

Image consultant Dolly Kee believes that every working person, from the CEO to the pencil-pusher, needs a dose of corporate sprucing up. *Grace Ong* finds out why.

Corporate makeover expert

Dolly Kee is an image consultant. Her clientele, however, comprises not the average Joe in a suit, but top management personnel, including chief operating officers. Her job is not just to teach them to project the correct image with their bearing, clothes and manners, but also in the way they dine.

Her courses include a mock fine-dining environment where she teaches them dining etiquette.

And, at her workshops, she is the boss and the bosses sit quietly and attend to her bidding.

At one such session, a subdued group of mostly men - there were 10 women - were trying to get through the starting course without stirring and slurping their soup.

"And please, don't smack your lips," she firmly reminds them.

These are lessons even CEOs must learn. That leads to the question: If CEOs need to be trained in business and social etiquette, where does that leave us ordinary pencil-pushers?

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Obviously, in dire need of the same.

After many years of observation in the corporate environment, Dolly is convinced that everyone can do with a little polishing up. And that does not exclude the most powerful man and woman in the boardroom, the CEO - if with all his or her business savvy and international contacts, still slurps his or her soup, and slices the hard roll with a butter knife, instead of breaking it into bite-sized pieces.

"The right image contributes to the most important aspect of your business - the bottomline. People might not want to deal with you if you appear unprofessional, uncultured and uncouth," she emphasises.

And your working attire is just as important as your manners. Earlier, Dolly, with a set of colour slides, showed the CEO examples of what professional men and women should ideally wear to work.

A lot of what she teaches is pure common sense, yet, one is amazed that so many people make the same mistakes. A common sight is women in too-short skirts and too-high heels.

"The more skin you reveal, the less authority you project in the boardroom," she says. That's why sleeveless outfits are a no-no, as are micro-minis - skirts must at least skim the knees.

"Prints are another matter; they make you look more casual. You need to balance it with solids. Perhaps you can wear a solid-coloured jacket over a printed dress," she adds.

Men are not exempted from the list of common mistakes,



Do it right ... Dolly showing one of her clients the right way to butter a bun. - SUMERS BY CHOW CHEN HUAT

going for bad-colour coordination and the wrong accessories.

"The men will wear sports socks with black shoes, and instead of classic watches, they like sporty, bulky, or plastic timepieces that are not appropriate. Sometimes, they wear the wrong belts, too," she says. "Details like these are very important. I see women, who have invested in so much money in a light-coloured dress and matching shoes have their image ruined simply because their pale shoes have dirt marks on them."

"People think that their unpolished shoes, or the stains on their shirts are not noticeable. Let me assure you that people do notice. A lot of people dress up for that important job interview, or that meeting with the director. But on other days, they are back to their usual self. There is no reason to drop the standard after you have secured the job." Not if you want to be seriously considered for that promotion, that is.

"There is no shortcut, and the trick to appearing well-groomed all the time is to make a habit of it - to make an

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effort, but not the extra effort. Like brushing your teeth, for example, it takes an effort to brush your teeth, but not an extra effort."

She is, of course impeccably, and "intimidatingly" dressed in a jacket, pearls and stockings and heels that are just the right height.

"You think I look intimidating? That's good, because when people see a well-groomed person, their respect for them goes way up. So, it is intimidation in a positive way," she says.

Dolly's agency, Image Power, which is based in Petaling Jaya, provides a full spectrum of consultancy services that will turn the most sloppy, ill-mannered person into a well-dressed, refined,

socially-acceptable being.

Her workshop modules cover a range of what any image consultant will vouch are the necessities of building the various images of the corporate person: professional image, developing your professional self-image, creating the "rapport" magic, enhancing your telephone image, business and social etiquette, professional presentation skills and business etiquette and protocol.

While it is not exactly the same as a year in a Swiss finishing school, Dolly's workshops are illuminating, especially the fine-dining modules.

Should you, or shouldn't you pick up the darned napkin yourself if you've dropped it?

Ask Dolly



Dolly ... epitomises the well-groomed career woman.