

EXECUTIVE STYLE

Dress for success, and survival

Minor changes can make a big difference, writes **Natasha Hughes.**

YOU might be clever and well connected in the office, but this won't necessarily shield you as the Grim Reaper of retrenchment sweeps from workplace to workplace.

Years of loyalty can be wiped out with a single tap on the shoulder as the global financial crisis selects its victims more often from the older and "more expensive" ranks of employees.

So how about "retrenchment-proofing" your looks and ensuring you look modern and engaged, that you belong and know what you're doing?

Appearance matters in business as much as anywhere else, says branding expert Murray Cheney.

"Perception is reality. Look the part, dress appropriately to the highest integrity, be astute and read the game," he says.

"The ability to dress to get the respect of the room is all part of making sure your appearance and persona are retrenchment proof. I've seen some very bright people let themselves down because they looked like they were not up to the standard of the decision-making process."

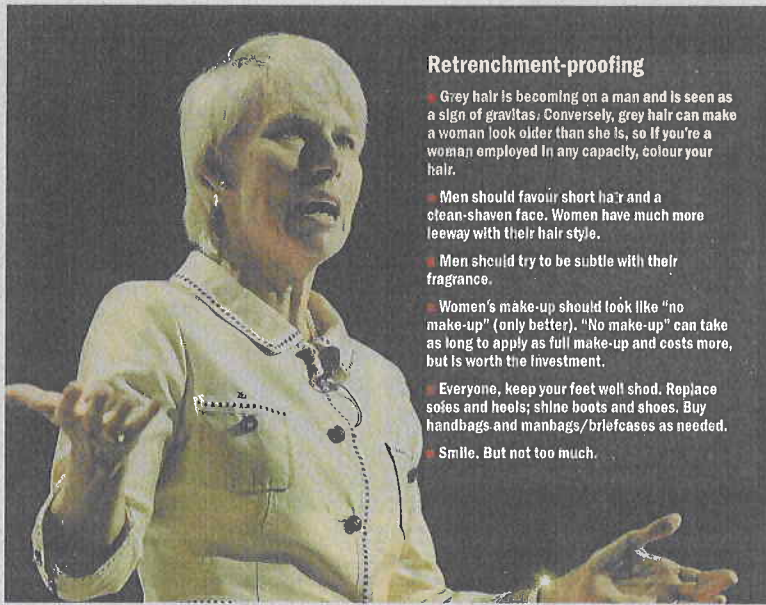
The attention to detail extends to grooming — and often the first thing people notice is your hair. Premature hair loss can still, cruelly, be a deal-breaker (behind the number of shaved heads around the office and join them if necessary), but grey hair can work to a man's advantage, conveying a certain gravitas.

"Few women can get away with it," says Melbourne salon owner Robert Weir. "They might want to think carefully before allowing their wisdom to show."

Men should also maintain a clean-shaven face and short hair, cut by a stylist rather than shaved by a barber to a prescribed number setting.

"With the credit crunch it's about change," says stylist Kevin Murphy. "It shakes you up. There's all these pigeons sitting there, doing the extra 9½ yards to keep their jobs; they never complain, and they're the first to go. Change is good now."

Murphy says this season women should take their hair shorter, "up to the join of the bra



Westpac chief executive Gail Kelly is a power dresser and a good role model for aspiring women.

PICTURE: PAT SCALA

Retrenchment-proofing

- Grey hair is becoming on a man and is seen as a sign of gravitas. Conversely, grey hair can make a woman look older than she is, so if you're a woman employed in any capacity, colour your hair.
- Men should favour short hair and a clean-shaven face. Women have much more leeway with their hair style.
- Men should try to be subtle with their fragrance.
- Women's make-up should look like "no make-up" (only better). "No make-up" can take as long to apply as full make-up and costs more, but is worth the investment.
- Everyone, keep your feet well shod. Replace soles and heels; shine boots and shoes. Buy handbags and manbags/briefcases as needed.
- Smile. But not too much.

strap at least", and if they're curly-haired go straight and vice versa.

Men whose hair has dulled rather than whitened could consider a subtle colour to enhance the eyes "and potentially take off some years".

Any extra kilos can be dealt with through judicious choice of outfit. Clothes should fit properly — no straining seams or gaping buttonholes. Dark colours streamline. Belts highlight expanding girths — as does a too-short tie.

Bronwyn Fraser, a style adviser to Melbourne's top end of town, reckons updating work clothes each season is essential. "It keeps you looking fresh."

Dressing for the occasion is crucial. "You've got to dress appropriately for the industry to be seen as a master of industry," says Cheney.

"Wear pinstripe suits if you're a stockbroker, be stylish if you're in retail. If you're not the CEO, look at how they dress themselves to give you an inkling of how you should dress. If the CEO doesn't wear a tie, that gives you permission not to. If they're a power dresser like Launa Inman [former Target chief executive] and Gail Kelly [Westpac chief executive], take your cue."

Sydney public relations director Ian Thomas says while he is happy about Havaianas (thongs) in the office, he expects his staff to be "client ready", with designer shoes under the desk, "so they can stand up and feel comfortable in what they're wearing".

"We work in an industry where there's very well-dressed women from media and fashion. I don't want [the staff] to dress 'corporate', but they need to feel comfortable in their presence without necessarily competing with them," he says.

Fraser says: "Clothing has got to be appropriate to you, to your workplace and your position. It still needs to reflect your personality and to feel right. But you should also be dressing for the position you want."

Whether that means "promotion" or keeping the status quo in these interesting times, it has also got to mean "eminently, remarkably employable".

Both sexes should also look after themselves — good diet, plenty of exercise — as this shows in the face, which they present each day. Here, women have the advantage.

"You don't have to wear a lot of make-up, but some good

make-up, carefully applied to just where it is needed, can give a fresh and pleasing appearance," says make-up artist Paddy Puttock.

"Fresh, modern make-up for the workplace means less is more. You want to look beautiful without people realising you've got make-up on. Less is more if you're older."

Puttock advises women over 40 to avoid mineral make-up as it can look powdery and clogged by the end of the day ("top make-up artists never use it"), and to instead use a really good concealer to even out the skin tone just where it is needed — usually around the nose and eyes.

"If you wear eye shadow, a simple swipe of a light or bronzy brown will do it; nothing over the top," she says. "Spend your money on having your brows done." Blush should be subtle. "A barely there sweep of colour around the eye." A lip balm should be enough. "You don't want to be making a statement."

Men and women should be aiming for clear skin rather than wrinkle-free skin, says Puttock. "You've just got to look after yourself. In the long run, it's the most economical thing you can do."

Cliches aren't the business

ANDREW MAY

WHY is it so many seemingly reasonable people resort to management speak?

Are they insecure and hiding behind fancy words or do they think it's impressive to roll out barrels of business clichés?

Here is a pick of some of the worst buzzwords:

Stir-fry that in the Ideas wok
YOU stir-fry chicken and vegetables, sometimes beef. You talk about ideas with other people. If you ever hear someone say this, please just run away.

There's no I in TEAM
WOW, thanks for the impromptu spelling lesson. If you really want to make a statement try retorting with "wow, thanks braniac, there is definitely an I in idiot!".

Pick the low-hanging fruit
YOU pick fruit in an orchard, or off a shelf in a supermarket. The only thing people should pick at work is a ticket in the Melbourne Cup sweep, or perhaps their noses.

You're on my radar
HUMANS don't have radars (unless you are bionic). Humans have eyes, arms, legs, brains and other organs. Radars are on boats and planes, and in military camps.

Let's take this offline
NEXT time somebody says this to you in a meeting, say "but we are offline now". Perhaps you could suggest they log into a chat room so you can take it "online". That should work.

Push the envelope
YOU lick the envelope or put a letter in the envelope. You push your lawn mower and you push a wheelbarrow filled with dirt. Envelopes and pushing don't mix.

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