

LIFE *style*



CHOOSE ME!

Want to get ahead in business and relationships? Clever girls are calling in the professionals to re-style them as a walking superbrand

TEN years ago, my then boss hired an image consultant to preach to my colleagues and I about the merits of using appearance to climb the corporate ladder. But we were hardly expecting the Hyacinth Bouquet lookalike who greeted us, wafting colour charts in our faces while sporting bouffant hair and cerise lipstick.

A style guru she certainly wasn't, yet there were a lot of her sort around at the time

By Sadie Nicholas

gaining the competitive edge both at work and in the pursuit of Mr Right. With the chips as down as they are right now, smart girls have sussed that their personal style is everything if they want to land that elusive dream job, win promotion, or entice The One.

Chantelle Znideric, 29, is one of a new generation of funky, fashion-focused image consultants with their eyes trained firmly on helping clients make the most of

CERTAINLY the statistics seem to back up the current trend; get your image right and not only will employers be clamouring to recruit or promote you, men will be falling at your feet.

But is success at work or in love really as shallow as what a woman looks like? It seems so. Research from a Work Foundation think tank revealed that women who wear make-up can expect to earn 25 per cent more than those who don't. And 80 per cent of employers said appearance was one of the top three qualities they look for when recruiting.

When it comes to how others perceive you, 55 per cent is about your appearance, 38 per cent your tone of voice, and just seven per cent what you've actually got to say.

Pippa Rees is a top stylist, with TV presenters and celebrities on her books. She owns www.stylecompany.co.uk and says ordinary women are calling her in their droves, desperate to emulate the chameleon style approach of women such as Madonna and Victoria Beckham.

'They see these stars dramatically alter their hairstyles, clothes, make-up and style persona each season, and they've realised the power that has when it comes to holding an audience,' Rees explains. 'Ordinary women want to wield that same power by flitting between sexy, cute or high fashion to surprise friends, acquaintances and suitors.'

Rees is also a former boss and admits, controversially, that she frequently hired employees based on appearance.

'Before I became a stylist, I worked in media and communications for large blue-chip companies including a leading airline and Boots,' she says. 'I relaunched the No7 cosmetics brand and employed countless staff, mainly women. My experience taught me that people are recruited and promoted based on their image over and above ability. And, yes, I fell into that bracket as a boss.'

Rees is not alone. Research shows that interviewers decide within ten seconds whether they want to recruit someone.

What, then, distinguishes personal branding from traditional image consultancy?

'It's far more than just clothes,' says Camelia Fredericks, City lawyer-turned-fashionista and owner of The Divine Image in Richmond, Surrey. 'A woman can wear the most beautiful dress in the world but it's a complete waste of time unless her overall brand is intact.'

'She must learn to carry herself, to make eye contact with people, to engage with them, to smile and have presence. Throw in a grasp of social etiquette, but in a natural, not contrived way, and the brand begins to emerge. It's about what you want to be known for: your glamour, or per-

haps your ability to carry off the latest trends, or to switch effortlessly from demure to sexy.

'To achieve brand status, a woman also needs the right hairstyle and colours to suit her and her lifestyle. Personal branding is about making someone attractive; not textbook beautiful but appealing to others at work and in your personal life. This can be conjured up by a stylist or image consultant.'

'I've got clients I can dress in Primark and they look fabulous now because they've got all the components of their own brand — they know how to walk and talk, how to smile with their eyes, and we've fine-tuned what colours, make-up and styles of clothes suit them.'

'Others would look disastrous in the most beautiful couture gowns when they first come to me for help. It can be as simple as them slouching when they stand or walk, or simply not having the groomed hair, nails and confident poise to carry off a dress.'

In their quest for Mr Right, professional women are also tapping into image consultancy as a means of attracting quality men.

Upmarket millionaire-only dating agencies such as Seventy-Thirty think so. Owner Susie Ambrose and her team offer one-to-one advice to members on style, etiquette and brand in the firm belief that image has a profound effect on the types of men you attract.