

What Color Are You Wearing and What Business Effect Does It Have?

By Denise Martin

We live in a colorful world, with colors transmitting a strong psychological message, of which most people are largely unaware. At an unconscious level, the colors selected – in advertising copy
in logos
in office décor
in clothing worn -- play a large role in supporting (or hindering) the desired function of whatever the underlying vehicle is. Choosing colors wisely is more than just what 'looks good', but really about the desired communication message.

Here the focus will be on just the last arena – color implications in business dress. In the specific context of clothing, colors carry innate hard-wired connotations.

- Wear **black** to appear aggressive, forceful, in charge, the no nonsense boss, all business persona
 - o If you are a court attorney, avoid wearing dark suits to court, for your client to appear more sympathetic.
 - o Attorneys out of court , private investigators, etc. should wear dark suits to show their strong commitment and ability to get the job done.
- Wearing **white** signals passive, non-threatening, submissive, good
 - o Services involving trust – daycares, elementary schools, hospitals, nursing homes – wear white to best effect.
 - o Non-profits who want to attract volunteers (submissive) around their mission should embrace the purity of white and avoid dark colors.
- **Black and white together** strongly polarize, create judgmental thinking –
 - o Mediators, facilitators, counselors should avoid the b/w combination
 - o Political candidates who want to rally the public around an issue are wise to wear black and white together.
- **Red** signals aggression, without the hard edge of black. The wearer of red displays dominance, competitiveness (not a team player).
 - o Family counselors, mediators, facilitators should avoid red.
 - o A male in a red tie looks like a leader. Interviewing for a job as a turnaround expert, an executive that will take charge and 'clean house', a micromanager will be well served by wearing a red tie to the interview
 - o A female interviewing in red is fine with men, but interviewing with other females, a female in red comes across as threatening and superficial

- When negotiating, the wearer of red signals hard core aggression – not one who is going to give much. Blue signals a less aggressive negotiation stand, a willingness to settle faster.
- **Yellow** is a tough color to wear, signaling weakness. The more intense the color, the more strength it carries until it gets to electric yellow, which shows great dominance.
- **Green** is the worst color to wear, besides yellow, jading the complexion of the wearer to look sickly, instead of attractive (red and black) or likable (blue and white).
- **Blue** signals likable, with especially positive connotations in creative fields.
 - Men in high positions with blue ties look like visionaries, and carry the perception of working well with others.
 - Women in the company of men are best to avoid blue or will be perceived as having low energy (oxygen association). Women wearing blue in the company of other women are perceived as likable.

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