

Targeted Teaching Topic



FELONY FASHION FAILURES



Contacts, Networking, and Socializing....Oh My!

Those three words may not seem as scary as the “lions, tigers and bears...oh my!” that Dorothy feared in the Wizard of Oz, but they can be just as dangerous for an entrepreneur.

With that scary R word (*RECESSION!!!*) and the credit crunch making the headlines, entrepreneurs need to be especially mindful that the impressions they make when meeting a prospective client/customer, venture capitalist, or banker can be make-or-break. From the clothes that you wear, to your table manners, to what you say and write, everything will be scrutinized just that much more carefully.

The Targeted Teaching Topic in the September 2006 issue of Nebraska E-News Monthly and the accompanying support materials addressed networking, business casual attire, and related topics. Because of the importance of making positive impressions, this and future Targeted Teaching Topics will explore other aspects of creating positive impressions when contacting potential clients or investors, networking, and socializing.



Studies have shown that when meeting a person for the first time, your nonverbal communication makes all the difference. That means that no matter how silky smooth your verbal delivery, clients, prospective partners, or venture capitalists/bankers are likely to tune you out if they are focused on that stain on your tie or that too-revealing blouse. The clothing you wear, no matter how fashionable or expensive, may be a roadblock to your success if it makes a negative first impression.

So, for your consideration, here are some key “Fashion Felonies” in no particular order of importance...they are all bad! And many apply to either gender, so please don’t stop reading with just one of the categories.



Women’s Fashion Felonies

1. Clothing that is way too tight, too short, or too revealing
2. Open-toed shoes with visible stocking seams
3. Too much make-up or perfume
4. Buttoned garments that gap, showing skin or underwear
5. Shoes that are the wrong color, wrong style, or wrong height for the business outfit or occasion
6. Out-of-date hair style or too trendy hairstyle
7. Overly gaudy, jingly, or clangy jewelry
8. Torn hems and linings that are visible

Men’s Fashion Felonies

1. Poorly fitting clothes—too baggy, too tight
2. Scuffed/unpolished shoes, sandals (with or without socks) or sneakers when wearing business attire (yikes!)
3. Showing your hairy legs because your socks are too short
4. Clip-on ties or ties that are too short or too long
5. Not wearing a belt
6. Wearing a belt that doesn’t match the dress shoes you have on (and you should have them on, by the way!)
7. Earrings, visible piercings, or tattoos
8. Unkempt (uncombed or unclean) hair



Professional Development Felony Fashion Failures

Teachers Guide

Relevant National Content Standards for Entrepreneurship

Ready Skills	
The basic business knowledge and skills that are prerequisites or co-requisites for becoming a successful entrepreneur.	
H	Professional Development Understands concepts and strategies needed for career exploration, development, and growth
Career Planning	
H.02	Analyze employer expectations in the business environment
Job-Seeking Skills	
H.07	Utilize job-search strategies
H.16	Determine skills needed to enhance career progression
H.17	Utilize resources that can contribute to professional development (e.g., trade journals/periodicals, professional/trade associations, classes/seminars, trade shows, and mentors)
H.18	Use networking techniques for professional growth

The personal image projection issues that are important for job-seekers apply equally, if not even more, to prospective and current entrepreneurs. Young people, especially those in what some call the “alphabet generations---Generation X, Y, etc.” may have become too accustomed to their high school and college attire and grooming habits. They also have become used to a marketplace that had a shortfall in available employees, and therefore was willing to accept a wider range of acceptable attire and grooming.

Change is in the Air! Entrepreneurs...be Forewarned!

With the global economy, entrepreneurs and job-seekers alike are competing not just against individuals living in their area or even in the United States. They have to compete against the world.

Also, the economic downturn (Recession) that we have arguably just entered poses new challenges to the entrepreneur. It’s increasingly difficult to convince bankers, loan officials, investors, and venture capitalist to invest their capital in a new and potentially risky entrepreneurial venture. It’s not just your business plan they will scrutinize...it’s the entrepreneur him/herself.

That face-to-face meeting can form either a positive or negative first impression. And, it’s the clothing the person wears, the non-verbal cues they give off, and the personal grooming habits in evidence that could close them off to an entrepreneur. That can and does happen before the entrepreneur even utters a word or presents a beautifully crafted business plan.

Making a Positive First Impression

As our culture and economy have changed, basic conversation skills and etiquette are no longer necessarily taught through example in a family setting. Appropriate verbal and listening skills, basic dining and attire etiquette, are not something that we can assume young people (or adults for that matter) are able to demonstrate. For entrepreneurs and job-seekers both, the lack of these skills and the knowledge of how to use them to network can be devastating.

Discussion Tips-Student Handouts:

Student handout pages have been provided to help guide classroom discussion. You can also use these as overhead transparency master if PowerPoint projection is not available.

- **First Impression Focal Points Handout**

- Using the four key points from the handout, allow students to offer insights into what would be considered “best practice” for an aspiring entrepreneur seeking business guidance, venture funding, partners, etc.

- **How Much Do These Count? Handout**

- Ask the students to fill in their best guesses as to how much each of these factors counts in forming first impressions. The answers are 7%, 38% and 55% in descending order on the handout.
- After gaining a range of answers, show and/or tell them the actual percentages (based on multiple studies)

- **Clothing Pointers Handouts**

- Use these handouts to help guide your discussion of what is best practice for each aspect of the personal image/appearance. Suggest that the students take notes for future reference on what is “good” and what is “bad” relative to forming positive first impressions.
- There will be differences in opinion based on each student’s background, experience, culture, etc. Reinforce that you are discussing what “sells best” in today’s business world.

- **PowerPoint Slides**

- The slides simply serve as another way to guide class discussions.
- Add your own slides based on your experiences, recent articles, etc.
- There are always “grey areas” but urge students to remember that they need to focus on the perceptions of their target audience, not their own personal preferences. It’s all about what the customer, client, prospective partner, banker or venture capitalist is thinking...not their own personal “flair for the fashionable or trendy.”

First Impression Focal Points

What do people look at...and judge you by?

➤ Clothes

➤ Hair

➤ Carriage

○ Posture

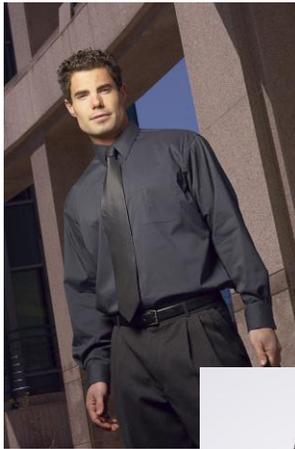
○ Projecting confident “aura”

➤ Smile



How much do these count?

- **7 %** -- verbal messages (words)
- **38 %** -- tone, pacing, inflection
- **55 %** -- speaker's appearance & body language



Clothing Pointers for the Female Entrepreneur

Making a Positive First Impression



Skirts, Dresses

- Knee-length or slightly above is best
- No “wrinkly” fabrics

Blouses

- Coordinate color with the skirt/slacks
- Laundered and pressed; no “wrinkly” fabrics
- Neckline should be conservative
- Shells (not see-through though) are fine



Jewelry

- Gold or silver
- Nothing overwhelming in size, brightness
- Earrings should be in nickel-sized range
- Less is more...multiple earrings on each ear are not a good idea.



Shoes

- Think comfort
- Open toes or heels not as professional looking as closed toe/heel
- Low pumps (1-1 ½”) are best
- Save the high-high heels for social events
- Black, navy, taupe test best, red is ok with the right outfit

Hosiery

- Having a spare pair along can be a life-saver
- Check for snags/runs before important meeting

Clothing Pointers for the Male Entrepreneur

Making a Positive First Impression

Pants/Slacks

- Fit is important; not too loose/baggy, not too tight
- Always wear a belt or braces (suspenders)
- Flat front if slim; pleated for heavier builds
- Cuffed or plain equally acceptable
- Always clean; pressed
- Wool or poly/wool blend



Shirts

- Long-sleeve is the best professional look
- White tests best; colors or patterned are fine if not “over the top”
- Clean, well pressed; no such thing as permanent press!
- When buttoned at the collar, should be able to insert one finger easily



Necktie

- Silk always, no man-made fibers
- Tip of tie should hit right at mid-belt buckle for length
- No clip-ons



Belt

- Belt should match shoes
- Leather always
- Gold or silver buckle

Shoes

- Black or cordovan (brown looks casual)
- Always freshly polished
- Never tennis shoes



Socks

- Never show any “leg”
- Solid color that matches the slacks
- No patterns unless VERY sedate

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➤ Hair

➤ Carriage

○ Posture

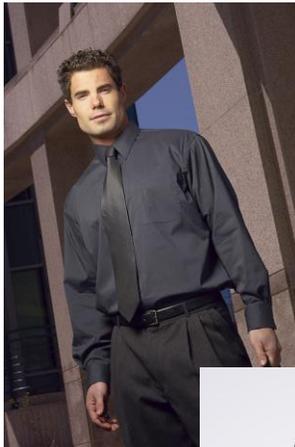
○ Projecting confident “aura”

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Clothing Pointers for the Female Entrepreneur

Making a Positive First Impression

Skirts, Dresses



Blouses



Jewelry



Shoes



Hosiery



Clothing Pointers for the Male Entrepreneur

Making a Positive First Impression

Pants/Slacks



Shirts



Necktie



Belt



Shoes



Socks

