



# WANT TO IMPRESS? DRESS LIKE A SUCCESSFUL LAWYER!

*By Terrie S. Wheeler, MBC*

Somewhere in the '90s, casual Friday happened. At the time, many law firms were concerned about client perceptions and would post notices at their reception desks to brace visitors for the shock of seeing their lawyers in Dockers and button-downs. Casual Friday soon morphed into the business casual movement, which led to an across-the-board acceptance of lawyers dressing more like normal people. And guess what? Lawyers loved it! Gone were the three-piece suits and pocket squares. Never again would women lawyers have to wear pantyhose and pumps.

But, as a lawyer, you're really not a normal person. You are brought in to solve the largest and most stressful personal and professional problems your clients will likely ever face. They look to you for the advice that will guide and direct them through a complex and complicated legal process. You are a representative of the judicial system, and could be the first lawyer your client has ever worked with. That said, you need to look the part! Consider these tips and commit to taking your image up to the next level.

**Perception v. Reality.** It's not about what you think is true because perception *is* reality. Good lawyers can be extremely perceptive. So too are prospective clients, referral sources, and even judges. Please keep this in mind when you get dressed tomorrow morning. Dress for the perceptions people have of you as a successful lawyer.

**What does a Successful Lawyer Look Like?** When you reflect on the traits and characteristics of the most successful lawyers you know, you might focus first on how smart and skilled they are in their fields. But move beyond that to their image and appearance. If you close your eyes, you will see they are well dressed, well groomed, manicured, pulled-together, sharp dressers, use tasteful accessories, have great posture, smile with warmth and integrity, and literally personify confidence.

**Conduct an Honest Self-Assessment.** How do you measure up to what your mind's eye perceives a successful lawyer looks like? When was your last haircut? Do you dress down if you know you aren't meeting clients? Whether you are a solo practitioner or working in a large firm; whether you work for the government or in a corporate legal department, you have to dress the part of a successful, competent lawyer. A good rule of thumb is to dress as well – or even better – than your boss, or your bosses' boss.

**The Cinderella Concept.** Remember what happened to the stepsisters when they tried to get the glass slipper to fit? They smashed and smushed, and tried to force their foot into a shoe that was just too small for them. Maybe you have gained a little weight and your professional wardrobe doesn't fit like it used to. Stop punishing yourself. Go out today and invest in a few high-quality pieces that look great on you *and* that you feel great in!

**Why are We Even Talking about my Shoes?** Well, because they are a very important accessory. When I see men or women in shoes that are dull, scuffed, old, stained, or in any other state of disrepair, it ruins the whole look. Buy high-quality shoes – even just a pair or two. Then, get to know your local shoe repair shop and take your shoes in for regular maintenance (buff, shine, polish, water repellent,) just like you would your car!

**Does Your Briefcase Date Back to Law School?** As a lawyer, you operate in a paper-based world. In fact, think about where the concept of a *briefcase* came from. There comes a time when you have to say goodbye to your loyal, hardworking satchel and replace it with one your clients would expect to see you carrying. If you look the part of a successful lawyer and walk into a meeting with some old relic, it detracts from your overall look of professionalism.

**Accessories Matter.** While you don't want to overdo it, a unique necklace or scarf, combined with your successful lawyer look (and for men, it might be a pocket square) can really catapult you higher on the best dressed lawyers list.

**The First Impression.** I don't need to repeat the adage because you all know it. I just want to reiterate that it's true. You never know when you're going to meet a new prospective client or referral source. Make sure the one chance you have is supported by the confidence of knowing you place a high priority on looking (and acting) like a successful lawyer.

If you dress every day as if you were going to meet an extremely important person and *had* to make a great first impression, you will notice that your confidence will increase, your attitude toward work will improve, the quality of your work will be higher, and you will start to see yourself as the successful lawyer you are. But first, you must dress the part.



*Terrie S. Wheeler, MBC, is the founder and president of Professional Services Marketing LLC. She helps lawyers grow their practices at every level including the way in which they are perceived by clients and prospects. She will always offer unsolicited fashion advice, particularly if it helps her clients maximize and enhance their images as successful lawyers. To access free marketing webinars, visit [www.psm-marketing.com](http://www.psm-marketing.com) or email [Terrie@psm-marketing.com](mailto:Terrie@psm-marketing.com).*