

Women in Business

Special 'Image Consulting' Feature



Putting your best face forward

Helping professionals refine their look and return to the workforce is what image consulting is all about

By Karen Bridson-Boyczuk

Communication experts call relationships the 'new currency' in business.

And with a whopping 93 per cent of how we are perceived by others coming as a result of how we look and sound (according to a UCLA study), putting a professional face forward is now more essential than ever.

"Being able to build mutually-beneficial relationships is key to success in any business," said Donna Chevrier, an image and Emotional Intelligence expert, who helps people refine their look, manners and relationship skills to maximize their professional potential.

One of Chevrier's specialties is helping women who are returning to the workforce rev up their confidence and fine-tune their appearance.

"Most women who opt out of the workforce, for any reason, usually feel they need a transition from feeling like a stay at home mom," she said. "It can be hard. It can be a really tough thing."

Often women in this situation say they have lost some of their confidence, Chevrier said. "They want to feel confident and look credible," she said.

Mississauga resident Colleen Peddle recently underwent Chevrier's business makeover, six months after delivering her third child. "I still have the baby weight on and I'm squeezing back into the 'fat clothes,'" Peddle says with a laugh. "After each baby your posture changes, your body changes. I was ready for a perk-up."

Peddle said the makeover, including a haircut and colour by Antonio at Salon Botticelli - The Art of Hair, improved her self-confidence. "It's absolutely great," she said. "They put highlights in my hair and gave me what I call a funky cut. I'm just a



Before and After: Mississauga's Colleen Peddle recently underwent Donna Chevrier's business makeover, six months after delivering her third child.

low-maintenance kind of girl, so this was a huge amount of fun."

Chevrier's clients have a wide range of reasons for wanting her services, she said. "Some say they need a wardrobe that supports their success," she said. "Some say they are entertaining clients a lot and want to feel confident in their table manners and conversation skills. And sometimes it's just about improving their confidence with business etiquette."

And visual communication is key in this, she said. "We communicate all kinds of things visually," she said. "We communicate



Photos by Stephen Uhraney

our moral character, our trustworthiness, and many other things. All of these messages are sent through how we present ourselves. It's about image and body language. Our behavior comes out of what we believe. What people see is information they use to decide whether they trust someone or not."

With just seven per cent of how people perceive us based upon what we say (according to the UCLA study), Chevrier said professionals can't afford to drop the ball on image and communication. "It's pretty powerful," she said.

Meanwhile, Chevrier said this is not about having perfect features and

conventional 'beauty,' it's more about having a certain energy and way of carrying oneself, she said. "I think attractiveness is about someone who values themselves and others and that shows in the way we present ourselves."

Chevrier's image consultation starts with a needs analysis, she said. "We look at what they want to accomplish," she said. "Then we do a colour analysis where we determine what are their most harmonious and flattering colour groups."

This information can then inform choices on hair colour, wardrobe and cosmetics choices, she said.

Next is a visit to the hair stylist and hair colour specialist. "Also, we go through her makeup and see if it fits with her colour category," she said. "Usually this means buying a few items."

Shopping for new clothing is next, she said. "Many of my clients do pick a new wardrobe," she said.

Ultimately, this move toward change is about a desire to expand their potential, Chevrier said. "The physical change is a manifestation of their desire for self-actualization," she said.

Business etiquette is another key element of Chevrier's work. "Manners are breaking down," she said. "Business etiquette has always been a large component of my business. Some companies just have me come in and talk about this alone."

In order to stay on top of current trends and issues, Chevrier said she is constantly upgrading her skills and knowledge through courses. She started in the business in 1984.

And it's not just the fashion trends that have changed since her early days in image consulting. "Everything is so immediate," she said. "It's 'I have to have it by yesterday.' Communication has resulted in a lot of change and resulted in a lot of stress. And as a result, emotional power has become more powerful."

That's where Chevrier's Emotional Intelligence coaching comes in, she said. "It's about a range of personal, emotional and social skills that influence our ability to succeed in managing ourselves and the demands and pressures of our environment," she said.

Chevrier works with her clients on the BarOn EQ-I, an emotional power report, to determine their weaknesses and strengths.

For more information, visit www.donnachevrier.com

Donna Chevrier's top tips

1. Body language is more powerful than verbal language. Surveys show that when visual and verbal messages are incongruent, we trust visual messages. Some examples of positive visual messages are a warm smile with an outstretched hand for a handshake, impeccable grooming, well fitted clothing that complements our body and job level.

2. Surveys show that we do business with people we like and trust. Building trust requires good interpersonal skills, social responsibility, impulse control and empathy.

3. More business is lost through a lack of manners than a lack of knowledge. Some of the reasons:

A lack of knowledge can be admitted, it's temporary with the promise of finding the correct answer for the client usually quick and easy. A lack of manners is experienced as a failure to show respect for the client and impacts on trust. It is not discussed, but is felt deeply especially in a new business relationship.

Because it's not usually acknowledged by either person it is much more difficult to overcome.



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