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Image is everything

Wednesday, October 19, 2011

Dress right to impress. In-depth knowledge about the established norms of social etiquette and grooming might be an estranged topic to most of us and wardrobe faux pas as good as overlooked. Naressa Coutinho finds out how image management could become the next hot career option from Parul Shukla, Image Consultant & Director of Image 4 U Consulting.

How often do you find yourself in the act of preening in front of the mirror in self-appraisal? The walk, the talk says it all – all enough to reiterate the famous idiom 'first impression is the last impression'. With a wealth of experience of over six years in her previous profession in HR, Parul Shukla says, "It takes recruiters just the first few seconds of the interview from the time you walk through that door to decide whether to hire you or not."



Parul (29), with a BSc degree in Business Administration and an MSc in International Employment Relations and Human Resource Management, became an entrepreneurial image consultant in India. "It basically involves advising, guiding and coaching people on how to enhance their image, not an overnight makeover but a gradual process of adapting to certain new styles. It's a one-stop-shop to acquiring socially accepted mannerisms with respect to wardrobe fashion design, styling, beauty, grooming, weight management, etiquette and body language, communication skills."

As an image consultant your expected clientele would include anyone right from a housewife, young professional to the likes of hi-profile individuals in various sectors like investment banking, retail, health care, lawyers, universities, schools, business schools, tourism industry, film and media. And how much more important will the right image be for any big corporate company in a world of intense competition and globalisation? After all it's an impressive first impression – well maintained, that would ultimately earn you higher returns, promotions, salary hikes or even a better job.

"I decided to combine my professional experience and interest to help individuals create a desired persona retaining their own strengths and minimising weaknesses," explains Parul, though admitting that as a professional image consultant there are no such things as weekdays or weekends because the nature of her work would demand organising workshops for schools or companies on their weekends or offs. The job necessarily entails doing personal research on the latest fashion trends, brands and styles, do's and don'ts and analysis of target audience that may differ according to age group, gender and social preferences. Being a fairly novel concept, not many are convinced of its need and so being able to market or sell your work and pitch to companies and organisations is quite a task.

Parul feels B.Com graduates, MBA professionals, psychology major students and fashion inclined youngsters should keep an open mind to a career in image consultancy. The scope is immense where one could specialise in retails, social or individual image management. Auspicious days like weddings and anniversaries also require their much valued advice. With youngsters already hopping on for internships and part time jobs before their big career choice, CV and interview preparations become another important section for an image consultant. In fact, image consulting workshops could become a necessity right from school and throughout university studies. Parul herself maintains a blog and publishes many write-ups along with being associated as a personal shopper for a reputed mall.

"It's far from being monotonous and moreover I like helping people come out of their shell and portray their confident side. That is what makes it a very rewarding profession for me. It involves a lot of interaction with new people from different places which itself is exciting. No given day is the same," says Parul simultaneously reminding me that it's a sunrise profession, requiring a lot of awareness and hard work. As an entrepreneur, it could financially strain you as a beginner but the long term rewards are a guarantee and as she likes to put it: "The success of any business is what you make of it". With flexible timings and project based nature, this customer service career has a long way to go in a developing country like India in the face of global competition to excel.

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