

## Polish Your Professional Image: Tips from a HR Pro

By Patricia Traina-Duckers, CPRW, CRW, CEIP  
The Resume Writer  
[www.theresumewriter.com](http://www.theresumewriter.com)

A good resume writer can only contribute so much towards your successful career search. At some point, you have to take over and being the search to the successful close. In addition to possessing the background and experience necessary to get the job done, you also want to pay attention to the image you are portraying to prospective employers.

Judy Miller, a recruiting manager for a mid-sized Manhattan law firm, spoke about making a positive first impression, and how job seekers ruin things without even realizing it. She shared five areas for people to pay attention to when conducting a job search:

1. **Paper Choices.** I have had many clients want to print their resumes on extremely fancy paper. Imagine their surprise when I recommend they stick to plain linen stock, although it means less of a sale for me. The reason why I stick with the basics is that fancy paper does not make a difference in deciding what candidates are called into an interview.

Judy agrees. "A fancy paper stock means nothing to me other than a person has good taste. But if they can't get the job done, then the fancy paper was nothing more than a waste of money."

2. **Personal Appearance.** Heavy chains, pinky rings, and large gaudy earrings, while fashionable, carry a certain stereotyping with them. Trendy clothes, artistic collars, leather blazers and skirts are not smart choices to wear to a job interview, nor is loud make-up. "People need to dress as though they were going to a religious ceremony," Judy suggested. "Flashy and too stylish is best left for the fashion runways of Paris and Milan. And ladies, please make sure you wear a slip under a translucent skirt -- better yet, don't wear a see-through at all."

3. **Personal Hygiene.** Good personal hygiene goes along with personal appearance. "Don't come into an interview wearing heavy perfume or cologne," Judy said. "Don't chew gum -- if you must lubricate your throat, discretely suck on a small candy. Make sure you clean your teeth before coming to the interview -- it's not only distracting to see someone with a lettuce leaf stuck between their teeth, it's also unappealing." Judy adds that it is important to be yourself, but exercise common sense and sound judgment if you happen to have some unappealing personal habits that are offensive to others.

4. **Voice Mail.** Who amongst us doesn't like to express ourselves in our own way? There is nothing wrong with playing a favorite song, reading a poem or getting cute with your answering machine's greeting. However, when you're in the midst of a job search, it is a good idea to put the cute stuff away for a little while and stick with the non-nonsense basics. "Recruiters are very busy people. We don't have five minutes to listen to that song you wrote," Judy said, sharing a story about an aspiring musician who wrote a song summarizing their qualifications for a paralegal position. "Keep your home voice mail-greeting short and simple -- and remember that you can always go back to the creative stuff after you've landed the job."

5. **E-mail Address.** You probably know that e-mail addresses that have handles such as "hot mama," "big daddy" "cowboy" or "sexy stud" are major faux pas because they are better suited for collecting replies to a personal ad than to a job inquiry. However, did you also know that handles like "Audiman" democratic fan and "Yankees nut" are just as bad? Just as you wouldn't put down hobbies and interests on a resume (unless of course they are relevant to your desired profession), you shouldn't include any information that might reveal a hobby/interest, political or religious affiliation. Doing so could disqualify you from consideration if the wrong person sees it, or worse yet misunderstands your creativity. "Discrimination is against the law," Judy said. "However, it is not extinct. A good rule of play it safe and stick with

your name or some variation of your name if it's not available." She also added, "Screen names like 'legal beagle' or anything referencing the type of job you're seeking do *not* put you at any kind of advantage."

6. **Bags.** Judy chuckled when this topic came up. "People are coming in for an interview," she said. "Yet they bring in these huge bags, and for what? Do they think we're going to give them a cash signing bonus on the spot and that they need the big bag to haul it out of here?"

She suggested that job seekers limit their baggage to one small purse for women or a briefcase/portfolio, not both. (Women can put their makeup inside the briefcase just as easily as they could inside a purse.) Men should limit their baggage to a briefcase or portfolio. "If a job interview calls for samples, don't bring your whole book. Select three to five of your best samples to show and protect them in a folder."

Judy acknowledges that it's hard to turn off certain habits, but maintains that making a few small sacrifices will pay off in the end. "Companies want people of whom they can be proud enough to have represent them in the community. There's always going to be a time and place for a person to kick back and relax, be creative, be silly or whatever. The job market is not that place, not if the ultimate goal of the career professional is to become established in a good-paying position that offers room for advancement."