

DAILY REPORT

THE GOOD LIFE

Creating a 'personal brand'

FROM YOUR LOOK to your tone of voice, image consultant says the first 10 seconds are key to making a positive first impression

MARY WELCH | Special to the *Daily Report*

REMEMBER YOUR MOTHER lecturing you about the importance of first impressions?

Well, she was right.

"Within the first three to 10 seconds of meeting someone, they will have made judgments and assume they know your educational level, your values in life, your professional success," says Peggy M. Parks.

A former runway model, Parks later entered the corporate world where colleagues constantly sought her advice on how to achieve a look that projected confidence and professionalism. A couple of years ago, she decided she could take what she modestly calls her innate "sense of style and panache" and turn it into a full-time consultancy. Parks is now president of The Parks Image Group.

Instant impressions are not just visual, she warns. She advises that about 55 percent of a person's opinion of you is based on visual cues such as dress and grooming. Tone of voice is the next 38 percent and only about 7 percent is based on the content of a conversation. The precision of her calculations, she says, is based on her long experience watching how people interact.

"All that within the first 10 seconds," she says. "You only have a few seconds to make that first impression and then they've decided. So it's up to you to make



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IMAGE CONSULTANT PEGGY PARKS says because people are always being sized up by colleagues and bosses, clients need a "personal brand."

sure that your appearance brings out the essence of who you really are. You don't wear your school name on your lapel, but you can make sure that you are properly and consistently positioned so that people know who you are."

Creating an image is not just for red carpet moments. Whether it's fair or not, colleagues, bosses and clients are always sizing you up, she says. You need what Parks calls a "personal brand."

That doesn't mean you have to always be dressed for a presentation, but she does caution against inconsistency. A mixed

message is ... well, a mixed message.

Image consultants such as Parks can do a lot more than help you pick out the right shoes. They can tutor you in the table manners your parents never taught or how to discreetly pick up a dinner tab, reassuring your colleagues or clients that you didn't end up in their social milieu by taking a wrong turn.

"Business success is about building relationships," says Marion Gellatly, president of the Association of IMAGE CONSULTANTS International, told *The New York Times* in a Sept. 17, 2006,

story. "So learning to put someone at their ease, displaying appropriate manners and communications clearly are critically important."

For those seeking an image consultant, the AICI is a good place to start. The professional trade association has an exacting certification policy and members adhere to strict professional standards. "Getting someone who is certified is very important," says Parks, who is certified by AICI. "A lot of people call themselves IMAGE CONSULTANTS but mostly they like clothes and like to shop. Again, it is more than just the clothes; it's putting them together right."

Parks suggests that a potential client interview several certified consultants. "It really is a matter of chemistry," she says. "You want to be able to work closely with the consultant. They're going to be going through your closet."

Image consultants generally charge by the hour (Parks' fee is \$150 an hour with a two-hour minimum). She will shop and select clothes for her clients but they are

not obligated to purchase them, she says. Parks recommends a color analysis and a style analysis. The style analysis is a 129-page printout of exactly what clothes work best with your body proportions and personality. "It will tell you what kind of shirt collar goes best with your neck and head, what kind of trousers work best," she says.

Parks, who works frequently with attorneys, says having a proper business suit—for men and women—is no longer enough. "You can wear a blue suit or black pumps, but there's no creativity in that. Often professional people believe that if they have a good suit that it's enough. But it's not. It's a matter of standing out. You don't want to be boring. You don't want to look like you're wearing a uniform or that you're looking like you came out of the 1980s."

Remember, she says sounding suspiciously like your mother, "You never have a second chance to make a great first impression." ®



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