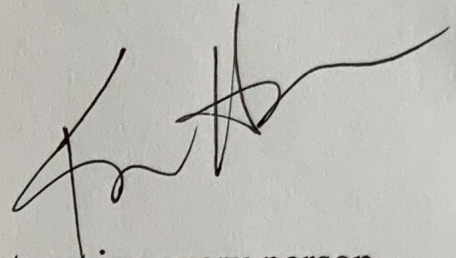


Toastmaster Magazine Article by Karen Hudson,
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Who Am I Now ...What Is My Story?



Consciously or Sub-Consciously we judge and categorize every person we encounter based in great part on the clothes they are wearing.

This process of observation - in reverse - is how I Costume characters in a script. I think of myself as a social/psychologist – in other words I watch people evaluating how their clothing functions to expresses individual character and how that person fits into his society.

The process is a similar when you dress to speak before an audience.

For me one of the most interesting parts of Costuming for TV and Film is the wealth of information that can be conveyed by minute detail. Changing just one item of clothing or accessories can change the Character. In my Costume Class I play a game with the students called "Who Am I Now"? I wear a black turtle neck sweater and pants, pearl stud earrings and black low heal shoes. During the first half hour of the class as I introduce myself and outline the class I change jackets. I begin with a turquoise, cotton casual jacket with large silver buttons. I ask the students to make notes on who they think I am including what kind of job I have, how much money I make, where I live, what car I drive, etc? Then I change to a more tailored red jacket – Pay attention to the psychology of the color and style change. Who Am I Now? This has opened their eyes to the necessity of attention to detail.

Will you be speaking to Inform; Inspire; or Entertain?

Speak to Inform:

When you **Speak to Inform** you present information or teach concepts. First impressions count. You must establish your credibility at first glance, whether you are the CEO of a Fortune 500 company or Jack Hanna with a Lemurs on "Good Morning America". I would be confused if I saw Jack Hanna in a suit and tie talking about endangered animals in the wilderness.

Your Clothes Speak: The goal is for the audience to understand that you are the expert and accept your credibility. When you **Speak to Inform** you want the audience to look up to you and reach up to take action. You are achieving a look of Strength, Power and Leadership.

A Story: When I knew the day "on set" would be challenging I dressed for power, usually in black with a sophisticated jacket and a striking accent of jewelry to draw focus to my face.

Speak to Inspire:

When you **Speak to Inspire** you are telling a story that offers a point of view leading to change. Your goal when you dress is to break down any wall between you and the audience, while maintaining a powerful persona. You could be less formal, a little softer, more conversational. That might run the gamete from a softened conservative look such as wearing a dark blue suit rather than a black suit; to the very casual look of Wayne Dyer, the expert in self-development; or to the "out there" look of professional speaker Mikki Williams whose look was mentioned in the December issue of Toastmaster Magazine.

Your Clothes Speak: When you **Speak to Inspire** you want the audience to reach out to you, embrace your ideas and grow personally. Your goal is to be accessible, credible and lead people.

The Who Am I Now Game - change #3 is a moss green antique Kimono. When the students complete their notes on the Kimono clad character I add a psychic/hippy necklace and ask if the necklace changes or clarifies their description.

Speak to Entertain:

When you **Speak to Entertain** you will be telling a story that grabs the attention of the audience and “Makes Their Day”. There are two ways you dress to tell the story. The rule in both cases is that the garments must be Congruent with the Story.

#1. Often you Dress to suggest the Setting of Your Story.

Dr. Francis Hodge, Professor Emeritus of Directing, calls Costumes, “Scenery on the Move”.

A Story: In a recent Area Contest a young business man told the story of his trip into a remote mountain area where his life was challenged. He was dressed in a suit, tie and dress shoes. He demonstrated the physical challenges and spoke of his fear. After the contest I talked with him about the idea of wearing casual clothes to better illustrate the story. At the Division Contest he told the same story but wore an oxford cloth, button down shirt – open at the neck with no tie. His sleeves were buttoned at the wrist. He wore tan khaki pants pressed with a crease and new hiking boots. He had taken my advice in a very interesting way. By wearing casual clothes he illustrated the setting of the story. By wearing them clean and neatly pressed he painted a picture of his day-to-day life amplifying the fact that he had stepped out of his comfort zone and learned a life lesson. His choices told both sides of the story.

#2. You may Dress as the Main Character in the story. In a screen writing class I learned that each character and his action must contribute to the outcome of the story. The same holds true for the garments and accessories you use as a Costume for your speech, each item contributes directly to the telling of the story and its outcome.

Go for it, have fun, and then... Does it work for you? Evaluate:

- The Costume should not take focus from you, the speaker.
- You need be able to perform comfortably and effectively in the costume and accessories.
- The Costume should not tell more story than you have time to present.

For Your Consideration: How do you choose the garments?
Weigh the effects of one or more of these Design Elements when you choose what to wear as a speaker or as a Costumed character speaking.

- **Color** – The color you use and the way you use it can create Power, Aggression, Focus, Humor, Gentleness and many other emotions.

A Story: On “Hill Street Blues” I costumed the character of a young woman drug addict. She lost her battle with drugs when she over dosed at the end of the third episode. The Actress was a thin, frail looking blonde. For her first change I dressed her in washed-out tan which was not her best color. To illustrate her decline I dressed her in dirty yellow and for the final episode in putrid yellow-green, each time making her look closer to death. Color can create a positive or a negative.

- **Contrast** – Contrast in shades of light and dark as well as the contrast between patterned and solid fabrics can create sophistication, exaggerated humor or low grade bad taste. Medium to Large size jewelry can also create contrast. Small details are often not seen from the stage. On the stage a speaker dressed in all black can look flat and two dimensional without contrast.
- **Focus** – Focus should be kept near the head and gesture area, unless otherwise required by the story, Dorothy’s red shoes in the “Wizard of Oz” being an example.
- **Line** – The “Hard Line” created by the straight skirt of a woman’s business suit makes a very different statement than the “Soft Line” created by a three tiered peasant skirt. For men there is a vast difference in the “Hard Line” of a double breasted suit and the “Soft Line” of a corduroy sport jacket worn open.

- **Exaggeration** – Exaggerate with caution. It can be great and it can also overwhelm the speaker and make him invisible.
- **A Delicate Balance:** In each of these elements of design there is a range of choices from simplicity to complexity. I believe a degree of simplification along with focus should be considered even when the character is frilly, complex, or exaggerated.
Too many good ideas – is too much!

Tips for Fine Tuning:

For the Women:

- If you wear a straight skirt on stage it is important that your skirt hem be level. To achieve a level hem begin by wearing the shoes you will wear with the skirt. Using a yardstick vertically from the floor to the bottom of the skirt measure the hem length at 5 inch intervals all the way around.
- Being seated on stage can cause modesty challenges. It helps if the skirt is an inch or two longer. When you are seated place one foot behind the other, hold your knees together and tilt them to the left or right to show a little thigh to the audience which creates a ladylike, modest appearance.
- Wearing shiny or dangling earrings may be distracting to the viewer. If you are physically animated your speech can become a story about earrings.
- Clanking bracelets and necklaces are distracting to the eyes and to the ears.
- It is advisable to keep your hair off your face. When it falls forward a segment of the audience cannot see your face. In the theatre this visibility is called “Sight Lines”. For me it seems disrespectful to the audience to obscure your face.
- Cream colored lipstick makes it difficult for the audience to see your lips. In most instances it also makes you look sick.

For the Men:

- Your Tie choice is an opportunity to visually enhance your power, credibility, accessibility, creativity, etc. The wrong tie

could distract the audience or confuse their perception of who you are.

The second hand store is a good place to expand your collection of ties for a very nominal cost.

- Your tie should be tied so the point rests at the bottom of your belt buckle. If you have trouble tying the tie long enough you may need Tall Man ties which are available at a Department Store in Men's Furnishings. Ask the sales person for help choosing the correct tie length.
- When you are speaking and gesturing your coat sleeves can appear short. If you do a lot of speaking it might be worth having one jacket or suit coat finished with the sleeves an inch longer than normal.
- The worst pant length is "too short". In general when you are standing your socks should not be visible.
- Polished shoes and well groomed nails are a plus.

For Men and Women:

Footwear:

- Shoes are important not only to the way you look, but also to the way you move, to your safety and to the possibility of annoying sound effects.

If you are a woman wearing high heels, be sure you can move gracefully in them and stand in a poised manner. Standing in a poised manner would be with your feet spaced at a comfortable distance apart - perpendicular to each other. Not only does this look graceful but it also allows you to make subtle body gestures by shifting your weight forward and back from one foot to the other.

Men and women's shoes have a similar challenge with safety and noise. To keep your shoes from making unwanted noise and to keep them from slipping you can have rubber cushion, sometimes called "Dance Rubber", applied permanently to the sole and heel by a shoemaker.

Miked for Sound – If you will be wearing a microphone your clothing and jewelry should be chosen within these parameters.

- The microphone will be placed in an area on your front of your clothes near the base of your neck. There should be no fabric or jewelry that could rub or bump on the microphone when you move.

The microphone will pick up the scratching sounds of hard surface silk and polyester fabrics, nylon windbreaker jackets and plastic rain gear rubbing together.

You will need a waist band, belt or pocket to carry the sound pack.

I challenge you – Look in the mirror and ask yourself “Who am I Now...What is my Story? Am I projecting the person who is qualified to speak on this subject...Do I convey the story I want to tell?”

Good Luck with your choices. Decide to Do It – Don't let it be an Accident