



Looking good in the corporate world

BY LOH CHYI JEN

An ambience of perfect serenity, amidst lush tropical greenery, fragrant lilies and roses arranged beautifully in tall bouquets, the cheerful sound of birds singing - all of this enlivened my senses. Away from the bustling, annoying traffic, the majestic Carcosa paints a picture of romance and classic elegance. Any guest to the Carcosa Seri Negara will have a charmed experience of nostalgic 19th century British lifestyle.

What a marvellous place to attend a course, and an etiquette course for that matter.

I made my way upstairs to the Seri Ehsan suite where the course was held.

I was given a warm welcome by Dolly Kee, the director of Image Power. Certainly before meeting her, I had carved an image of her in my mind. She would be polished in her manners and actions, absolutely courteous, sophisticated, impeccably dressed, exquisite. I was not disappointed.

Kee is of medium height and size, with large, brown eyes behind a pair of gold-plated spectacles. She sports a short and chic hairstyle, and offers a bright smile and a firm handshake, exuding an aura of cordiality and confidence.

She oozes a sense of elegance and professionalism, ever sensitive of her surroundings and mindful of her actions at all times.

She was tastefully dressed in a brown velvet maxi, a short white jacket with satin trimmings, skin-coloured stockings and a lovely pair of black high heels. A gilded

Business Computing was recently invited to attend an etiquette course conducted by Image Power. In the conducive environment of Carcosa Seri Negara, we were enlightened on the general rules of social and professional etiquette.

brooch in the shape of a parrot rested on the right side of her jacket for that finishing touch.

I was ushered to the balcony for some coffee while waiting for one more participant. There were only seven of us. Within a short while, the ice was broken.

The participants came from different industries, namely finance, insurance and even the reputedly dry IT industry. It was a small and cosy group. The session was nothing like the setting of a conventional classroom. We sat in a semicircle, on huge comfy sofas, beneath a brightly lit chandelier. I admired the luxurious interior of the suite, the wallpaper with floral motifs, tall pink drapes, dimly lit stand lamps, the plush carpet under my feet - all created an ideal atmosphere for some *tete-a-tete*. I was prepared for whatever etiquette legacy Kee was about to impart.

SELF IMAGE

She began her lecture by reminding us that as professionals in the corporate world, people have certain expectations of us be it in the way we behave, dress or talk. Therefore, the way we carry ourselves in a corporate and social environment is important in order to command respect, authority and

ultimately, to influence behaviour and achieve the results we desire. It is not good enough for an individual to have intelligence or expertise in a particular field of work. Soft skills are important as they give an edge to the individual.

How well we carry ourselves in public demonstrates how confident we are. Confidence is acquired through knowledge. When we know what to do and how to do things in a situation, we are able to act confidently. This is where etiquette comes in - the rules for formal relations or polite social behaviour in a class of society. In short, etiquette is the socially-accepted norm in a society.

The Malaysian culture is skewed towards the West. According to Kee this is because in the West, the lady is given more attention compared to Eastern culture where men takes precedence over women. However in a business environment, hierarchy takes precedence over gender.

A firm handshake is required, undoubtedly. But who should initiate the handshake? Kee states that in a social gathering, the gentleman ought to take the cue from the lady. In a situation where the lady does not extend her hand, a smile or a slight nod by the gentleman is sufficient. In a business environment, this does not apply. The initiation of the handshake should come from the person higher in the hierarchy. This is because the parameters for social and business environments are different. In a social environment, age and gender are prioritised. In a business environment, hierarchy takes precedence.

PROPER INTRODUCTIONS

When introducing yourself, Kee suggests that all titles be dropped. For example, you do not say, "Hello, I'm Mr/Dr/Prof/Datuk/Tan Sri Donald Lim". Just say, "Hello,

"How well we carry ourselves in public is equivalent to how confident we are."

— Dolly Kee



I'm Donald." On the other hand, when making third-party introductions, you ought to address the title of the person you are introducing. Kee adheres to three principles for third-party introductions.

First, identify who is more important. Second, always introduce the less important person to the more important one. Third, mention the name of the more important person first. To break the ice for the two parties you are introducing, it would be good to provide some information about the person you are introducing. For example, "Tan Sri Gopal, please meet Datuk Joned. Tan Sri has just arrived from London this morning."

POSITIVE IMPRESSIONS

Next, Kee talks about the importance of grooming and managing a positive impression. "People who are well-groomed generally command higher integrity and trust. That is why a woman who behaves like a lady, will naturally be treated like a lady. The same goes for men," says Kee. "Those who behave like gentlemen will be regarded as gentlemen

and treated as such.

In her opinion, wanting to look good does not equate to self-importance. Rather, it is self-respect. We should always inspect ourselves for undesirable flaws and take the necessary steps to overcome them.

Stained and crumpled clothing, unpolished shoes, dandruff, body odour and bad breath are unattractive traits. These can be avoided if we take time and effort to address them. Kee stresses that if we take the trouble to present a good image of ourselves, we are able to create opportunities, be it in career or personal aspects. It gives that extra edge over our counterparts in whatever we are pursuing. An individual may have all the wonderful inner qualities and skills to take on a particular job, but because he or she fails to present a positive image, they could lose out. "In short, good packaging creates opportunity," says Kee.

The basic wardrobe guidelines in order to look presentable are: simplicity, elegance and orderliness. According to Kee, it is easy to be simple and neat, but not easy to look elegant at the

same time. The way she sees it, many people do not know how to dress elegantly. Dressing elegantly means dressing appropriately for the occasion. Quality and style also play an important part in defining elegance. For instance, using a backpack to work is not elegant. A backpack is meant for outdoor adventure and casual use. One should carry a briefcase; and for ladies, a sling handbag. Furthermore, using designer labels does not necessary spell style and elegance for the wearer.

ACCESSORIES

For ladies, Kee advises that accessories for work should strive to enhance the look and are not aimed to attract attention. Chunky and noisy accessories should be avoided.

For gentlemen, because their accessories are limited, they should strive for quality. A good watch, pen and belt are good starters for a more polished look. Those who are more meticulous may want to consider cuff links, tie pins and suspenders in order to be more distinctive in their style of dressing. ☐



IMAGE BUILDING: Kee talks to the participants about the importance of grooming and creating a positive impression.