

# Building & Maintaining a Positive Image

*“The way to gain a good reputation  
is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear.”  
—Socrates*

Building and maintaining a positive image is as important in the real world as it was in college. The only difference is that the stakes are higher now if you get stuck with a bad reputation.

Word can travel fast about the good you do and the bad—the excellent image you project and the one that will keep you from advancing in your career. As African- American women we often have to struggle harder than our white counterparts to be respected and taken seriously; we don’t want our own mistakes to be the cause of this.

Projecting an image that demands respect and developing a reputation as a diligent, intelligent and honest person should be considered an ongoing process for all of us. In order for us to succeed in the workplace and our careers we must be perceived

in a positive light by our peers and the person who signs our paycheck. Though it's easy to forget, you must remember that everything you do and don't do, say and don't say, is picked apart and judged by others. People view your talk, your walk, your style of dress, and the overall way you carry yourself as a reflection of who you are and what you have to offer.

At this point in our lives we should have all been exposed to various types of questionable people one can find in almost any work environment: bossy people, manipulative people, brown-nosers, etc. It would be awful for you to be stereotyped on the job as "being" a certain way. And when it comes to black women, there are unfortunately some behavioral types that people think belong just to us. Please do all that you can to ensure you aren't labeled as being like one of these women:

*Ms. That's Not My Job*

"That's not my job" is her motto, but the real problem is that no one can figure out what she does anyway. All her peers wonder why she hasn't been fired yet and resent her because she doesn't pull her own weight. The word "teamwork" is not in her dictionary, and neither is "diligence" and "competence." Ms. That's Not My Job spends most of her day pretending to work and thinking about what she's going to do with her next paycheck. She sees her job as just a stepping-stone to something greater, so she never really puts much effort into anything she does. When she gets passed up for promotions or fired she thinks it's because she didn't brown-nose the boss or because he or she just didn't like her.

*Ms. Donna Karan*

Her co-workers wonder if she's selling drugs or has a sugar daddy because they know she doesn't earn enough to sport all those expensive clothes. It's like this woman comes to work for the sole purpose of working her outfit. Everything she wears has its designer label in plain view and she'll find some way to tell you how much the outfit cost her. And while she can name every hot fashion designer in the industry and tell you when a

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new line is coming out, she draws a blank when you ask her anything about her industry and line of work. She doesn't realize that clothes don't make the woman and she'll never make it out of a cubicle with her present mindset.

### *Ms. Saved*

Her peers are all out of excuses for why they can't go to church with her this week. It's not because they're heathens—they're actually afraid they'll get struck down in the church if they go with her. Ms. Saved put all her old ways behind her when she turned her life over to God except lying, gossiping, coveting thy neighbor's possessions and swearing when she thinks no one is listening. What's even more unacceptable is that she walks around acting like she's the salt of the earth and as if everyone but her needs to get their life together. When she's not quoting scriptures she's giving someone advice they didn't ask for. No boss will ever put her in a position of authority because her co-workers feel uneasy working with her. When she quits or gets fired from her job she'll tell the new person interviewing her that the people on her old job couldn't accept true Christians.

### *Ms. Too Damn Loud*

Ms. Too Damn Loud's black co-workers wish they could slap her mouth shut, especially if they're in a predominantly white workplace, because they feel like she makes them all look bad. She is rude, loud, obnoxious, clumsy, and thinks that "keepin' it real" means telling anyone who so much as looks at her funny where they can go. Ms. Too Damn Loud criticizes other black women and men who have a quieter demeanor, whispering to her other loud friends that he or she is "just trying to be white." She is quick to label white people as racists and black people as sell-outs when they tell her that her loudness and over aggressiveness is unbecoming of a professional and she needs to start looking for another job.