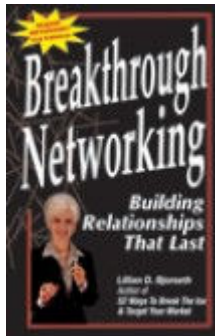


What You Say Before You Speak

Submitted by [Heidi Richards](#) on January 10, 2011 – 11:42 am



By **Lillian Bjorseth**



The success of any personal encounter begins the second someone lays eyes on you, usually before either of you speaks.

Someone sees you across the room.

You exchange smiles, and both of you “eye” each other.

You are the presenter or the meeting chair, and everyone watches as you prepare in the front of the room.

While there are 86,400 seconds in a day, it takes 10 or fewer for to you make a first impression on others. The decision is based on your image, a combination of appearance and behavior. That’s why dressing appropriately is a key factor in your success in the workplace and social settings.

Because you are in charge of how you look and how you act, you are in charge of the impression you make. I call it Impression Management. You need to decide what impact you want to make and then how to make it. This article will examine how your appearance “speaks.”

The Messages of Color

Color, style and fit are the one-two-three punch in your appearance arena. Color elicits conscious and unconscious reactions. It appeals to you or sidetracks you, and, thus impacts your opinions of others and vice versa. What is most important in business is people’s response to color. Secondary is what colors are most complementary to your skin tone, your eyes, your hair color, etc. This may turn upside down what you have

learned from an image consultant or read in fashion magazines. There's hope: you may be able to use accessories in your best colors to accentuate your features.

Here's a sampling of what colors "say."

Black – most powerful color, dignity, sophistication and slimming

Blue – calm, reliable, serene

Brown – dependable, practical, stable (not a power color)

Gray – success, perception increases as shade deepens

Navy Blue – authority, knowledge, responsibility

Pink – friendly, flexible, sensitive, approachable,

Red – adventurous, exciting ... but also sexually arousing

White – clean, formal, sophistication

What Style Says

Style, the second punch, encompasses both the style of the garments you choose as well as your distinctive manner of putting outfits together.

Men have long dictated the look of success in traditional Corporate America. Their fundamental uniform is the business suit, with long-sleeve shirt and tie. Their business casual look is dress pants and a long-sleeve shirt. The former is a powerful uniform because wearing a jacket with long sleeves, slightly padded shoulders and a collar makes you appear one-third more powerful.

The debate has long raged as to whether women need to adopt the "male look" to be taken seriously and considered powerful. My contention is the most powerful, professional look is a suit, and it is non-gender. I don't understand all this concern about looking like a man. I have always felt 100 percent a woman when I wear a suit. I certainly look a lot different than a man looks in his! A good business casual look for women is a dark skirt or slacks and a solid or coordinating long-sleeve blouse.

Women in business are often more concerned about looking attractive in the office. I agree, however, ensure that others listen to you rather than look at you. You want to be feminine, but not frilly or fluffy. You want to be stylish, but not to the point where your clothes speak louder than you do.

Women have such a plethora of choices that you need to be particularly

astute in choosing proper attire for the work place. While it may appear that rules have relaxed, my experience shows unwritten dogma still prevails. I know firsthand from my days in Corporate America that top-level people do discuss the dress and behavior of others ... behind closed doors.

Fit Has a Voice, Too.

You may have selected the right color in the proper style; however, if your clothes don't look as if they were made for you, you still are lacking a piece of the puzzle.

You don't have to buy custom-made clothing. Department stores and boutiques typically have tailors on the premises. If not, find a neighborhood tailor who can do wonders with a nip here and a tuck there.

The money you spend to make the sleeves, pants and skirts the right length and the waistline fit perfectly will give you increased self-confidence and that indescribably good feeling that you are a winner!

When in doubt, buy one quality item instead of two less expensive ones. You will feel and look better in a well-tailored outfit; therefore, you exude more confidence and garner more respect. Good quality means fine fabrics such as wools and linens; sturdy construction – pockets that lie flat, plaids that match at the seams and no gimmicks that will date the outfit.

If budget is a concern (and it is for many of us!), watch for seasonal sales at higher-end department stores rather than shopping at discount stores. Sales items can be double-edged swords. They can add quality to your wardrobe. A sale item, however, is not a bargain when it doesn't complement or coordinate with anything else in your closet. Also, the most stylish piece is wrong if it pulls, puckers, bags or droops on you.

What do you “say” without speaking? The choice, as always, is yours!

Lillian BJORSETH is a highly sought after communication and networking skills speaker, trainer, coach and author. Her best-seller, [Breakthrough Networking: Building Relationships That Last](#), is in the third edition. She also has a popular online course, [“What You Say Before You Speak.”](#)