

Build a Better Image ... by building a better wardrobe.

Like it or not, you are what you wear. Sure, there are the Silicon Valley computer tycoons who have made going to work in jeans, shirt, and running shoes fashionable. Even some of the corporate giants are going casual these days. But in a world where you define your place by the image you project, dressing right still counts a lot. To spruce up your wardrobe, follow these tips from the experts:

HIM

Shoes: Black or brown lace-ups are a must for the gentlemen, perfect for either dress or casual situations. Always keep them polished-nothing reflects more poorly on you than a hard-leather shoe that doesn't.

Pants: For maximum durability, look for pants that are lined with extra fabric like silk or linen on the interior. Then purchase a linen or rayon blend in khaki, gray or olive. These fabrics wrinkle less than cotton, and the colors will blend with sweater and leather jackets as well as with a sport coat or a white shirt.

Shirts: The pure white button-down shirt is a wardrobe cornerstone. It speaks of authority. And it works alone, with khakis or with a suit jacket and tie. Try a good cotton or linen, which travels better. A blue dress shirt-any hue from pale blue to indigo-is a good understudy. It looks casual with jeans and creates a nice background for neckwear when you want a dressier look.

Tie: You could be wearing a great suit and a bad tie, and the tie's the only thing people will notice. Two basic ties will work for anyone: Get one in a shade of yellow like amber or honey. It goes with everything and every skin tone. The second should be a rich color, a dark red or scarlet. Ties can be solid or patterned; just don't let them go wider than your lapel. Best fabric: silk.

Suit: Any executive worth his cuff link in gold must have a three-piece navy blue suit, which can go anywhere from the boardroom to dinner. Suits in black and brown are also appropriate. Pinstripes are fine, as long as they're narrow so you don't look like a convict.

HER

Shoes: The lady executive must have at least two closed-toe leather shoes in neutral colors such as black and beige, which go everywhere with everything. Choose shoes that are feminine as well as comfortable.

Skirts: Buy skirts in traditional cuts and designs, preferably in medium gray and navy blue colors. Avoid bold, bright colors and patterns. Keep in mind that you want to mix and match skirts with jackets and blazers.

Blouses: Plain blouses in white or a muted pastel and styles with detachable bows at the neck or that simply button down the front are best. Stick to cotton and silk choices which are far more executive-oriented rather than sheer polyester georgettes or slithery silk imitations.

Blazers: It's wise to have at least two blazers in good, go-with-everything shades such as black, gray, or camel. You might want to vary the weight of each blazer, too, to create a different feeling with the same skirts. A raw silk would add a dressier touch than a flannel.

Dresses: Unless you have an endless supply of blazers, a dress won't go very far. But when you see a dress that looks professional enough with subtle colors and clean lines-grab it. It gives you a break from having to struggle coordinating blouses, skirts, and jackets.

Suits: Invest in at least two 3-piece suits, in medium gray, navy blue, or black. Black is necessary for business occasions that extend into evening, and is also a good choice for high-visibility meetings. Ideally, each suit could function well as separates, with the jacket and skirt leading independent lives.