

## IMAGE is everything for an MP

2009/11/22

It's common practice to keep track of bills and issues debated in Parliament, but keeping tabs on the people behind them is rarely heard of. Unknown to many, inside the four walls of this august house are two groups of people — one that wishes to impress with both voice and looks, and one that doesn't give two hoots about grooming, writes the NEW SUNDAY TIMES team  
IMAGINE President Barack Obama with an unruly stubble or shaggy hair -- it's an incongruous image, isn't it?

There's a reason for that.

When trying to present the most professional image possible, to endear to the largest possible number of people, looking unkempt and lazy about your appearance is not the way to do it.

Looking dishevelled can diminish the personality you project, which is why virtually every charismatic politician, realising that he or she is a brand too, relies on a clean-cut appearance.

Walking through the lobby and "MP watching" in the cafeteria of our Parliament house, it's quite a sight to see perfect tie knots on some and khaki loafers on others.

Obviously there are MPs who go the extra mile to look dashing and those who have no problem with wildly unkempt hair.

But, Chapter One director and image consultant Wendy Lee tells us that should not be the case at all.

"If you want to be taken seriously, before your voice is even heard, there are a few simple grooming rules that can't be ignored -- bearing in mind humans are very visual creatures.

"MPs should first take the effort to improve their image before even selling their politics to the people. If you have done the former well, doing the latter will be much easier.

"There are many components that make up an image -- visual, values proven, experienced and assumed. They are all important, especially visual image.

"If public figures and politicians don't take the effort and time to groom themselves, they will lose the attention of the people.

"As soon as a public figure says something that doesn't make sense, people will say, 'from the start, I knew he was like that'. First impressions will come back to haunt you."

Although some may argue that looks aren't everything, Wendy says as a public figure how you look

constitutes a large portion of everything.

"The message is that you must not only be defined by your job title but also find ways to remind swooning fans that you have an interesting personality.

"You don't have to show off, but be proud and take efforts in putting in the additional iconoclastic image you want your fans to see and this will contribute to your background.

"If you see a faded picture in a menu, would you order that dish? Of course, not.

"Visual impressions make a difference -- like it or not. Unfortunately, our Parliament looks 'faded' from some angles."

Did men and women MPs score the same in the image test? Hardly. Women MPs scored very much higher on the "grooming scale", with most obtaining perfect marks from top to toe.

"I must say I was very impressed with the women, they were not only very well groomed but also carried themselves with great dignity and poise. On the other hand, men were either extreme," says Wendy.

Bad grooming just speak laziness, Wendy says, because how you treat yourself reflects on how you treat your work.

"It's not so much right or wrong, but the image you wish to portray. And MPs have to convey an appearance that is both distinguished and polished.

"People look up to you as a leader, someone they can rely on, so you must look and behave as one."

Wendy says there are a few changes that could be made in parliament, besides bills and rights.

"I see men walking around with their coats unbuttoned and no cufflinks, these are simple things that can make a huge difference.

"There are also women who wear sandals instead of shoes. Sandals make people slouch and cause them to drag their feet - sure sign of laziness.

"Another indicator of sloppiness is wearing your tie noticeably above or below your belt buckle."

Wendy says it would be great for our MPs to emulate the fashion sense of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak or US President Barack Obama.

"These are people who know how to dress and carry themselves.

"If you observe closely, they both usually wear red ties with white shirts. Visually, that combination catches the eye and immediately draws attention to what someone is saying.

"You hardly catch them wearing earthly tones, because on television those colours appear pale and audiences aren't drawn to them or their message.

"Another thing to observe is that men of such calibre have good posture and hold their chin up when they walk. Their shoulders are upright and they look straight before shifting their gaze."

Another key to grooming, Wendy says, is to think about whom you are going to meet before you dress and groom yourself.

"You want to look different from the rest -- drawing attention to yourself and grabbing people's attention.

"For the general public, put some thought into what you are going to wear everyday and how you are going to style yourself before stepping out of your house.

"But for MPs and politicians, you're a brand, too, and even if you're not selling yourself to an electorate, you are selling your image.

"Whether you're going for wry cleverness or consummate professionalism, make sure that image is coherent, and that you reinforce it across everything that represents you, from business cards to the tone of your voice and how you look in the media."

### **BLUNDERS AND BLOOPERS IN PARLIAMENT**

These are only some of the many grooming and styling mistakes by members of our parliament.

- Wearing suits with loafers
- Using low contrast colour combination
- Choosing faded colours
- Not buttoning up when wearing double-breasted jackets
- Wearing a tie pin too high
- Wrong tie/shirt combination
- Unkempt facial hair
- Very old fashioned spectacles
- Flying up collars
- Tip of tie too high or below the belt buckle
- Wearing ties without dimples
- Too big collars
- Large men with thin ties
- Bottom of pants not touching the soles of shoes
- Women not wearing any makeup at all
- Women wearing sandals
- Women with grey hair showing
- Tudung tied too loosely
- Wearing dress-shirts without dress-shoes
- Older women MPs not accessorising enough

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