

THE MALAYSIAN

# Women's Weekly

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Heartbreak Confession

"My husband hates me because our baby is not pretty"

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Master trainer  
Sheila Wong shares  
how to boost your  
confidence and shine,  
without showing off!

by Rina Ahmad Sapiuddin

Twenty years and thousands of clients after she held her first grooming class, Sheila Wong's name is synonymous with image consultancy and etiquette education in Malaysia. A leading consultant and master trainer in the image and beauty industry, Sheila strongly believes that positive self-presentation is not a luxury, it's a necessity.

As she explains, "How you package yourself determines the kind of people you attract. If you want respect, you need to dress correctly for your profession and the occasion. But no longer is there a single rigid standard for what is 'correct dressing'. The suitable choice depends on the industry or job profile, the specific business occasion and the message you want your image to transmit," she says.

According to Sheila, industries such as finance, accounting and law generally have a more conservative dress code. "When their money is involved, clients like to see signs of tradition and stability," she explains.

Meanwhile the advertising and interior design business "is where you need to show creativity and out-of-the-



**celebrate**  
your best self

box thinking. So these industries favour a more fashion-forward look.

"Real estate agents, sales, service and marketing personnel usually adopt an approachable, friendly business style. They can show their attention to details by using the right accessories."

Of course, the human factor also is part of the equation, adds Sheila.

"Within a single large corporation, each department may have an individual style. For example, a casual style may work in a branch office, but if you travel to corporate headquarters, you may need to project a more polished and sophisticated presence.

"Apart from that, every woman ought to carry herself with poise, confidence and elegance, without losing her warmth, sincerity and friendliness. A woman who looks after how she portrays herself, and conducts herself positively and graciously, will definitely command the respect she deserves."

So how does Sheila manage to portray this mix of friendliness plus professionalism? Her secret is to always keep her cool and to go with the flow.

"Once I was asked to conduct a grooming talk for 200 secretaries. I was under the impression that there would only be female participants, so I prepared fashion and style advice for women only. But on that fateful day, half the audience were men! They'd invited themselves along to the talk as a bonus! I couldn't change my slides at the 11th hour.



Sheila addresses the crowd with confidence at *The Weekly's* Etiquette & Grooming MasterClass.



*The Weekly* readers listen attentively to Sheila's insightful advice and tips.

At a workshop for *The Malaysian Women's Weekly*, Sheila Wong gave etiquette and grooming tips to help readers move up in their career. "Positive self-presentation is not a luxury, it's a necessity," she says.

Nor did I have a single piece of men's clothing with me.

"I went backstage to compose myself, and mentally re-do the sequence of my presentation. Those 10 minutes of mental preparation helped me compose myself and work out what to do.

"On stage, I felt I was in my element. I connected well with the audience, and remembered to share grooming tips for both sexes, by making use of natural

resources – I even borrowed some male clothing items from the floor. The audience loved the presentation."

It isn't surprising then that Sheila says her core philosophy is: "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

So she believes in being polite and listening to others as well as putting forward your opinions. "In a meeting, it can help to wait for when that subject is raised. If it's not raised – or even if it is – you may find it helps to ask permission for 'air time' so you can speak.

"In most cases, courtesy prevails in a professional business situation, so if you put forward your opinion you will be given attention. When sharing your opinion, look after people's self-esteem, avoid confrontational language but still keep it clear, concise and get to the point. This will help you to earn respect."

As for what to wear, Sheila says the answer is not to spend, spend, spend on the latest fashion. As she explains, "The world's greatest wardrobe plan isn't worth much if it substantially exceeds your budget. The solution has less to do with ringgit than with sense. If you look through your wardrobe you may find that you are using only 20 to 30 percent of what's in there."

She suggests you look at how you can mix and match the good-quality items in different ways, or give old

## Dress to impress

SPEAK THE RIGHT CLOTHING LANGUAGE AT WORK

### 1. Clean, healthy and neat hair works for men and women.

Says Sheila, "If you're fiddling with your hair all day, it says you are more interested in your hair than work. Try tying your hair back into an elegant chignon bun or high ponytail – not the same messy ponytail you wore at school."

### 2. Avoid sheer blouses or very short skirts.

Avoid plunging necklines and overly sexy fashion. Knee-length skirts are ideal. If you prefer shorter skirts, raising the hem 4cm above the knee is fine, but no more. Sit down in the skirt and check that it doesn't rise too high on your legs.

### 3. With jackets, wear formal shoes or pumps that cover your toes.

Hosiery also helps absorb perspiration and reduce blisters. Good hosiery colours for work include skin-coloured, toffee or light grey. But for industries where a fashionable image is important, black or coloured hosiery, bare-toed sandals or slip-on high-heel mules are fine. Unless you work in the fashion industry, avoid shoes such as high platforms or wedges, sequinned footwear and slippers.

### 4. Keep dangling earrings and jangling jewellery for after-work or social events.

A ring on every finger or an armful of bangles is distracting – and can send the message that you are flamboyant. One or two classy pieces of jewellery is better than a whole lot of bling.



## "I now have courage to speak up"

Mother of two, Azma Zuraida Ismail, 31, has worked in the Maybank Takaful accounts department for two years. In August last year she took part in a grooming course with Sheila Wong, and here's her story:

"People used to describe me as terribly shy and quiet. I kept to myself and didn't think much about how I dressed or my beauty regime. I knew the basics but didn't know how to wear bright coloured outfits. But my entire world began to change after attending Sheila Wong's class. I realised that although I interact with a limited amount of clients, I should look professional and groomed for meetings and seminars, because your image can be a better recommendation than any reference letter.

"My new grooming and communication skills have also boosted my self-esteem. I feel more confident in public. I used to keep things inside, but now I can say or do anything if I put my mind to it.

"Now I'm determined to enjoy life more. It's been my lifelong interest to do more with my career skills and to meet more people. So I've set a target to get involved in public relations or human resources – and I will! Life for me now is not just about excitement, it's also about achievement."

## What is your confidence rating?

ARE YOU BRAVE OR BLAND, SASSY OR STUFFY? TRY THIS QUIZ TO FIND OUT...

### 1. You're asked about work at a party. You:

- A. Tell them about your job, plus new roles you would like to try.
- B. Share interesting parts.
- C. Mutter something like "Oh, I'm not important..."
- D. Say, "It's very boring."

### 2. Your husband's aunt is coming to dinner. You've never met her before. You:

- A. Cook a dish you've never tried before.
- B. Cook a dish you like.
- C. Cook something your husband likes and hope his aunt likes it too.
- D. Cook a traditional dish.

### 3. Someone makes an appointment but lets you down at the last minute. You:

- A. Sulk for months.
- B. Scold them.
- C. Ask if they have a

reasonable explanation.

D. Say nothing.

### 4. You are about to meet someone you've never met before. You:

- A. Plan what to say.
- B. Stick to common topics of conversation.
- C. Ask questions and find out about them.
- D. Nervously hope they'll do all the talking.

### 5. If you could go on holiday, you would:

- A. Choose an adventure, like an African safari.
- B. Choose a trip where you know people.
- C. Choose somewhere romantic and relaxing.
- D. Go shopping, eat, then laze on a beach.

### 6. In a restaurant, your meal is not cooked well. You:

- A. Call the manager, and

loudly complain.

B. Ask for a fresh dish.

C. Eat it, but complain to your husband afterwards.

D. Eat it and say nothing.

### HOW TO SCORE?

A=10; B=5; C=3; D=0.

### YOUR SCORE

**40-60:** You push yourself and don't let anything get in your way. You have no fears of new experiences. Just remember, you won't be dragged down if you're more gentle sometimes.

**20-40:** An extrovert and creative, you delight your friends. Just remember that the world does not revolve around you.

**0-20:** Your confidence is very shaky and you're afraid to experiment. Look beyond your safe little cage or you'll lose out on all that life has to offer.

favourites a new look with accessories:

**Donate what you don't use.** If it doesn't fit, you haven't worn it for a year or you just don't like it, get rid of it. "If the items are in good condition, donate them to charity. You'll have more space and will do a good deed," states Sheila.

**Save and spend.** "Set aside 10 to 20 percent of your nett income for your wardrobe and grooming. Think of it as an investment in you."

**Flatter your figure.** "Select pieces that are flattering to your figure. An item does not need to be from a designer brand. Look for a cut and style that enhances your bodyline and gives you extra confidence when you walk out."

**Be careful about the fit.** "If the jacket, skirt or trousers are great but they don't fit, take them to a tailor to be professionally altered."

**Go for quality, not quantity.** "Quality is the real bargain. Better clothes and accessories are made from more beautiful fabrics and leathers. They tend to be cut more precisely, keep their shape better and look classic year after year."

**Use the cost-per-wear formula.**

This helps you work out the true cost of any item. "A well-cut jacket may cost you hundreds of ringgit. But if it gives you a slimmer silhouette, is in a neutral colour and adds the perfect finish to your business look, you will wear it very often. So divide the cost of the item by how often you will wear it. If you wear a RM500 jacket twice a week for one year, its cost-per-wear is approximately RM5." **Capsule groupings.** Says Sheila, "Plan your wardrobe into capsule groups of six to 12 garments you can mix and match in many ways. For example, coordinated skirts, dresses, blouses, pants, jackets and cardigans."

**Add accessories.** Trendy accessories like a slim silver or gold belt are a quick way to update and they don't have to be expensive. For more classic accessories, like a black belt, buy the best quality you can afford. Says Sheila, "A strand of pearls or silk scarves add a special signature to your look." **IWI**

For details on Sheila Wong's classes email [sheila@swetadvancement.com](mailto:sheila@swetadvancement.com)