

Facet: Appearance

Train Your Eye

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My freshman basketball coach was the first person I recall telling me I had a **“good eye.”** Back then it was because I could consistently put the ball in the basket from outside the key. Given the fact that I was vertically challenged and seriously lacking in most other basic basketball skills, I remember this feedback making me feel like I had a special gift. These words never get old, especially with what I do now professionally.



As a stylist, having a **“good eye”** is about picking winners off a sales rack or easily making outfits from what first appears to be a closet full of clothes with nothing to wear. Like being **on a basketball court and making the ball swish**, it's magical when a **well-trained eye** helps you present yourself better. You can quickly dismiss items that you know won't work while embracing others that you may never have considered.

As a professional called on frequently to coach others on the art of executive image, it is always my intent to help clients train their own eye to better recognize how line, proportion and balance impact their overall professional image and why.



To help clients understand the importance of these elements, our team of consultants encourages their clients to think of the eye as a camera that automatically seeks out a break in line, proportion and/or balance. When you are interacting with someone, regardless of their degree of style savvy, their eyes are automatically drawn to those places in an outfit where there is an obvious break in the flow. Often and without knowing why, people feel less than 100 percent confident in their clothes because they are needlessly attracting attention to parts of themselves that they are self-conscious about. Some clients tell us they never really feel like they own the room or even deserve a seat at the table, even though their experience and knowledge certainly give them the power to speak and be heard. By mastering these simple style techniques, many begin to be heard on a whole new level.

Below is how our firm defines line, proportion and balance, as well as a few examples of how to make these essential style elements enhance executive presence:

Line: To understand the importance of good lines when presenting yourself professionally, consider how your eye naturally seeks out and follows lines. The goal is to use lines strategically in your outfits to complement your overall appearance while positively impacting communication. For example, an outfit that presents a vertical line tends to be more slimming and naturally draws the eye up to your face, a very handy strategy when you want to instantly command a room. You can easily incorporate this effect into your wardrobe by dressing monochromatically (all one color from shoulder to hem as is often achieved with dark, matched suiting or a professional business dress) or by selecting clothing with vertical details such as pinstripes, ribbed knits or zippers that run up the center of a jacket, sweater or blouse.

Proportion: Proportion is how everything fits. Whether you are on the small and slim side or the tall and stocky side, there is no substitute for a good fit. If you are wearing a suit and the length of the jacket is too long for your height, your overall appearance will be out of proportion. You may look top-heavy without even realizing it. If you are very tall and wearing pants that are too short, you will look out of proportion for your height here too. Sleeve and hem lengths as well as pocket, zipper and collar sizes, and shoulder pad placement on an outfit need to be scrutinized and, if necessary (or even possible), properly adjusted before you can be confident that

they are in proportion and, therefore, flattering to your natural body size and shape. Professionals with a high degree of executive presence take the time to eliminate distractions caused by ill-fitting clothes. Many brands offer petite, missy and plus-size cuts for women and short, regular and tall cuts for men to help master this element of dressing well.

Balance: Balance is how every part of an outfit fits together. **It's the trickiest of the three style elements to master.** The best way to get a handle on balance is to think of your wardrobe as a puzzle. Be aware of how fabrics, styles of clothes and the weight of shoes and accessories work with one another as you piece together outfits. For instance, if a woman is wearing a sweater with a wool skirt and tights, a boot, bootie or a suede pump will connect to the outfit and balance it out better than if you wear nylons and patent leather pumps. If your pants have a heavy cuff, a jacket with a flap-over pocket might help balance the weight of the cuff, especially if you are short. If you decide to take advantage of a summer casual dress policy at your office, wearing a pair of khaki trousers with a loafer and polo shirt will look more balanced than wearing the same pants and top with a formal dress shoe. When all the elements of your outfit are well balanced, the outfit is more flattering and you project more confidence.

Last Word

By strategically incorporating line, proportion and balance into your outfits, you will be wearing your clothes instead of having your clothes wear you. **It's really all about training your eye so that you score your own set of points!**

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