



THE STAR TUESDAY 20 May 2008

CENTRAL

03-7967 2020

03-7957 7496

Log on to <http://classifieds.thestar.com.my/booking/>

# THE NEW AGE POWER DRESSING FOR WOMEN

**"Feminine. Not Girly... Strong. Not Severe."**

**T**HESE days, we are getting lazy with our work wear. Most jobs today only require us to look smart, which does not necessarily mean formal. A pair of black trousers and a smart top will usually suffice and some of us may even get away with donning smart casual pants or even a pair of sandals to the office. There are not that many occasions which require us to wear a full tailored suit with a crisp shirt anymore. And with a hot climate like Malaysia's, we all try to push our boundaries in the workplace - wearing skirts of all lengths, colourful girly tops and pretty shoes.

Whilst following current trends is all fun and fashionable, it also breaks the boundaries between work and play. While dressing is a matter of personal choice, sometimes whether you are taken seriously at work or not is decided by how you look overall. Unless you work in the fashion industry, in most cases, your boss will certainly appreciate a smart and serious professional you to a bimbo image of yourself strutting around in high heels.

But choosing the right outfit is not as easy as it may seem. With a large variety of work environments and various opinions on what is appropriate, choosing the right power dress can be tricky. Many workplaces are now settling for business casuals, allowing a comfortably large range of outfits to choose from, which can lead to endless confusion. So what is a girl to do?

Coco Chanel once said, "Dress sharply and they notice the dress. Dress impeccably and they notice the woman." In the 1980s, women's power suits were designed specially so that women could look more like men and compete with them. But, today, women can wear dresses, look feminine and powerful, and be just as good as men when it comes to performance.

Here are some quick tips that will help you along the way:

● **A Touch of Make-up**

Wear make-up. Research has shown that women who wear make-up to work get promoted

four times faster than those who do not. Wear light powder, and colour lips with light to medium shades and apply lip-gloss on top. Avoid looking dated by reassessing your make-up and application techniques every few years.

● **Grandma Perm or Crowning Glory**

When it comes to length, long hair is seen as artistic, romantic and casual. Short to medium length hair is seen as professional, businesslike and serious. Women should not wear such elaborate hair styles that it would look like they have an army of maids helping them every morning. Keep it simple, tied up in a sophisticated roll or chignon and keep your hair away from your face.

● **Spend More on Your Clothes as You Grow Older**

See your wardrobe as an investment in your future: good quality clothes equal increased confidence. If you want your income to go up, invest in your appearance and that means good quality clothes that fit perfectly.

● **Invest in Jackets**

Spend as much as you can afford on a jacket. The better the quality, the better it will look in 12 months' time. Medium to dark solid colours and subtly patterned suits will make you appear slimmer. The finer the stripe and the closer they are the more businesslike the suit will appear. Whenever possible invest in high quality jackets and always make sure they fit perfectly, especially around the neck and shoulders.

● **Don't wear all black to work**

Those with not enough colours in their wardrobe might be perceived as being unadventurous. Dark colours tend to bring the energy level of those around you down. Use dark colours as a staple in the wardrobe, but always add a burst of colour, be it in the form of a top under a dark jacket, or in a bold accessory.

● **Be Feminine, Not Sexy**

Every woman has two choices, either to dress sexily or for success. Using your sexuality can



Wendy Lee

make men drop their defences, but it won't make you successful in the long term. Instead maximise your gender, but in a subtle, non-sexual way. In other words, opt for a skirt, but don't slash it to the thigh.

● **Remember the Hem**

Always hem your pants if they are too long. Don't let them get caught in the backs of your shoes; it looks sloppy. For jackets, make sure the hem doesn't end at the widest part of the hips as it broadens the hips. And make sure sleeve lengths aren't the same as the jacket's hem as it creates one line that emphasises the hips.

● **Nip it at the Waist**

Pick jackets and blazers that are nipped in at the waist to create flattering curves. Forget weak pastels but choose bold colours to wear underneath for power dressing. Look for suits where the jacket has some contouring rather than one with little or no shape for a slender yet feminine appearance.

● **Define and Taper**

While weight and age need to be taken into consideration, defining your best features will

always give you a memorable total look. Maybe you have a great bust line, a fabulous figure or a gorgeous face; whatever it is, play it up as much as possible. Tapering garments will also accentuate a figure even if it's a little straight or heavy. Tapering the hemline of a skirt will enhance a figure by giving it a more vertical appearance. A shirt that is shaped and has tapered sleeves will also make a woman look taller and slimmer as will pants that are tapered.

● **Watch Your Skirt Length**

Studies in the psychology of dress show that certain lengths initiate unconscious opinions about us in the mind of those we interact with. Minis are sexually extreme and restrict decent physical movements to standing and walking only. Skirts that fall just above the knee are by far the best - professional, comfortable, fashionable, current and easy to move in.

● **Avoid Plunging Necklines and Sleeveless Tops**

The more skin you show the less professional you will appear, so avoid any top that draws attention to your breasts. Everyone knows you have them: you don't have to flaunt them with eye-catching revealing tops or blouses. The same applies to anything sleeveless; they're just not right for serious business environments.

● **Forget Florals and Floaty Styles**

Never wear anything too detailed or patterned when power dressing. Don't allow your clothes to steal the limelight. Choose straight, classic tailoring, pencil skirts or trousers and find a style that you feel most confident and comfortable in.

● **The Devil's in the Details**

It's the small details that most often let people down; dandruff, laddered hosiery, food caught between the teeth, bleeding lipstick, oily hair, chipped nail polish, missing or straining buttons. Pay attention and maintain the most polished appearance you can at all times. Little things say a lot.

● **Ditch Those Ultra High Heels**

Five centimetres is the agreed maximum height for heels. Any more than that and you risk looking too sexy or walking with a gait as though you're on stilts. Opt for comfortable medium height heels and avoid mules, strappy styles and over-the-top embellishments like gold motifs around the heels.

● **The Finishing Touch**

Always keep accessories to a minimum, choosing silver jewellery for subtle sparkle and a subtle leather tote or handbag to finish your confident, empowering and fashionably fierce look. Numerous bangles, multiple dangling earrings, art enhanced nails or extra fancy belts all serve to undermine your credibility. A few, well-selected quality pieces are all you need. Aim for structure, simplicity and strong shapes to give the message that you're in control!

■ **Article by Wendy Lee, director of Chapter One Asia Sdn. Bhd.**

She is one of Malaysia's leading image and etiquette experts. A professional speaker and corporate trainer, Lee has penned numerous articles and has been quoted and featured in a myriad of magazines. She has appeared in television programmes. Lee was also invited to chair and speak at conferences in Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand where she received rave reviews and was voted one of the most inspiring speakers in the industry. For more information on her products and services, kindly visit [www.chap-one.com](http://www.chap-one.com)

■ **Lee is one of the speakers for the upcoming Empowering Women in the Workplace workshop, presented by HP and StarJobs.com.**

Participate and gain insights into how you can make a positive impact for yourself in today's working environment through your dressing and overall presentation. The workshop will be held on May 24 at Menara Star, Petaling Jaya. For details, go to the event microsite at [http://star-jobs.com/events/counsel\\_empower/](http://star-jobs.com/events/counsel_empower/).