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ASK THE PRO:

YOUR PROFESSIONAL IMAGE: FASHION VS. BUSINESS

Interview with Mary Lou Andre, Founder – Organization by Design

Q: How important is it for an executive or professional to be up-to-date in wardrobe?

A: It's one of those ugly facts of life. Our professionalism is judged in many more ways than just our business acumen, product knowledge or ability to get the job done. Non-verbal communication – posture, eye contact, clothing and grooming choices – all speak volumes about our professionalism before we ever utter a word. Being up-to-date, fresh and polished with all your wardrobe and grooming choices is a great way to send the message that you're with it, details matter to you and you're a current thinker.

Q: What fall trends are appropriate for business this year?

A: For women, we're seeing a lot of chocolate brown (a.k.a. the new black!), turquoise and skirts. The gypsy look continues but is not appropriate in most office settings. Boots get taller, necklaces get longer and textured hosiery for day and night abounds.

Q: And what about the men? Any advice for them this year?

A: Men, pack away your chinos and polo's right after Labor Day. Whether or not you choose to wear a tie is still an option in most industries. However, stepping it up with a fresh new blazer, medium weight wool pants and some interesting dress shirts (i.e. those with subtle patterns) is a smart and easy way to move beyond summer "business causal" into fall's more "business appropriate" look.

Q: How can you appear stylish without overdoing it?

A: For professionals, we advise freshening up your shoes, shirts, blouses and accessories each season as an appropriate (and cost effective) way to introduce trends into your business wardrobe without going over the top.

Q: What's your advice for women –on being feminine and still meaning business?

A: Showing an appropriate amount of skin, adding some soft colors and accessorizing with a bit of sparkle are all great ways to be feminine yet still office-appropriate. Skirts and v-neck tops can replace pants and turtlenecks if you choose to be a bit more daring in that area, a lilac blouse with a navy suit can be less severe than pairing navy with a standard white or cream top, and a colorful brooch pinned at your lapel adds visual interest to your face while projecting a feminine flair.

Q: Any other tips?

A: Most of our senior level professional clients want help stepping their look up a notch. We call this “the look of a leader.” Here is our best advice in this area:

- Dress at or above industry standards
- Fit in while standing out
- Appear effortlessly pulled together at all times
- Pay extra attention to the details that complete your look
- Set the tone for what is expected from others in your area of responsibility
- Be consistent with your image at all times

*Mary Lou Andre is a nationally recognized professional image expert, and the founder of Organization By Design, Inc., a wardrobe management and fashion consulting firm. She has appeared on ABC, CBS and CNN and her fashion and professional image insights are regularly featured in magazines such as Esquire, Executive Female, Real Simple, In Style and Sales & Marketing Magazine. She is the editor of dressingwell.com and the author of “**Ready to Wear: An Expert’s Guide to Choosing and Using your Wardrobe.**” She and her team of expert image consultants are available for one-on-one coaching. Mary Lou is also available to conduct professional image workshops for all levels of employees. She can be reached at 800-578-3770 and marylou@dressingwell.com.*