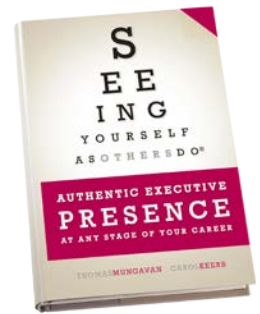


Executive Guidelines: Women's Clothing



Appearance forms perceptions very quickly. We can debate the accuracy of the perceptions but, there is little debate that the impact is significant. It is important to discover and cultivate your own personal style. It is also important to make choices that create a perception that fits with the expectations of your profession and workplace environment. There are few rules that fit all situations and geographical areas. The suggestions below are meant to serve as guidelines.

The women CEO's we have worked with have had enormous and expensive wardrobes. In many ways, it is much more challenging and less defined for female leaders compared to men's dress where the acceptable options have less variety. We do see that more conservative attire is the norm, particularly at higher levels.

Suits and Dresses

Color Choices

Gray, black, dark blue are most accepted and your wardrobe should contain at least one suit in these colors. These colors are traditionally more formal and conservative. Be current, but classic. You may want to shop at a store such as Nordstrom's which has a complimentary personal shopping service to stay on top of trends.

Neutral colors (tan, cream, pale green or pale yellow) are good choices for videotaped, video conferencing or filmed presentations. If your coloring is light you may need to add color with accessories to avoid looking washed out.

Extremely bright colors - bright reds, electric blues and hot pinks or loud prints are typically poor choices for presentations because the eye of your audience is drawn more to your clothing than to your face. Stay away from these color choices if you are being videotaped, you're on video conference or you are being filmed. The camera does not like patterns.



Quality and Fit

Suits, dresses or slacks and pantsuits should be made of top quality fabric. This is as important as the fit of the garment. Look for natural fibers such as silk, raw silk, cotton, linen, wool or wool blends and gabardines.

- ◆ Fit: allow 1" of fabric on either side of the hips to avoid looking too tight for slacks. Jackets and blouses should not pull across the bust line.
- ◆ Use a solid, single color scheme with color touches added with scarves or accessories is the best choice.
- ◆ Keep trims and accessories subtle. Go with simple gold or silver jewelry for your safest bet if you're not sure of how formal the setting is.
- ◆ A solid color scheme will also make you look taller than two different colors.

- ◆ Currently skirts are being shown at all lengths. A good rule of thumb is to consider what you do and what your range of movement is going to be.
- ◆ Mid-knee to 2” above the knee is the most common length for executive dress.
- ◆ Skirts above the knee (2” or more) - steer clear of them if you are going to be sitting on a platform above an audience in presentation, if you typically sit away from a desk or table, if you like to cross your legs or sit more casually.
- ◆ Long, flowing skirts create a more feminine look, but they can also be difficult to move in due to the extra fabric. Long skirts diminish stature in shorter women so may not be a good choice if you wish to create a strong visual presence.
- ◆ Expect to pay \$500 or more for a suit. Those who do recognize those who don't.

Blouses

- ◆ Quality cotton, linen, and silk work best with most suits.
- ◆ Avoid large trims of any kind (i.e., bows, ruffles, shoulder pads).
- ◆ Turtle necks, bows and collars that stand up high will make the neck appear shorter. V-necks make the neck appear longer.
- ◆ Short sleeves are seen as more casual, long sleeves more formal and executive.
- ◆ Expect to spend \$50 or more for a blouse.

Accessories

- ◆ Scarves add color and softness to your outfit. They are a good choice for women who dislike or cannot wear jewelry or who need a touch of color to highlight their faces. Tying scarves is easier than it looks. Most scarf departments have easy instruction books available. Small areas of bright color can be used to create a focal point, usually at the face.
- ◆ Purses should blend with the color of your coat or suit. Many women are choosing a small purse that can fit inside their brief case to avoid carrying two separate bags.

Jewelry

- ◆ A few pieces of jewelry, worn discreetly is the best choice.
- ◆ If it sparkles or shines too much; if it rattles, jingles or makes noise it will be distracting in meetings and on the presentation floor.

Shoes and Hosiery

- ◆ Hosiery. The hue should blend with the color of your clothing. Sheer nylons are the most sophisticated. Sheer cotton tights are acceptable with short skirts or casual style clothing.
- ◆ Shoes should be in good repair and polished. A medium heel height provides the most comfort.

Hair, Nails, Make-up.

- ◆ Get a haircut before you need one. This is particularly important if you wear a shorter hair style. Keep hair neat and in place.

- ◆ Hair lengths below the shoulders appear youthful. If you choose to wear your hair long, make sure you keep it from hiding the eyes. “Playing” with your hair or constantly pushing it aside becomes distracting and can make you appear nervous.
- ◆ Nail polish is appropriate, but if it chips, take it off. Subtle tones work best. Bright colors will draw attention to the hands, especially if you gesture or “talk” with your hands.
- ◆ Make-up. This varies with your comfort level. Generally, a cheek blush, mascara and lipstick is all you need.
- ◆ Peach or rose colors work well with pale skin tones. Wine or burgundy work well for darker skin tones.
- ◆ If you choose to wear eye color, keep it soft and natural in tone. Brown, taupe, gray work best. Shadow should get lighter as it moves up toward the
- ◆ brow line.
- ◆ Lip gloss or full lip colors should complement your clothing tones.
- ◆ Almost every major department store has excellent consulting services on clothing choices. Check with their “career clothing” department to make an appointment. Make-up tips and consultations can also be arranged in major department stores or done on a drop-in basis at cosmetic counters.

For the short in stature:

The most slimming and height enhancing combination is monochromatic in muted colors. Keep shoes and socks in the same color tone as well. Avoid contrasting colored belts that cut your figure in half.

General Comments

It is almost impossible to discuss this topic without debate. There is typically either disagreement about the generalizations or about what the rules should be. The answer to almost all questions is to look at the organization and/or who will be making decisions based on their perception of you. What is your dress communicating to them? Is it what you want to communicate?

Ultimately, we get to decide what dress standard we use. Others get to decide what their assumptions are about you based on your dress choices. Many times it is an unconscious judgement, but a judgement non-the-less. Hopefully, this list will give you a starting point or some things to think about regarding dress.