



Book The Image of Success

Make a Great Impression and Land the Job You Want

Lizandra Vega
AMACOM, 2010
[Listen now](#)

- play
- pause

00:00
00:00

Recommendation

You know better than to walk into an interview holding a sloshing cup of coffee, with your tie askew or your hem uneven, and your cellphone buzzing. Yet people do things like this all the time, and they suffer the consequences, including being bewildered about why they didn’t get that job or promotion. The reality is that, to potential employers, your image is just as important – if not more important – than your résumé. Recruiter Lizandra Vega explains that, rightly or wrongly, people will make assumptions about your capabilities and competence based on the image you project. In this charmingly autobiographical text, Vega takes you through the job-search process step-by-step, from buying the right interview suit to shaking hands to negotiating an offer. *BooksInShort* recommends this comprehensive manual to graduates entering the job market, employees stalled in their career progress and anyone looking for a better opportunity – or a brushed-up professional look.

Take-Aways

- To land your dream job, focus on the “ABCs” of your image: your “appearance, behavior and communication.”
- Develop “flair” – the interaction of your personality, style choices and behavior – to set you apart from rival candidates.
- Cultivate an image that is engaging, memorable and appropriate for the position you seek.
- Analyze your body type to make discerning clothing choices that flatter your assets and camouflage your faults.
- Use color to spice up your wardrobe and bring out your best.
- A well-fitted, flattering business suit is as important as your résumé.
- The introductory handshake is a pivotal opportunity to make a great first impression.
- Networking is an important aspect of career building.
- Résumés, cover letters and thank-you notes are written representations of who you are.
- Prepare answers to standard interview questions, and plan questions of your own.

Summary

A Book and Its Cover

Have you ever wondered why management passed you over for a promotion or why you didn’t get a job when you thought you aced the interview? Things might not have gone your way because of something as simple as aftershave that was too strong or a skirt that was too tight. You’d like to think your résumé makes the strongest impression, but the “ABCs” of your image, that is, your “appearance, behavior and communication,” are what make you attractive to those doing the hiring. The qualities employers look for might vary from one hiring manager to another, but how you choose to present yourself is always influential.

You've Got Flair

Flair is about the appearance and behavior choices you make that display your personality. Your individuality and your ability to feel comfortable and chic with your clothing or accessories reflect your flair. The final product is an image that aligns your actions with your look and makes a lasting impression.

“Let’s face it, selling one’s ability to do a job in as few as 20 to 60 minutes requires an entirely different skill set than actually doing the job.”

It doesn’t matter that you’re wearing a top-of-the-line designer suit if you are uncomfortable in your own skin. You can pull off a nice ensemble from a discount chain if you wear it with panache and personality. What is crucial is presenting an image that is engaging, distinctive, memorable and appropriate for the position you seek.

“Let your image become your winning asset.”

Understanding the traits that make up your flair requires a journey of self-exploration. First, assess your physical attributes, such as body proportion, size and color. You don’t have to look like a model, but you do have to make the most of what you have.

An ideal body proportion is a height that is eight times the length of your head. By taking measurements from your scalp to chin, chin to waist, waist to the bottom of the pelvic bone and pelvic bone to feet, you can identify your body challenges and learn how to camouflage or work around them. The ideal ratio is 1-2-1-4: A head is one unit of measure; a torso, two; a waist-to-pelvis, one and legs, four. Use your clothing to compensate for any deviations – for instance, if your legs are short in relation to your body, wear pants that taper toward the ankle, and “avoid cuffs.”

Color Me Successful

Although choosing the correct colors is mystifying to some people, getting it right will add zest to your wardrobe, reflect your personality and even make you look thinner. Color is “gender neutral”; men can benefit as much as women from knowing what shades look best on them. To figure out the most flattering colors for you, check your complexion. Your skin hue reflects the relative combination of three components: “hemoglobin (red), carotene (yellow) and melanin (blue).” The ratio of each, “along with your hair and eye color, dictate your personal relationship to color.”

“Style, poise and panache are all synonymous with flair.”

Many colorists use a seasonal/temperature analogy to color-code people and select the right shades for them to wear. To find your best colors, first place a gold metallic piece of paper or fabric under your chin, and then a silver piece. If you look better with the silver, you are “cool.” If the gold enhances your look, you are “warm.” Next, do the same with a light- and dark-colored item of clothing, and then alternate a bright item with a dull one. Your color type is “spring” if you are “warm, light and bright”; wear “tan, brown, rust, turquoise or off-white.” An “autumn” is “warm, dark and muted”; stick to “olive green, brown, navy or gray.” If you look best in “cool, light and muted” colors, you’re a “summer”; focus on “French navy, heather gray or brown/taupe.” Finally, a “winter” is “cool, dark and bright” and should sport “charcoal gray, navy black/brown or forest green.”

Perfectly Suited

The interview suit is still a staple, regardless of your field. When you wear an attractive, well-fitted suit to your interview, you’ll make a good impression and you’ll feel good about yourself. The following do’s and don’ts apply to all suits: The collars should not stand up but hug the back of the neck. The fabric should not bunch around your back or arms and it should be cut so that the lapels do not pull apart. You should be able to button the jacket comfortably, and about one-half inch of your shirt or blouse cuff should extend beyond the arm length.

“The interview suit is not dated and it’s not over the top; it is required in order to present the most professional image you can.”

For women, skirt lengths can be just above your knee, just below your knee or to mid-calf, depending on whether you want to look taller or shorter, or if you want to camouflage your legs. Before you go suit shopping, inventory your own closet to see what might work or not. Consider using a personal shopper, a service many stores provide. If your time and budget allow, purchase a custom-made suit; if not, buy a ready-to-wear suit that is altered to fit you perfectly.

“If you were a picture, your suit would be your frame and your shirt would be the matting.”

You can wear the best suit in the world and still ruin your image with an ill-fitting shirt or blouse. Women have more choices, but they should consider their coloring and the shape of their faces when picking a blouse. Men must have shirts that fit well at the collar and torso and that have the proper sleeve length. Collar points should not curl and the top button must fasten easily. Also, choose a good quality fabric such as Pima or Egyptian cotton.

“It takes seconds for people to form their first impression about you, and if it’s not a good one, you may not have a chance to make a second one.”

Accessories provide an opportunity to show your flair. Just make sure your personality peeks through in a good way. You don’t want noisy bangle bracelets or enormous hoop earrings to be the reason you just didn’t fit the job. Hair accessories should be subtle and simple; choose items that compliment your hair color. Never wear a hat, regardless of how fashionable, to an interview. Avoid distracting costume jewelry and realize that eyebrow, nose or lip rings are simply not professional. Men can get a little creative with ties or bow ties, while women can do the same with a scarf. Just don’t overwhelm your outfit. Whatever your preferences, some items should never be part of your interview wardrobe, including: a logo t-shirt, sportswear, a revealing blouse or open shirt, a miniskirt, “fishnet or highly decorative hosiery, open-toe shoes or sneakers,” or dirty footwear.

A Hunting We Will Go

Finding your dream job, or any job, involves more than writing a great résumé and waiting for the phone to ring. Networking is an important aspect of career building. First, rely on those who are closest to you, such as family and friends. Extend your network to neighbors, teachers, recruiters, former employers and the like, since you

never know where your next lead might come from. Use “online networks, professional trade associations, business associations, service organizations and alumni associations.”

“Inappropriate nonverbal behavior can silently slay your career probabilities.”

Be prepared to sell your talents at every opportunity by having a business card, a résumé and a rehearsed 30-second “elevator pitch” in mind. An elevator pitch is a brief summary of who you are, what you do, why you are unique and what your goals are.

Correspondence you send to a recruiter or potential employer makes an immediate impression. Résumés, cover letters and thank-you notes represent who you are. When writing your résumé, stick to the truth, be careful about spelling and grammar, and make it clear and easy to read. Keep the five C’s in mind: “clarity, coherence, compelling, correctness” and “character.” The two main résumé styles are “chronological,” which lists work experience beginning with most recent, and “functional,” which highlights specific experience. Chronological résumés are the most common and work best for people with a relevant work history, while functional résumés are a good choice for people changing careers or those re-entering the workforce.

“Protocol, etiquette or just plain good manners are pivotal to conducting business with confidence and flair.”

The cover letter is an advertisement for your résumé, but don’t include everything that’s already in your résumé; instead, match your attributes to the position’s requirements. Send thank-you notes to anyone who helps you during the job-hunting process. Make them specific so that they’ll resonate with the recipients. Email is commonly accepted in employment communications; however, remember that your emails should look as professional as your résumé and other business correspondence.

It Goes Without Saying

Your interview grooming should be impeccable, although being well groomed is a good practice at all times. Neat fingernails, clean teeth and ears, skin that looks cared for, well-trimmed facial hair for men and simple makeup for women, all play a part in making a positive impression. Have your hair cut stylishly, and make sure it’s clean and shiny. Don’t use strong perfume or cologne. If you are prone to body odor, dandruff or bad breath, you should deal with them before your interview. Along the same lines, be careful of what you eat right before your meeting, and don’t overindulge the night before your interview.

Interviewing 101

Your interview starts as soon as you step into the building. After all, you never know when a bad word from the security guard or receptionist will put the kibosh on getting the job, so be kind to everyone you encounter. Adopt a positive attitude regardless of how you feel. A job interview is not the place to whine about your current situation. Stay calm, even if the interview becomes challenging. Your composed demeanor will convey your ability to manage conflict, stress and the other demands of the job.

“You are the architect of your social and professional network.”

The introductory handshake is a pivotal opportunity for making a great first impression. Many handshakes are too hard or too soft, or are held too long or not long enough. To correctly shake hands at an interview: Before you sit down, extend your arm with your right palm facing to the left, grasp the other person’s hand with “moderate to firm pressure, pump two or three times within five seconds (up and down, not back and forth),” and then, let go.

“Cover letters, résumés, executive summaries and thank-you notes are like advertisements in a magazine or banner ads on your computer screen.”

Be aware of your body language and other nonverbal communication. Normal eye contact shows that you are alert, open and attentive. Respect others’ body space, and keep an appropriate distance. Practice good posture while standing and sitting: Hunching over, slouching or leaning too far back in your chair will send unintended messages. Control nervous tics or gestures such as playing with your hair, licking your lips, touching your face, or crossing and uncrossing your legs. Say “please” when you need a question repeated, and respond “thank you” when offered a drink. Don’t swear, chew gum, talk too much, or bring food or drink with you.

“Writing a business email requires a more structured set of guidelines than writing to your college bud.”

Some questions are bound to come up in almost every interview. Know how you want to answer them, and prepare ahead of time. Be ready to talk about your previous successes and challenges. Expect queries such as, “Tell me about yourself,” and “Why are you interested in this position?” Also, think up questions of your own: It’s your opportunity to emphasize something about yourself, find out more about the position or introduce a topic the interviewer overlooked. However, avoid questions like, “What is your sick day policy?” or “Is there a waiting period before I am eligible for vacation time?”

“All offers are not created equal and, more important, they’re by no means written in stone.”

As part of the interview process, your potential employer may ask you to dine in a restaurant. Often, this is when job candidates let their guard down, have a drink or two, and talk too much. Don’t fall into this trap. Research the restaurant ahead of time so you know how to get there, where to park and what to order. Arrive 15 minutes early so you can hang up your coat, use the facilities and get comfortable. Order something easy to eat, such as boneless meat or fish, and avoid potentially sloppy entrées such as spaghetti or lobster. Stick to club soda, water or another nonalcoholic beverage. Be ready to make conversation about innocuous subjects such as sports, books, travel or current events. Most of all, exercise good table manners.

The Offer Comes at Last

Finally, the company makes an offer. Thank your potential employer, and confirm that you are considering it and will make a decision quickly. At this point in the process, you should have a clear idea of what you are worth, what contract items would be deal breakers and what you really want. Ask questions if any part of the offer is unclear or ambiguous.

“Self-reflection is the crux of establishing your image.”

If you decide to negotiate, concentrate on the one or two issues that concern you the most. Keep your attitude positive and when you decide to accept, do so enthusiastically.

About the Author

Recruiter **Lizandra Vega** is a co-founder of Perennial Resources International in New York City and a Certified Image Coach.
