

LEISURE

An expert's tips on looking good

Sharlyn Stafford likes to describe herself as a Sri Lankan-Canadian-Australian-Singaporean. If that seems too much of a mouthful, it merely embodies her philosophy to take in the positives wherever she finds them.

All humans seek the same things, happiness, love and harmony though culturally the way we get down to achieving them maybe slightly different, she says. By tapping into the channel of personal development, we can learn how to get along with people and thus influence them, she believes.

Personal development and specialized people training are Sri Lankan-born Sharlyn's forte. Together with her Singaporean partner Kate Chan, Sharlyn who has lived in Singapore for the past 11 years, runs a successful company Stafford & Chan Training Pte. Ltd which conducts training programmes on corporate image, interpersonal skills, motivation, teambuilding and leadership, presenta-

tion skills etc. Their portfolio of clients is impressive; banks, airlines and service institutions from Singapore Airlines, The Singapore Government, the Union Bank of Switzerland, Motorola and Reuters.

For Sharlyn, image building is a way of life she passionately believes in. Companies spend so much on corporate branding but what about the people who sell their product, she asks. Personal branding is about aligning the people within the organization with that corporate image.

In Colombo last weekend on a brief holiday, she was keen to talk of her first book *Imaging for Women* which released last November is now in local bookstores.

Imaging for Women; Colour, Style and Make-up is the modern woman's guide to projecting positive self-image, confidence and enthusiasm.

She is quick to stress that it all begins with having substance and being good at what you do and then presenting yourself

Sri Lankan-born Sharlyn Stafford speaks of her book, *Imaging for Women*, which is the modern woman's guide to projecting positive self-image

in the best possible light. "Package yourself accordingly if you have the professional skills and knowledge. Look the part. This will make your message more powerful and boost your confidence," she argues. The end result is that your 'positive self-image' will prove contagious and influence those around you.

How does one go about achieving this positive self-image? Your dress plays a vital part, she feels. "We can't change our age, sex, our ethnicity but what we can change is the way we look." This includes being well-dressed, standing tall and looking confident. There's no such thing as neutral dressing; you always make a statement by the way you dress, she says. If you don't bother about what you wear, the message you send is 'I don't care'.

The book is a practical guide that details the basics of how to find out your own look and what clothes, make-up and accessories suit you best. We'd all love to have hourglass figures but most of us are either too short, too tall, too big etc, says the down-to-earth Sharlyn. She herself is a triathlon athlete with a passion for physical fitness and has a lithe, tanned figure.

With the right body language, clothes and make-up anyone could create a good impression, believes Sharlyn and her book offers women advice on hairstyles, make-up, what outfits work and what could be disastrous. Questionnaires help a woman pinpoint her particular body type and personality and then define her style.

Colours matter too and Sharlyn's advice to the Asian woman is to wear winter colours like emer-

ald green, brilliant white, charcoal brown or fuschia that bring out the pinkish undertones in our skin which make us look healthier.

The book now available in Singapore, Malaysia and other South East Asian countries has had a good response, so much so that Sharlyn's planning her second *Imaging* guide, this time for men.

Born in Sri Lanka, Sharlyn went to Ladies College until age 12, when her family migrated to Canada. "I was young enough to embrace the new but old enough to take a lot with me as well," she says. After doing an honours degree in the arts she gave into the urge to travel and moved to Australia where she worked for two years in the hotel industry. An article she read piqued her curiosity so much that she went back to Canada to do a course in image consultancy, focusing on colour co-ordination and style. Back in Sydney, she set up her own business in 1986 and was soon on her way. It was a new field back

Pic by Dinuka Liyanawatte



then and hardly one she had envisioned for herself. "I liked to look good but no more than the other person," she says.

Many years later and vastly experienced now, having trained people in Canada, Malaysia, Korea and Singapore and even Sri Lanka (she's done courses for Keells and Virtuosas), she feels her work is always a learning experience. Whatever the programme whether it's a professional image

course, a 'think on your feet' workshop which teaches people how to train their minds to communicate effectively and organize their thoughts while they talk, or a cross-cultural communication course, it's no canned approach she advocates, but rather delivering what works best in that particular context.

So what's her secret to looking and feeling good? Her personal formula which she ardently recom-

mends is physical fitness. Find 30 minutes a week to exercise, she says, walk, swim, do yoga, or whatever. If you can do it thrice a week, that's great and if you can do it every day, it's superb, but even once a week is a start.

She'd love to work more in Sri Lanka, she adds and have a reason to come back not just on holiday. Speaking of holidays, her next break will be a bicycling holiday in Tuscany.

Renuka Sadanandan