Women: Wearing the right hues for you

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Wearing red will not make you more powerful. Orange will not make you cheerful. And purple certainly won't make your co-workers see you as royal. So why are so many of us intrigued by the psychology of color?

Why even talk about color in the workplace?

Color is a means of instant communication: You can convey something about yourself simply by choosing certain colors. Do consider the following:

1. Wearing the right hues for your skin tone makes a difference. You look healthy and bright

– just right – in the correct shades of color for you. The reason image professionals push clients to understand their skin tone (warm or cool) and intensity (vivid/bright or soft) is to help them to dress for their personal brand. We want people to focus on you and your intelligence and ability. The right colors help make that happen.

2. You feel great in certain colors: the shades of colors that are right for you. And when you feel great you generate more energy and appear more confident. Don't we all want to be seen as confident?
3. Certain colors are seen as more work traditional; others are seen as more trendy. Being aware of your brand and then using color to project your strengths is just smart. Why not take every advantage?

Psychology of color: Older than the hills

Marketers, advertisers, and designers are very aware of how to use color to elicit responses in people. There's a reason the color red was chosen for Coca-Cola: It's stimulating and exciting. Why is UPS brown? Because they want to convey safety and trustworthiness. Business professionals can use color to elicit response just as easily.

Red is exciting and stimulating. It's an attention grabber and can communicate power. But it can also be distracting and exhausting to the eye. Use red judiciously. Red "power suits" are few and far between. Consider a black skirt, red blouse and dark gray jacket; or red shoes; or a red purse or statement necklace. Wear red when you want to appear:

- Confident
- Vibrant
- In charge
- Dynamic

Pink can convey warmth, delicacy and femininity. Too much pink might be perceived as "girly."

Orange is cheerful, invigorating and warm. Orange has been trending for some time now:

Tangerine Tango is the color of 2012, as designated by Pantone. Just because it's out there doesn't mean you should wear it. Here are some suggestions for wearing orange:

- Orange is best either as one statement piece or as a component of a pattern.
- Don't wear a truly "orange" lipstick. Orange lips aren't natural – put peachy ones are. Invest in the right peach tone and people won't be thinking, "My, her lips look orange" instead of listening to your words.
- If you have a cool skin tone, consider raspberry or blue-red instead of orange. Or choose to wear orange away from your face.

Blue is cool and is perceived as sincere and trustworthy. It's also considered a "conservative" color because it conveys reliability and dependability. If you are not a conservative kind of person, opt for more vibrant hues of blue, such as aqua or sapphire.

Purple is associated with royalty: it's a luxurious color. In purple occurs least frequently in nature, so people do take notice when you wear grape, violet, plum, or lilac.

Go ahead and experiment with color. Learn your skin tone (warm or cool) and then try out a new color: orange-red or blue-red; grape or plum; peach or orange. I'd love to hear how a new color makes you feel.

If you would like to learn more you about the psychology of color I suggest:

Color – Message and Meanings: A Pantone Color Resource by Leatrice Eiseman

Color Psychology and Color Therapy: A Factual Study of the Influence of Color on Human Life by Faber Birren