



Advice

Psychology

of Selling

Clothes really do make the man – or woman

James Dion explains why and how what employees wear impacts sales

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THERE'S A CONCEPT in psychology called the "like me bias." This concept describes the tendency of humans to feel most comfortable with what is familiar and known to them, what they have grown up with or what they've become accustomed to.

Each of us sees and experiences the world through our own eyes. What we define as "normal" is based on our experiences, even if our experiences are outside

what most people define as normal.

When we interact with someone like us – in age, gender, ethnicity and attire – we feel most comfortable. Likewise, when we interact with someone who's different or the exact opposite of us, we feel uncomfortable.

Imagine a 20-something female shopping for a dress to wear to a special occasion and a 68-year-old male serving her.

Most likely this young lady isn't going to feel very comfortable. (Unless, of course, it was Ralph Lauren, which simply proves that to each rule there are exceptions!)

A disconnect can also happen if the clothing one of your sales associates is wearing causes a lack of connection and trust. Humans use clothing to identify the group that they belong to or want to belong to. Clothing says a lot about our state of mind and how we feel about ourselves and even those around us.

How would you feel about a Prada-clad associate at an American Apparel store? A Target-style uniformed associate at a Tiffany boutique?

Retailers need to pay attention to what their staff is wearing as they truly are an extension of the store's brand. Inappropriately attired employees can and do have a negative impact on business.

Look at your target customer (the customer who represents more than 60 per cent of your business). Define them by age, sex, education and lifestyle attributes. Then think about how they dress. Do they don casual or formal apparel? If you want to maximize your ability to make that customer more comfortable and hence more likely to spend more with you, your employees have to mirror the target customer as much as possible.

James Dion has a bachelors and masters degree in psychology from the Chicago State University and a Ph.D. in industrial psychology from the Illinois Institute of Technology. Coupled with 30 years of hands-on retail experience, he's one of the most sought-after retail consultants internationally. He's also the author of three books including *Retail Selling Ain't Brain Surgery, It's Twice As Hard*.