

A MATTER OF STYLE

What not to wear' tips are oozing from every other magazine and TV show. so who on earth needs a personal image consultant? An increasing number of urban professionals. as it turns out

On a wet winter morning I splash out of Sydney's Town Hall station and dodge umbrellas en route to meet Evelyn Lundström, stylist supreme. A woman in heels and tailored A-line coat dashes ahead of me in the rain. She's wearing an intriguing pair of stockings: a corset-like effect trails down each calf, exposing alabaster skin in an age-defying and sexy manner. On arriving, I find the stockings and legs belong to the very affable—and authoritative—Ms Lundström herself.

Like any girl with a penchant for pretty things, I'd always fancied consulting a personal stylist. Ten years into my chosen career and I'd been wondering if my retro specs had become too artsy; my candy-coloured necklaces and floral prints too wacky. Yet I like my offbeat style, and would resent an arch-corporate stylist telling me to tame my curly locks or freckles. Could I learn something from an image consultant and still maintain my identity?

Evelyn starts by placing a folder of style notes in front of me. We discuss my values and how they affect my dress sense. 'Sometimes I see a completely different style direction for my clients, based on their lifestyles,' Evelyn explains. 'There are

women who say they have very corporate lives, yet their wardrobes are full of party dresses.' Ten minutes later and the evidence is clear: I'm conveying creativity and femininity, but barely a scrap of authority in my dress. So far, so interesting.

The next step is an inspection of my wardrobe at home. We pull out sweaters, pants, skirts and accessories and I'm asked to pick my favourite outfit. Evelyn is trying to pick my complexion—warm or cool?—and when I hold up my favourite cherry-red dress, she calls out an approving 'Aha'. 'You're a cool; definitely a cool,' she nods. So that's why I never look right in my beloved vintage '50s jacket—the fiery red strays too far into 'warm' territory.

Evelyn whisks out several colour wheels and we check if I should be wearing pale, dark, bright or dusky variations of cool. Held up to the face, the right colours will appear to enliven the skin while the wrong palette emphasises blemishes and tiredness. Turns out I'm a 'cool/light'. Is this concept hard for any of Evelyn's clients, especially the men, to grasp?

'Not at all. Once shown the right palette, everyone gets the hang of it. You hold your colour wheel at arm's length against an

item when shopping and you'll instantly know if it blends or not,' she affirms. It's not necessary to match the exact shade, and you can wear patterns containing colours that aren't 'yours'—so long as most of the item's base harmonises with your palette.

Next, we discuss styles. A complex combination of body parts come under scrutiny, from facial shape to shoulder slope, and ratio of leg length to torso. Also, is my frame bony, muscular or cushioned? The right clothing styles will lead to the most flattering silhouette possible. A short-waisted person can create a longer torso with dropped waistlines; a muscular person can downplay bulk by selecting structured fabrics that hold their line.

I ask how much this really matters in a corporate environment. 'Dressing right is part of developing your personal brand,' Evelyn instructs. 'Some career people look great on paper, but it's personal presentation that will get them through the door.' Clients range from women re-entering the workforce, to men and women keen to protect their current position. Often, she advises not just on style, but on interpersonal areas such as etiquette and verbal communication.

A dilemma for most women is how fashionable they should be. 'Women do need a fashion edge to look good in business,' Evelyn agrees. But it's not as hard as it sounds. 'Fashions only undergo major changes every four or five years—for the rest, women can get away with the "top and tail" effect, updating only their shoes, hair and accessories.' Cue Evelyn's impeccable tailoring, worn with Gothic stockings.

I'm relieved. When we hit the shops later, she leads me through boutiques filled with striking, avant-garde designs certain to convey a bolder look, not the collared blouses and staid blazers I'd dreaded. I mentally add up thousands of dollars' worth of wardrobe mistakes avoided.

With the day over, I consider the fee for this image update and decide it's justifiably professional. After all, the consultation can be life changing for clients. 'We help people get what they want by developing a style that works, and giving them the right social skills,' Evelyn says. 'Afterwards, they see new possibilities. They say, "I wish I'd known about this when I was younger!"'

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