

Building a Business Wardrobe

This is a very specialized type of wardrobe. You need to give this some serious planning. Three ways to break it down are to *know yourself*, *know your business*, and *know your closet*. Too often, women make the mistake of dressing for work as if they're going to a summer B-B-Q. According to John T. Molloy author of "The New Women's Dress for Success", 65-70% of women dress for failure. These women have degrees and are often highly educated yet limit their career potential simply by not dressing well.



Know yourself

Understand how to dress for your body type.

- Are you visually narrower at the shoulders than hips? You need more tailored structure on top like blouses to balance the wider hips. Lighter colors on top & darker on the bottom.
- Are you wider at the shoulders than at the hips? Less structure is needed on top. Shoulders can be softer tailoring and pants/skirts have more embellishment creating a better line. Wear darker colors on top & lighter on the bottom.
- Don't have a discernable waist? Wear tops that come below the natural waist to lengthen the torso.
- Are you naturally balanced all over? Excellent...as most styles will work for you. Just don't create a focal point that cuts your body in half.

Know the best colors to wear especially for work. These colors may be different from the color palette received from a consultant. Dark colors like navy, black, grey provide needed authority when you want to be taken seriously. Brown and earthtones make you approachable to win people over. Bright colors can cause you to lose power especially at meetings.

Be aware of how your fashion personality influences your closet decisions. Mr. Molloy mentions 8 traps to avoid. Two traps of particular importance to avoid are:

1. *Being tempted to follow fashion*...if you wear fashionable clothing, your peers will often perceive you as a 'lightweight' in your profession. Fashion designers don't care about your career. They're in the business to sell clothes every season. Your work environment is not the place to show off your style panache unless you happen to be working in a fashion-related industry.
2. *Dressing too provocatively for the office*...men will enjoy your look, maybe make a pass. Women will be annoyed and openly hostile. But one thing is definite; no one will be promoting you. If you want to be taken seriously at work, it is imperative to cover up.

Know your business

Be aware of the type of business you work in. Is it more *Traditional* like a lawyer or accountant? Or *Creative* like working in Public Relations? Is your career *People-oriented* such as being a Social Worker or Teacher? Perhaps *Casual* which would be appropriate for Computer Programming, for example?

These Four categories of career dressing were first defined by Judith Rasband, an international Image Consultant.

- **Traditional** workplaces demand the power Suit. You are conveying honesty, credibility.
- **Creative** offices allow a bit more leeway. The Suit is important but the cut can be more interesting. Accessibility & influence are being shown. For both of these categories, the clothing & accessories will be of very good quality material and workmanship.
- **People-oriented** careers can wear pieces that are softly tailored. Your clothing choices say you are approachable and knowledgeable.
- Those employed in more **Casual** type of careers may opt for informal to appear agreeable. Or these workers may be employed in front-line retail or warehouse. Their look is still clean and professional.



Know your closet

Now that you understand your specific body type, the right colors and what kind of career you have, you can begin to pare down the closet. You are creating a wardrobe for a specific activity. Another word for this is “capsule”. *A capsule is a cluster of clothing items that can be mixed to create a number of different outfits.* A capsule usually consists of a jacket/vest, two pants, two skirts, two blouses, two tops, a light sweater. And the accessories like shoes, boots, purse, jewelry, scarves, outerwear etc are included. One or two colors would be chosen to create color harmony. Women make mistakes in their business wardrobe by mixing clothing from the weekend fun items with the professional wear. Keep it separate!! Begin to do the following:

- Get the dated items out
- Get rid of the articles that are beyond repair eg. Missing special buttons that are long gone, perspiration stains, pilling
- Determine whether you are full-time or part-time in your work. If full-time, you will need at least two or three clothing capsules. And part-time work only needs one or two.
- Looking at your business clothing in your closet, can you begin to create a capsule? Think of it as shopping in your closet!!
- Create your required capsule(s). As you move through this exercise, items that you don't own but are needed to complete the capsule will become apparent. Have a sheet of paper to write down those items for future shopping purchases.
- Remember my shopping mantra... **Quality over Quantity**

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