

STYLE

Work in progress

Job-search candidates inch toward the right fit for their interview suits

By Wendy Donahue
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If only a successful job hunt were as simple as a great resume topped off with a good suit.

Too many people leave the appearance portion of the equation at that, laments Kristi Kelley, wardrobe director for The Image Studios, an image-consulting

firm in Chicago. No matter how expensive or inexpensive

the suit, she wishes that fit would give more people, well, fits--particularly women.

"No men buy a suit and don't get it tailored, but women do that all of the time," she said. "They don't look their tallest, thinnest and most powerful, because the suit is big on them."

For women, The Image Studios uses a program called the Fashion Fit Formula, a computer tool that calculates the ideal proportions of clothing for a client. Based on 12 vertical measurements of the body, it's independent of weight loss or gain so it can be used for life, Kelley said, to help you see when certain shirt sleeves, jackets, pants and skirts need to be altered or avoided to flatter your figure.

"Most women only wear 20 percent of their wardrobe; the other 80 percent is left untouched," Kelley said. "This tool helps women to maximize what is already in their closet, utilizing dollars already spent."

She recently used an arsenal of tools, including color analysis--another underestimated feature in suit strategy--for two clients who were embarking on job searches.

Burr Ridge native Jessica Dixon, 23, a master's student in health administration at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, bought a suit on her own and brought it to Kelley for head-to-toe perfecting.

"I've never had to wear professional attire," Dixon said. "I felt like I had a grasp of what was inappropriate but not optimal. A lot of suits, when I put them on, I feel like a kid playing dress-up."

"A lot of that is the tailoring," Kelley chimed in.

Chicagoan Byron Prince, 34, who will graduate in June with a doctorate in education administration from Nova Southeastern University, asked Kelley to do the shopping for him, emphasizing that he has been told he looks "intimidating" and wants to avoid that vibe.

Below are some of the specific recommendations that Kelley had for each candidate.

Candidate/client: Burr Ridge native Jessica Dixon, 23, a master's student in health administration at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Job search: A summer internship in health administration, leading up to her final year of school. (Update: She landed an internship in hospital administration.)

Interview suit: An unaltered Benetton beige suit that she bought for about \$200 at the Benetton shop in the Chicago Premium Outlets mall in Aurora. "I'm a girl on a budget," Dixon said.

Color commentary: "I may not have chosen that specific color that she bought due to the fact it was a little light for her complexion," said Kristi Kelley, of The Image Studios. "But putting the lavender shirt with collar out gave her more color and life to the suit. It framed her face nicely." The lavender shirt by Brooks Brothers (\$19) is from an outlet store.

Skirt prescription: Shorten the midcalf skirt by a whopping 4 1/2 inches. "It was a frumpy look. This will make a more flattering, polished statement,"

Kelley said after pinning up the skirt.

Jacket advice: Tuck in flaps of pockets. "The flaps draw attention to the hips," Kelley said. "We'll tuck them in for a cleaner silhouette." Also shorten the sleeves.

Shoe selection: For a youthful touch of trendiness but with professional polish, Kelley suggests round-toe slingback heels from Lori's on Armitage Avenue, with nude sheer stockings. "For interviews, always wear hosiery," Kelley said.

Candidate/client: Byron Prince, 34, who is graduating with a doctorate in education administration.

Job search: A position in education administration, with an eye toward possibly entering politics at some point.

Interview suit: Kelley chose a chocolate suit with a blue pinstripe (\$950) from Trend for Men, a shop at 1551 N. Wells St. that claims several professional athletes as clients.

Color commentary: Kelley avoided a black suit because Prince has been told he looks intimidating. This shade of brown is softer but still dark enough to project authority. She paired it with a soft yellow dress shirt (\$185) and yellow tie with a circular pattern (\$150), again to soften the look (also from Trend for Men). "Normally, I would have done a bold stripe tie for interviews," Kelley said. "This is his exact color palette, based on color analysis. "

Jacket advice: "He has big biceps--bigger than his shoulders--so we had to go way up in size, then the tailor will have to adjust the armholes and sides." She also recommended taking a half-inch off the jacket sleeves so the shirt cuffs peek out.

Pants prescription: The single-pleat pants, chosen to allow room for Prince's muscular thighs, need to be shortened. He can opt for or against a cuff, partly because he's 6 foot 1. "Two-pleat pants need a cuff, one-pleat pants can go either way," Kelley said. "If you're below 5-8, you probably don't want cuffs." The waist also needs to come in as does the rise of the pants, again to accommodate his muscular thighs.

Accessories: Kelley chose silver for all hardware details, on the watch, belt buckle and shoes. "I didn't do a pocket square because of his size," she said. "It would draw attention to his chest."

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One tailor's fees

Behind every well-dressed man or woman is a great tailor, and Kristi Kelley fiercely loves the one she uses for Image Studios' jobs. A glimpse of what he might charge a client for alterations to a suit:

PANTS

\$10 to adjust waist and seat of pants

\$8 to shorten and add a cuff to pants

\$6 to shorten pants

SUIT JACKET

\$30 to shorten jacket

\$12 to shorten sleeves

\$16 to take in at the sides

GRAND TOTAL: \$50 to \$75

Wardrobe consulting

Kristi Kelley charges \$125 an hour for private wardrobe consulting at The Image Studios, 22 N. Morgan St., No. 215. She starts with an assessment of price sensitivity. A client's budget might be \$500 or \$3,000; the average

is about \$1,500 for a new wardrobe. For one client, she found a Garfield & Marks suit for \$75 at a consignment shop. "Some clients just want to do a closet assessment, some shopping, some both."

The Image Studios also staffs speech and image coaches and hair and makeup stylists.

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