

HOW TO PUT TOGETHER A COMPLETE PACKAGE

Many Institute members know they cannot rely purely on technical knowledge and business acumen to remain competitive. As soft skills are increasingly important, Jemelyn Yadao finds out how CPAs can maintain a polished professional image throughout their careers

Illustrations by Matt Burchell

More than five years ago, image consultant Caroline Sze noticed how professionals, including accountants, had begun to seek her unique services. Before that, some had considered her field unnecessary. “Things changed,” says Sze, a Hong Kong Institute of CPAs member. “More people in the corporate world approached us for advice, including accounting professionals.” Sze herself worked as an auditor at PricewaterhouseCoopers before she founded Seasoning, a company that runs private and corporate grooming workshops.

Institute members would come to her with a common problem. “For example, their colleagues had been working in the

firm for so many years but the firm evolved and improved,” she recalls. “They would come to me because they wanted the staff or management team to do the same.”

Others, she says, would come to her looking for a change. “They would want the firm’s brand image to be strengthened. They feel it’s important for staff to be very presentable, especially now that not only are they expected to have the technical knowledge, but they also need to be more interesting to talk to,” says Sze.

Enhancing the way staff look and behave has become increasingly critical to Hong Kong accounting firms as they seek to maintain an edge in today’s competitive business environment.

Last year, EY invited Sze to share her

expertise with its female professionals with the aim of encouraging their career advancement. Key topics discussed during her workshop included achieving the right balance of professional and stylish, cosmetic care tips for tired skin during peak seasons and quick-make-up advice for those with tight schedules.

“Technical skills are important but inevitably, the clients’ and other people’s first impression of you will include what you wear and how you look,” says Michael Wong, EY’s Greater China Talent Leader. “Dressing well is another way to give confidence to our clients and I even think it helps to build up the overall image of the profession as well.”

As Wong notes, paying extra effort



“Dressing well is another way to give confidence to our clients and I even think it helps to build up the overall image of the profession as well.”

jecting an image of their staff – and the company – as being capable yet up to date. “You can achieve this through your outfit, your make-up and your hairstyle,” she says.

Men’s suits need not be black. Navy, different shades of grey and different textures such as tweed and wool can also be explored. Men are also urged to make work shoes a priority. “This is the most serious issue for corporate clients. They ignore the importance of the shoes. I always advise that they invest in sleek, streamlined footwear.”

Desmond Chan, a professional and executive image management trainer who is also an Institute member, recommends male CPAs to specifically have two to three suits for work and shirts in no more than three main colours, such as a light pink, pastel blue or white. “The rationale behind this rule is that in the corporate world, we don’t want to emphasize too much on personal style. We want to emphasize team work.”

Using tie pins and tie clips as a way of underscoring the status of senior or high-level staff should also be considered. “It’s a sort of non-verbal communication.”

For women, Sze points out that the range of colours to choose from for suits is broader than they think and includes black, grey, beige, burgundy and navy. She also urges them to not be afraid of accessories.

“Your colleague can wear the same suit as you but if you wear a chain necklace or pearls, the whole look changes,” she says. “You can add a vintage brooch before you go out or thin dangly earrings will do. It makes you more memorable and can be icebreaking as clients can ask about it.”

Of course, women shouldn’t wear excessive amounts of make-up at work but instead use it to slightly enhance facial features. “It could be as simple as adding rose-coloured blush to cheeks or a bit of eyeliner and that’s it,” suggests Sze.