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## **THE MESSAGE YOU GIVE BEFORE YOU SAY ANYTHING: IMAGE AND ATMOSPHERICS**

By Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC

There are two factors that dramatically impact your ability to be effective in influencing others--your personal image and the image of your office, called "atmospherics."

Image--If you want to convey the image of being a high-quality professional, operating a high-quality professional service firm, then "think, feel, and act quality," within your relationships, certainly when regarding your appearance, the services you provide, and the resources you employ. As one consultant noted, image is really nothing more than creating assumptions in others. Psychologists have long known that people have been very much influenced by looks, and most of us conclude that, what looks good must be good.

Since you project your personal image in every sales encounter, the more you know about what image you are projecting and how that image may tend to impact a client, the more successful you will be in the long run. Philosophically speaking, the image you project is you--it is not right or wrong, or good or bad. Nevertheless, people will judge you based on the image they perceive. If you are over-weight, this signals to many people that you may be somewhat unprofessional. Being overweight, obviously doesn't mean that you are unprofessional, but since you have to market yourself in the world as it is, it is best to understand this. If you have sideburns of a length that does not reflect current trends, a beard or mustache, many prospects may judge you to be everything from, "a grown up hippie" to a "free thinking non-conformist." If you wear Pierre Cardin fashions, you are perceived as being an "arty" person. No one has a right to tell you how to dress or act. However, from a marketing standpoint, appearing or acting certain ways may diminish your overall effectiveness. So, you may wish to consider hiring a wardrobe consultant. In major cities, you can find such individuals in the phone book under fashion consultant, image consultant, or wardrobe consultant. While the range of services may differ, most of these consultants will visit your home, examine your wardrobe and make specific suggestions to help you accomplish your image related goals. Some consultants will even take you shopping, or go shopping for you for a fee.

Atmospherics--anytime a prospect, or client for that matter, comes to your facilities, the observations that he makes about your physical surroundings are part of the overall impression he makes about you and your firm.

One Los Angeles-based design consultant observed that all too often, "office decorations are approached as an after-thought," as sort of a routine personalizing something that is done after consulting a catalogue from an office furniture manufacturer. Yet your office, and the offices of your firm, help to express a unique style and personality. Look objectively at your office and if you suspect that there is room for improvement, much like you would in choosing an advertising agency, you can go about the process of choosing an office decorating consultant.

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Jeff Davidson is a professional speaker who offers simple advice that makes profound differences in people's lives. Check out his bio at <http://www.financialspeakers.com>. He is the author of *The Joy of Simple Living* (Rodale), *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Managing Your Time* (Alpha), and *Breathing Space*(MasterMedia). His books can be ordered at <http://www.ffbookstore.com>. Additional information about Jeff is available at <http://www.financialspeakers.com>.