

**“Ain’t you glad shoes can’t talk,” sang blues guitarist Ry Cooder,
“cause they might tell where you been”.**

Ahhh, but shoes do talk.

Because feet lie outside your conscious view, they subtly reveal your inner attributes and attitudes.

The secret is: anything outside your peripheral vision gets monitored less frequently than things that you see a lot. Just think of the time you spend caring for your face compared to your feet. That’s because your face is highly visible to everyone, including you, whereas your feet are less visible to everyone, including you.

This means that your footwear can present an unedited version of who you are.

Your footwear tells not only where you’ve been, but where you now stand and where you’re going.

Here are 5 keys to ensure that your shoes get their story straight:

1. Condition

Poorly maintained shoes scream that you lack attention to detail. Elegant clothing combined with feet that visually stink is a mixed message. Broadcast that message and your audience will always infer the worst about you. You don’t actually have to be a slack-arse for people to assume that you are one. You only have to wear slack-arse shoes. If your shoes declare that you’re less than you look, that’s the message others hear. Solution: keep soles and heels in repair and keep leather well conditioned with renovating polish.

2. Lace-ups vs. loafers

An American banker friend of ours recently asked, ‘Why do Aussie business men wear cheap shoes? My MBA course taught me to always invest in good shoes.’

MBA programmes teach that because the quality and condition of a man’s shoes has more bearing on how he is perceived than most other articles of clothing.

So if you own just one pair of business shoes, we suggest black lace ups in a conservative style. Black is versatile, lace-ups are always acceptable and conservative styles stay in fashion. Some people still judge loafers to be less formal and therefore less acceptable than lace-ups. If in doubt, play the percentages. Go classic: black, lace ups. Best of all, good shoes cost less than an MBA.

3. Heavy metal loafers

Decorative metal buckles and tabs are often seen on loafers.

A good business loafer is like a sleek, understated limo. A discreet, small metal logo is like an acceptable badge. But chains, plates and shiny metal styling are like designer hubcaps, rear spoilers and silly bumper stickers. A black limo is visually arresting; an ostentatious chariot can get you arrested

Besides, tarnished metal looks tawdry. What makes shoes a good investment is cosmetic durability, ie, they look good over time and thus keep you looking good over time.

4. Sole concerns

Do you suffer from electrophobia (irrational fear of electrocution and/or electric shocks)?

No?

Then stick with hard soles (leather or black nylon) for business wear. Thick rubber or soft soles are a bounding leap in the direction of casual attire. The rule is: the heavier the sole, the more casual the shoe. It’s unwise to mix casual shoes with formal attire for business purposes. In fact, it’s shocking!

5. Shine or matte finish

Shiny shoes are a must for business. Glossy shoe leather is more formal than a soft matte finish. Think of shoe surfaces as a continuum. At one end is the reflective, military ‘spit and polish’ shine. At the other end is the soft, lush look of suede. Matte lies in between. The more formal the occasion, the shinier should be your shoes.

Bottom line: treat your shoes well and they’ll always talk about you in glowing terms.

5 Ways to Shoot Yourself in the Feet

Is your image lame? Does your career limp?

It’s probably because your footwear:

- is not made from leather (even good sporting shoes are partially made from leather).
- is not black, cordovan, or deep brown.
- is white, grey, navy or light tan.
- associates you with a sub-culture that is contrary to the business world (eg Doc Martens boots).
- has thick rubber soles, deep treads and is more suited for scaling Kilimanjaro than the corporate ladder.



Dr Duff Watkins

is Director, Asia/Pacific of the Cornerstone International Group, consultants to Boards and Management. He has been interviewed by Geraldine Doogue, Bert Newton, Neil Mitchell and others. His doctorate is in psychotherapy. He is co author of *Dress for Effect* (forthcoming).

tel: +612 9411 4472

dw@execsearch.com.au



Jean Woo

is an expert on ‘people packaging’ and has been an image consultant for over 10 years. Once a commercial lawyer, she is now Director of Personal Brand Management and advises men, women and companies on all aspects of personal branding. She wrote *Executive Style* (Prentice Hall 1997) and is co-author of *Dress For Effect*.

tel: +612 9552 6322

jean@personalbrand.com.au