

Clothes still make people

The saying that clothes make people was not only true in Gottfried Keller's Seldwyla. Uniforms with reinforced shoulders and chests or stiff hats and high-heeled shoes that make people appear taller still have the same effect today. On the one hand, we perceive people differently depending on their clothing. On the other hand, our own clothing influences our self-perception and therefore our behaviour.

Peter Näf

In recent years, dress codes have been relaxed in many contexts, which may often make sense. And yet I have noticed that my coachees often underestimate the effect of clothing and thus miss out on an opportunity. Clothing influences other people and if we forgo this effect, we must compensate for the lost impact in other ways. This can mean extra effort.

We realise that we react to such apparent outward appearances as clothes at the latest when we accidentally meet an authority person in the sauna.

The right costume helps us get into the role

I find it even more interesting how our own clothing affects our behaviour through our self-perception. In the article «Role play - an underestimated concept!», I described the advantages of consciously adopting roles in professional life or clearly defining them. Clothes help us to find our way into a role.

You may be familiar with the game with the different hats from communication seminars: depending on the role you play in an interaction; you wear a different coloured hat. And what happens? It's like magic: the hat makes it easier for you to

slip into the role and act accordingly.

The same applies to everyday working life: when we consciously take on a role, the demands that a situation places on us suddenly become clear. You can utilise this fact in a targeted manner. Here are a few examples:

Rolling up properly is half the battle

Sometimes I offer coachees an appointment on a Saturday. I used to say that I would only work in jeans and a jumper at the weekend, but I never succeeded. I would struggle to find my way into my role as a career coach without my work clothes and my usual accessories such as laptop, writing pad and pencil. Another advantage of my work clothes is that when I change after a meeting, I also take off my role and therefore don't take any loose ends home with me.

As a young student, a white shirt with a bow tie and black gilet turned me into the boss of my section in the nightclub where I worked as a waiter. My guests would never have guessed that I was an introverted, slightly shy student in everyday life. One customer told me how she always wore her red blazer during difficult negotiations. And as a headhunter, I had my «acquisition tie», which I put on before every client visit.

It's not just by candlelight and romantic music that appropriate clothing puts us in the right mood. Even in professional life, the right costume has the same effect on our self-perception and our behaviour.

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