

Look first class (even if your finances are flying economy!)

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Improving your personal brand and appearance won't make the slowdown go away but it will certainly increase your chances of success. It's easy to look presentable when you have limitless funds, but when you're not cashed-up it takes innovation, imagination and a little more effort.

Go shopping in your closet

Shopping in your own closet is the best trick known to first-class dressers on a budget. All you need is a couple of hours of spare time and a pair of fresh eyes, yours or invited.

First, rescue your loved and forgotten possessions from the dark depths of your wardrobe. Don't be surprised to uncover your school formal outfit residing alongside your first-date shirt.

Next, try on and assess every garment you own. Ask yourself: How can I make it look better? Does a sleeve need to be shortened? Hem taken up? Shape altered? Lint removed? Dry cleaners visited? Colour changed? Buttons swapped? Belt updated? Polish given? Shoulder pads removed?

With a bit of patience you can turn old favourites into first-class creations without spending much.

Pump up your grooming

Your hair and your hands are the crown jewels in the kingdom of power branding. Whatever your financial position, you need to take good care of them.

This doesn't mean that you have to become a regular at your local nail bar. A DIY manicure and some hand cream will ensure you can offer a confident and pleasant handshake. Gentlemen: it's OK to buff up those rugged paws!

Your hair, though, is a different story. DIY is not recommended here. Don't be afraid to spend a little more to get a good cut. Your hairstyle is a window to your character.

Embrace the sales

Love them or hate them, sales might be the way to go when your finances are flimsy. To bag the best bargains, however, you need to have perseverance, clear focus and a sharp mind. Concentrate on the things you need, not the discounts you want.

When your heart rate is accelerating over a \$900 jacket (now only \$100!) take a deep breath and ask yourself:

1. Do I love it madly and need it badly?
 2. If I had the money, would I buy it for the full price without a second thought?
 3. Do I have three other things in my wardrobe I can wear it with? If the answer is no, compose yourself and walk away.
- Let some other bargain hunter experience the post-purchase remorse!

Accessorise for success

When it comes to accessories, do you know 'the rules'? First it's the scale or size of things you wear. Large watches are for big guys. Small earrings are for petite girls. If you are of an average build, opt for accessories of an average size. Then, it's your face and body line. If you have angular features (think angular face shape and/ or straight body) go for angular patterns and straighter accessories shapes. If you are rounded in your face and curvaceous in your body, opt for rounded jewelry and softened patterns. Finally, it's placing accessories strategically on your body to attract attention to your face. Loud shoes draw attention down; no good when you're trying to connect. A fabulous tie or necklace gets attention up; handy for ease of communication.

Some things are not negotiable

It's true; your shoes are seen as a signal of your personal success. The same goes for your handbag and watch; they are the signs of one's professional achievement. There are few things that a true professional should have in his or her life:

1. A leather bag - think neutral colour, minimum detailing and a timeless style.
2. Two pairs of outstanding shoes - a quality make with good leather in a simple shape.
3. An elegant watch - gold or silver finish, in proportion to your body size and a reputable brand.

The bad news? You can't fake it. Don't try to fool a discerning eye. Good news? You'll save money.

One decent pair of shoes is better than five mediocre ones.

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