

Judging a Book by Its Cover

By Wade Younger, CSP

For the past several months I have been working on a project at Wachovia Bank. I must say that, I have been in shock at the matter in which several employees present themselves in their dress and grooming. Yet frankly, some days I am shocked! Did you know that in a mere 30 seconds people seeing you for the first time are making assumptions about things like your educational level, your trustworthiness, your potential for success, your social standing, and even your sense of humor? Yikes!

Guess what the number one reason for rejecting a job applicant is?
Personal appearance.

How about the most important factor in promotions?
Yep, you guessed it, personal appearance.

You may be a terrific person, but in today's fast-paced world, you are often going to be judged by what you look like. Your brilliant wit and great work may never get a chance to be displayed.

Here are some tips for making the most of that initial 30 seconds:

Dress appropriately to achieve your goals. Are you going to a networking function to generate sales leads? You may be more comfortable in jeans, but you won't convey professionalism. If you think "This is who I am and I refuse to compromise," that's fine. Just realize that the world will judge you by your choice in apparel and you may not get many leads. Make a statement or generate leads – the choice is yours.

SMILE! People will think you are fun to be with and are comfortable. A smile is a great way to establish rapport. And don't forget to make eye contact.

People notice everything! Take a good look at the details of your appearance. What do they say about you? If you want to be viewed as competent and successful, but your shirt is stained or your hose are run, your image will suffer. Are your fingernails chewed to the quick? Are your fingernails three inches long? People will notice and judge you. Do you really want to be judged by your fingernails?

If it's not noticed, it's fine. In Fruition image sessions, people ask about certain things – hair, make-up, jewelry. The goal is to not be judged poorly because of some aspect of your appearance. Usually if no one notices your make-up or hair, you're doing it right. If you want to wear a purple mohawk or get your nose pierced, rock on! But again, people will use those to determine what kind of person you are. It's



best to wear the team uniform if you want to play the game. Wear the nose ring on Friday night, leave it out for work.

Learn the rules, then you can break them. You may find that you can push the envelope and express yourself once you know the rules. For example, you may not want to show up in leather the first day of a new job. But after a while, you may see that wearing a leather blazer is a great way to establish your individuality AND still be viewed as a professional.