

Image Development for Men

how appearance sends a message

by Victoria Rayner, Image Contributing Editor

Imagine the scenario. You are talking on the telephone with a very respected, very wealthy businessman. The kind with a house in every major western capital. The well respected man is looking for advice and asking for your expertise on personal style. You are a state-certified appearance counselor, one of an increasing number of highly trained estheticians educated not only in skin care and fashion awareness, but in the psychological implication of clothing attire. By definition, well schooled in the arts and the potent imagery associated with style created by color, proportion, line, shape and form. As an interfashion advisor, you are cashing in on one of the booming fields of the '90s, "image development."

One Man's Story



This client came in to evaluate his "look" and make a change for the better. This particular client's appearance made him look like an angry person. People kept mentioning to him that the initial reaction they had was that he was not a nice person, and not approachable.

So, he came in for appearance counseling to **learn** about the various options available to "soften" his appearance so that he would **appear** more receptive.



1-The original wardrobe: business casual

In terms of his wardrobe, this depicts the client's own choice of attire before he understood the principals of color, line, texture, and design. The colors he had chosen are not flattering to his color palette, and neither are the shades. There is no relationship among his skin texture, hair texture and the fabric, and this produces a negative effect in its **composition**.

2-The original wardrobe: business suit

The suit above reflects a time warp-not a good representation of today's fashion. In addition to finding out what fashion styles were appropriate for his physique, the appearance counseling program gave him more insight as to what is currently more appropriate in today's fashion.



3-The updated look, after consultation

What was **finally** chosen was **an** interchangeable combination, with a double-breasted jacket **worn** with an updated tie and more modern shirt collar, combined with brown shoes.

The look and image were restructured to consider

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The process

You listen attentively as your client describes what he is doing now and what his costuming needs are. Your precise fashion guidance from last year resulted in an image for **this** man that could only be described as strong, sure, and powerful.

Now, he has other esthetic concerns and he has come back for your direction in selecting smart but casual clothing and accessories that will make him appear more accessible. For this current business deal, his needs revolve less around power pursuits, and more around informality. He tells you he must appear competent yet easygoing. He is **walking** into a sticky professional situation where there is conflict and a desperate struggle for dominance is going on. His entire demeanor has to fit perfectly into this crossover scenario, but not too snugly. If he comes across as the reputed powerhouse that he is, he will ignite the flame. He goes on to say why he has to be Mr. Pink. As **the** plot thickens, you begin to understand that he wants to come in the back door in a major takeover bid. The message has been made clear, high-visibility **will** drive the asking **price** up.

Your first instinct is to suggest "workwear," flannel shirts paired with T-shirts and worn with coveralls, then there is even a more tentative move **into** recreational clothing, unpressed cotton shirts with **rolled** cuffs and open collars worn with dockers. But this look is too stereotyped, too pigeonholed it will identify him as a white-collar worker with white-collar preoccupations. It will not produce the physical impact of a man with non-threatening opinions. He needs an image that will convey unspoken messages that will diffuse the situation and subtly persuade others to cooperate with him and for that he has come to you.

You have taught your client well, he knows that a man's role is his operative identity and style choices follow therefrom. Many a business deal has been left hanging in a closet.

As you sit down to **summarize** the essential points covered in the conversation you refer to **the** information you so carefully documented and prepare to research it.

For this specific client what is called for is an image that evokes working-class sensibility as well as the abiding dignity of the American worker. After an intense study (which you are handsomely compensated for financially) you learn that blue collar workers feel more secure around those in loosely **constructed** garments. Starched, buttoned up shirts tend to reflect an uncompromising persona.

From your findings, you present a number of **pro-**
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One Man's Story continued

all of the elements of the client's image, and support who he is on both a personal and a professional level. This individual is in property management and as person. now has a refined vision of the esthetic aspect of his personality. which he had difficulty previously articulating in his manner of dress.

Men can be very esthetic as well, which they are but are not really sure how to handle it, until you direct them properly!

4-The updated look: semi-casual

On a casual level, men can benefit equally when they dress with the seasonal color concept. In addition, they can use the psychology of color to warm up their image, as we did with this client, so that people will perceive his personality as more inviting. The gold is interpreted as a friendly color that people actually feel comfortable around when they encounter.



5-The updated look: business casual/leisure

The last choice was appropriate for both the professional and casual look. It is a cashmere jacket with matching slacks and a crew neck t-shirt. The cashmere gives off the same sensation as color, only the warmth is perceived through touch, through texture. The sensation will exude the warmth. The crew neck is very modern yet it can communicate casual, less structured attire. When it is teamed up with the more formal blazer, it gives a mixed message of both casual sporty and distinguished.



professional uniform options for your client to choose from, all of which are derived from the world of labor. This encompasses fundamental clothing such as supple, double stitched, chambray work shirts, sturdy denim trousers, western belts, and visored caps that naturally breed social acceptance. You do not restrict your illusionistic recommendations to just clothing, you also write out detailed descriptions of hairstyles, eyewear and other expressionism accessories.

In the end, you create an inventive assembly of style components, an image for your client that is more agile, flexible, and energetic. You have tailored a wardrobe to fit the role the client wants to project. His low-profile look will now blend seamlessly into his working surroundings.

Image development vs. image consulting

It is only natural for people to assume at first that there is little difference between image development and image consulting. But there are traps for the unskilled and inexperienced: technical know-how is meaningless if powers of observation and analysis are not keenly developed.

All sessions start with a fascinating dialogue between the subject and the appearance counselor that establishes the directive based on the clients professional or social costuming requirements. This understanding provides a foundation from which the new image is to be created. The idea is to capture the essence of the subject in the way in which they wish to be perceived by others. It is therefore important to start out with a clear idea of what they want to convey. Image development is most successful when all inessential elements that do not contribute to the illusion are dispensed with.

What also distinguishes image development from image consulting is the lengthy investigative research that is required. In fact, this is where the appearance counselor derives a lot of pressure and satisfaction from the work. This aspect is really intriguing because it is based on the psychology of appearance. A wide variety of ingenious approaches are explored to facilitate a desired response. The appearance counselor provides the client with a list of useful accessories to broaden the range of style options available to the client. The final effect must be descriptive and expressive without being overstated.

For the image to be believable, it must retain the client's own distinct character. Thereby to be effective image development cannot merely be about representing the outward appearance of an individual [as it is with image consulting] it has to be just as much about the knowledge of how to capture attention and hold

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interest. Understanding of the optical effects of style **and** various color combinations and their psychological impact is essential if the client is to succeed in making their new image do what they want it to do.

The knowing how is crucial to increase the effect. Lack of confidence is a result of ignorance of the basic principles, in image development, as in any study, there are certain rules and guidelines that must be learned. As every experienced appearance counselor knows without this solid framework, the whole image would collapse. The appearance counselor's skills must be transferred to the client so they can emphasize the **message** behind their new image.

Independence vs. interdependence

One could say the metamorphosis that takes place with the client is so profound that it involves new sets of personality traits and/or attitudes. It is a process of **self-acceptance**, **surrender**, non-attachment, and letting go of what does not work for what does. The appearance counselor helps the client to identify what is possible and desirable at a particular **point** in time.

No matter how successful the new look is, after a while, sometimes months or years, the client's fashion needs **will** change and **the** image that was once perfect will become outdated and unattractive. Assessment and reassessment are constants in image development and for the client to be independent, he must learn the process of self-evaluation and periodic re-invention. Knowing what to do with appearance is comforting to the client and as a result he feels more secure and has higher self-esteem.

Regardless of what a man does, he has to coordinate his business uniform **every** day. The image he creates defines his existence, and distinguishes him at first glance. All other experiences he has of himself, his personality, his behavior, will follow from the ways **others** interpret that image. This is why image development is important. Since a professional man has to **make** fashion choices, he needs to know the consequences of those choices. Only then can he have the **full** range of objective and subjective freedom. ■

Victoria L. Rayner lectures on personal growth, stress management, image **development** and **motivation** and wrote "The



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A contributor to **several** professional and consumer publications, **she's** a frequent guest on radio and television. **Rayner** received the distinguished **KRON** (NBC affiliate) "For Those Who Care" award and **was** honored by the Commission on the **Status** of Women. **Rayner** operates the Center for Appearance & Esteem, 251 Post St. San Francisco, Ca (415) 398-6013. fax (415) 398.7240.

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