

WW | job smart

# how to get ahead at work

The answer to career success may be hanging in your wardrobe now

by Esther Phua

Everyone wants to get ahead at work. But sometimes the critical difference between those who make it and those who don't is this: The former can exert legitimacy, which in turn leads to more successful negotiations – and this is the secret to success in life, says career coach and author Lee Miller.

In particular, Lee says, the image you present to the world is the first “advertisement” of your abilities. “You need to be proactive in establishing your own legitimacy. You cannot assume that people know what you do or your credentials,” he states.

“One of the ways you can establish your own legitimacy is by how you dress,” he continues. “Image helps to create or destroy legitimacy.” In his book *UP – Influence, Power And The U Perspective*, Lee uses a story about a real estate agent to drive home this point.

The story centres around a property – a beautiful house situated on a fabulous location with excellent ocean views. It was listed with the agency that employed the grandson of the landowner, and only he was allowed to show it.

The grandson was young, cocky and self-absorbed. He also basked in his pride that his family owned the property, and showed his arrogance by dressing like a beach bum. The property didn't get any interested buyers.

When his grandmother died, a family tussle ensued and the property went to the court. It was shown by numerous brokers via multiple listings, and sold almost immediately for the full asking price of around S\$5 million.

“The difference between a buyer putting up the full asking price and the house sitting on the market unsold had nothing to do with the property. It had everything to do with the appearance and approach of the salesperson,” says Lee.

## Who's Your Market?

“Many younger professionals think it's more important to project their own personal style, rather than to conform to the expectations of others,” he says. This works at a party where you want to attract like-minded friends, but it's not likely to work on the job. Instead, it pays to dress to influence. Do show your own personality, but also think about the message you want to send.

“You want your appearance to say, ‘I'm experienced and successful. I know what I'm doing here. You can trust me to help you. I care about what you want’.”

But projecting the right image can be tricky, because everyone you meet at work has a slightly different expectation



Can that orange blouse help her get to the top?

of what a successful and reliable person looks like. So pay close attention to the reaction you get from others when you walk into a room. Adjust your appearance till you get the reaction you want.

“How we look and how we carry ourselves are essential ingredients, but it's the perception of others that matters – because they are the ones who give us legitimacy,” he concludes. **W** Lee Miller is giving a one-day seminar, “A Guide to Successful Negotiation for Women”, on Apr 3 at the Sheraton Towers Hotel. Call 6236 2760 for details.

Lee Miller is the author of the new book *UP – Influence, Power And The U Perspective: The Art of Getting What You Want*.

A Harvard Law School graduate, Miller is also Managing Director of NegotiationPlus.com and a radio host on careers.

