

# Finding a new uniform in a different setting

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*Speaker Rita Gworek, a DC-based image consultant, spoke to students and family members about dressing for success at the Sept. 14 "Dress for Success" presentation in Bliss Hall. Photo by Kelly Schloesser.*

Sept. 14, 2009 -- For many Army War College students, camouflage may be the standard for everyday attire, but in corporate settings, business dress does anything but hide an individual from watching eyes.

"What we wear sends a message," said Rita Gworek, a DC-based image consultant and the guest speaker at the Sept. 14 "Dress for Success" seminar in Bliss Hall. "The message we want to send depends upon the quality of our dress."

For many of the attendees at both the male and female portions of the seminar, worrying what to wear in the corporate world has never been an issue.

"Students are allowed to wear civilian clothing in the classrooms and many of them are used to only wearing a uniform," said Joe York, head of Military Family Programming, and one of the event's organizers. "At some point, the students will need to go out and buy professional clothing, especially if they are at the strategic level, which means more interaction with civilian communities and uniforms can be intimidating."

For Gworek, the translation from military dress to civilian clothing is not as difficult as it may sound.

"Having been in the military, many of you are used to wearing a uniform, but we wear uniforms in the private sector as well," Gworek said. "In the military, rank sends a message, well, in the corporate world, how you look and the quality of your clothing is reflective of your rank."

Gworek had plenty of advice for the men in the room, emphasizing to her listeners the importance of fit.



"Well-fitting clothing is probably the best piece of advice I can give you," she said. "Men tend to have an easier time with clothing than women but they still need to find clothing that fits well. When it fits well, it looks polished and you are more credible."

Women should find a trustworthy tailor as well.

"I think women need to be more realistic about their bodies and who they are," she said. "I think we try to compare ourselves to others but that's not who we are. We need to work with who we are and make it better."

Covering up means more respect for women in the workplace, but throwing oversize clothing on bulkier frames won't hide fuller figures, Gworek said.

"It is important for women to send the right message, be taken seriously and yet still retain their femininity," she advised. "A well-cut skirt suit can send a very strong message in the corporate world, and it is one of the things we can wear and men can't."

For men, sticking with the classics will go a long way in both the closet and the wallet, Gworek advised.

"Try to stay with fabrics like wool," Gworek said. "Regular wool can take you year round and it breathes; it is stain resistant; and it won't wrinkle as easily as synthetics will."

Speaking of wallets, Gworek suggests having clothing tailored with a wallet in a pocket, so adequate room can be left.

Women should stay with more traditional cuts of suits too, but should keep the accessories up to date so outfits are fresh, she said.

"Women can wear more synthetics because the styles change so often for women that we tend to buy more every season," Gworek said. "But having classic pieces, you can mix and match as well as update the ensemble with different tops, blouses and accessories."

Gworek had a word of warning about mixing suit pieces for both men and women.

"If it is a \$100 or cheaper, then you can mix and match the pieces, but if you have a really expensive suit, don't mix and match the pieces because you will wear them out at different rates, making the suit look worn and tired in places," she said.

In addition to fit, Gworek said the color of a suit or ensemble can dictate how the person wearing it is perceived.

"For men, jet black suits are reserved for intimidation, that is why we see the Secret Service wearing them," she said. "Try to avoid dark black and go with charcoal gray or a dark navy blue suit. Paired with the right color shirt and tie, they will take

you far."

Women were cautioned against wearing colors that contradicted their personalities.

"If you are an introvert, don't wear a red suit, it calls attention to you," she said. "Wear colors that not only compliment you, but colors you are confident in."



Many audience members said they had previously underestimated some of Gworek's speaking points and would pay more attention to them in the future.

***Gworek provided students and family members with examples of how to dress in corporate and professional settings, where a military uniform is not typically worn. Photo by Kelly Schloesser.***

"I learned a lot about the importance of accessorizing, which I like because I don't always accessorize very well," said Renee Warren, family member, after the presentation. "The presentation, for me, reaffirmed that buying off the rack is not easy and that finding a good tailor can make all the difference."

"I found her suggestion of going out to high end stores and actually feeling the high quality fabrics to learn their textures really interesting," said Col. Poncho Madkins. "It gives us the opportunity to learn about what is current and since most of us have been in uniforms, we have to get out there and see what is new."

Lt. Col. Jim Anderson said he was surprised to hear such emphasis placed on color.

"Most of us Army guys focus on color coordination and 'Does this match?' not about what message we are sending," he said. "I am going to try to pay more attention to that aspect now."

For York and the event's co-organizer Jeffrey Hanks, of the Family Member Employment Program, a presentation such as Gworek's provides service members with a new outlook on the corporate world.

"We tailor jobs to individuals," Hanks said. "So this helps them have an idea of what to expect and helps us to help them find what they are looking for when they leave the Army."

The importance of Gworek's presentation is not lost on military personnel.

"It is important," Madkins said. "People see the clothes before they see the person."