casual clothes to work. On the day of the faculty dinner, she had on a t-shirt, khaki pants, and tennis shoes.

She caught Robert as he was headed out the door early that day, and asked him where he was going in such a rush. When he told her “Home to change for the dinner party,” she proceeded to laugh at him and asked him whom he was trying to impress.
The banter evidently went on for several minutes, with Dr. Jones proclaiming that “true intellects” had no use for formal clothes. She was going to wear what she had on, and if others didn't like it, that was their problem.

Her bravado lasted as far as the front door.

As we queued to go through the receiving line, Dr. Jones quickly realized the folly of her decision. While she and her husband stood there in their work clothes, they found themselves surrounded by couples in suits, skirts, and good jewelry. The Joneses didn't look like a couple of rebels, out to “buck the system;” they looked like they didn't get the memo that this was a semi-formal affair.

Their discomfort was palpable.

They discussed whether they should leave, and then the good doctor tried to say that no one had told her it was a fancy dress affair. When Robert cleared his throat loudly, she sheepishly turned away. Yes, she had been told. She simply chose to ignore it.

So while everyone else there was making the most of the networking opportunity, the Joneses lingered on the fringes, checking their watches every few minutes. What few conversations they did engage in began with Dr. Jones apologizing for their attire. They left at the first opportunity.

So what went wrong here? And perhaps, more importantly, how can YOU avoid a similar fate when faced with an unknown dress code?

1. Never Assume That The Rules Don't Apply To You

Over the years, I’ve met literally hundreds of people who felt that because of their education, talents, political beliefs, or whatever, that the rules of social conduct just didn't apply to them. Because they perceive themselves as being above average in a certain area, the rules for “average people” just don't apply to them.

Unfortunately, the research just doesn't bear it out.

Let me explain.

The whole image industry began in the 1960's when a Connecticut schoolteacher, moonlighting in the men's department of a New York department store, discovered that people responded in specific ways to how others dressed. From hair cut to shoe style, clothing color to accessories, John T. Molloy determined that you could actually engineer your wardrobe to evoke particular responses. If you wanted to get ahead, he concluded, then having “the correct” wardrobe was as important as getting a good education. The whole “Dress For Success” phenomenon evolved from his findings.

Now while many of his clothing recommendations are a little dated at this point, the crux of his research echoes the findings of similar studies done to this day: people will respond to how you are dressed based on THEIR background and experience, not yours.
So if your clothing and accessories are similar to theirs or someone they trust and respect, then research shows that they will consider you an equal and respond to you accordingly. If, however, your clothing is much more or much less expensive, threatening, or completely foreign to them, then you will be considered unequal, and again, treated accordingly.

That's why a woman wearing a tailored suit into an office building might find men holding the door for her and treating her like a lady, while the same woman wearing a housekeeping uniform in the same building might be all but ignored.

It's also why the Joneses were all but ignored at the faculty dinner. While everyone else was dressed like professionals attending a social function, the Joneses looked like college students who had wandered in off the street. That they didn't glean the dress code from the invitation made them appear poorly schooled in the social arts. A confidence-shaking experience, to be sure.

So if you think that "the rules" don't apply to you for whatever reason, think again.

Everyone I've known who attempts to defy convention because of their perceived "above average" abilities is generally given one of two labels: eccentrics who should be given a wide berth, and brainiacs with no common sense. The extraordinary ability that they feel puts them above the crowd suddenly becomes the ONLY reason that others put up with them.

So if you want your talents to shine, dress appropriately for the occasion and allow your gifts to gleam brilliantly. Otherwise, they'll be competing for attention with your unconventional attire.

2. Read The Invitation. Then Read It Again

If someone had dropped by Dr. Jones' office on the way out the door that night and invited her for dinner and drinks, then her workday attire would have been appropriate. But this was an engraved invitation mailed weeks in advance that had required a written reply. There was simply no mistaking the formality.

When you get an invitation, read it. Then read it again. Don't assume ANYTHING -- particularly if you're new to an area and uncertain of the local dressing customs. If you don't know what kind of attire is appropriate, find out. Ask someone. Call the hostess, if necessary. A one-minute phone call could save you a whole evening of agony.

3. Always Keep Appropriate Clothing In Your Closet

The easiest way to always dress appropriately is to keep key pieces in your closet that can span the many different occasions in your life. Whether you work on a ranch, wear a uniform to work, have a business casual wardrobe, or are totally corporate, having separates in your closet that can take you through a wide range of activities will enable you
to dress in a snap. Anticipate, organize, and execute. It's the easiest way to manage a wardrobe.

So what's the bottom line here?

Dressing appropriately puts you on a “level playing field” that allows you to confidently interact with others. Dressing inappropriately makes you self-conscious and ineffective.

If you prefer to be in control, then always strive to dress according to the situation. If you don't know what that is, ask somebody. Don't assume anything, particularly if you're new to the area. Knowing how to dress appropriately makes you appear confident, schooled, and savvy.

If you're tempted to defy convention because that's what's done in your industry or social group, always stop to reassess the situation when you venture OUTSIDE of your regular crowd. For just as formal social attire might generate ridicule with your casual buddies, so too, will your casual clothes mark you as an outsider at a formal event.

Why set yourself up for failure like that?

Take the time to learn what's appropriate in any situation and you'll never find yourself apologizing for your lack of finesse. For once you get the clothing issue out of the way, you can get down to more important things—like the business at hand.
Guidelines for Wearing White
Issue #105, May 30, 2003

There's something cool and refreshing about white clothing that makes it chic on even the hottest days. Since it reflects light and absorbs perspiration, making it less noticeable than on other colors, the wearer looks cool and collected, even when the temperature soars. Small wonder then that white has been a long-time favorite of residents of hot, tropical climates.

Now that Memorial Day has come and gone, the unofficial launch of summer (at least in the United States) has begun and the "white wearing" season is underway. So let's take a look at some of the typical questions that have hit my inbox in recent weeks regarding how and when to wear white:

When to Wear White

"Does the 'wear white only between Memorial Day and Labor Day' rule still apply?"

While white blouses and shirts are year 'round staples, white skirts, pants, jackets, and shoes have generally been limited to summer. "Not before Memorial Day and not after Labor Day" has been the rule of thumb for as long as anyone can remember.

But is that still the case?

For many traditionalists, it is. For more fashion-forward people, it isn't. Designers have been creating white winter wear for the last couple of seasons, bringing the warm-weather favorite out into the cold.

So what should YOU do?

It depends on your situation.

If you work in a traditional business, like accounting, banking, law, etc., and typically socialize with people from this same background, use the traditional Memorial Day/Labor Day guidelines for dressing when you're around these folks. YOU may be fashion-forward, showing up to work in white wool in October, but those around you probably aren't and won't appreciate your fashion sense. They'll assume you don't know how to dress for business and wonder what other areas you're lacking.

If you regularly work or socialize with a more fashion-forward crowd, on the other hand, wear white if you want, whenever you want, keeping fabrics in line with the season. Those around you will marvel at your good taste.
White Clothing Do’s and Don’ts

"I heard that if you have large hips, you shouldn't wear white from the waist down."

Not true.

Since light colors (including white) visually enlarge while dark colors visually diminish, it's true that white will make you look bigger, wherever you wear it. But it doesn't mean that you have to skip it entirely. Instead, keep these simple camouflage techniques in mind:

DO:

1. Opt for a monochromatic look (all one color) to appear slimmer and taller.

2. Look for construction details or accessories that create a vertical line on the white, like a long jacket or duster, a long strand of beads, a long scarf, or a flattering, diagonal belt with a long chain or fringe. Verticals draw the eyes up and down instead of from side-to-side.

3. Create a focal point elsewhere on your body to draw attention away from your trouble spot. Examples: a fabulous hat, a large, eye-catching necklace or scarf, or a pair of knock-'em-dead shoes.

DON’T:

1. Put a contrasting color at or near the area you're trying to disguise, like a dark shirt tucked into a waistband, or a darker shirt or jacket that falls to your hips. It will call attention to the area, not detract from it.

2. Wear styles with embellishments that call extra attention to your trouble spots, like pockets, embroidery, zippers, etc.

If your clothes fit properly and you use these simple diversion tactics, there's no reason to avoid white, whatever your figure challenge.

The Deal with White Shoes

"My friend told me that you should never wear white shoes, unless they're sandals."

Again, not true.

To repeat, since white visually enlarges, wearing all-white shoes will make your feet look bigger. Not a big deal, unless you don't like the size of your feet.
White shoes often complete a summer ensemble, making the whole look crisp and pulled-together. Still, if you don't want to fully encase your feet in white pumps, flats, or espadrilles, try:

- Slingbacks
- Mules
- Sandals
- Flipflops

Keep the formality of the shoes in line with the rest of your outfit.

Want to look really tall in a white monochromatic ensemble WITHOUT calling attention to your feet? Then wear flesh-colored shoes instead.

**White Hosiery: Yes or No?**

"If I'm dressing in all white, should I also wear white hose?"

In my opinion, no.

White legwear is appropriate for nurses, brides, and girls under five. It just doesn't do much for anyone else.

Yes, white and very light hose were the rage twenty years ago, a trend popularized by the late Princess of Wales. While the look did precisely what she wanted it to do – visually "chop up" her appearance to make her look shorter – it didn't fair as well on shorter copy cats around the world. For most, it simply made their legs look bigger.

So what should you wear instead of white hose?

Depending on your skin tone, try sheer hosiery in:

- Off-white
- Nude
- Light beige
- Taupe
- Pearl Gray

P.S. If you're wearing Spectator or Chanel pumps, match your hosiery to the lighter rather than darker color.

**Other Things to Remember**

So what other things should you keep in mind when wearing white?
Always wear flesh colored undergarments under white clothes. If you wear white bras, panties, slips, or camisoles, the outline will show underneath your clothes.

See the difference?

Don't wear all-white to a wedding, unless you're the bride or a member of the bridal party. A white blouse under another color suit is okay, but the tradition still holds firm: white is reserved for the bridal party.

If white makes you look pale or "just isn't your color," try off-white instead. Pure whites look best on skin with blue undertones, off-whites look best on skin with yellow undertones.

So what's the bottom line here?

White can be an elegant staple in your wardrobe, whatever your shape. Just remember that it visually enlarges whatever it's against, so choose clothing and accessories that flatter your shape and enhance your assets. Don't avoid white – disguise it! – so you can enjoy its many benefits instead of stumbling on its drawbacks.