

You're a *what?*

Image consultant

by Elka Jones

Beauty isn't just in the eye of the beholder. It's also in the hands of image consultants like Lori Johnson.

Image consultants make style and clothing suggestions to transform a person's outward appearance. They are experts at bringing out the best in people, whatever each person's career or lifestyle. "You need to be able to listen to people and adapt to them—to be like a chameleon," says Lori. Knowing how to read and understand people is essential to an image consultant's success.

Both men and women benefit from Lori's expertise, but most of her clients are women. She begins by meeting with clients to discuss the type of look that they hope to achieve. Sometimes, clients aren't sure what they want. Lori helps them to consider their personality, career, lifestyle, and the amount of time and effort that they want to spend on their appearance.

Next, Lori conducts a color analysis for each client. She uses a seasonal color analysis system based on hair

color, skin tone, and eye color. Summer colors, such as pastels, complement the coloring of fair-skinned blondes with green or brown eyes, for example. After Lori determines a client's color season, she gives color suggestions for clothing, cosmetics, accessories, and other complementary wear.

Lori then assesses the client's wardrobe, identifying which items to keep and which to toss. "Some clients want to throw it all away and start over," she says, "but then they realize that they have things they can use."

To purchase new items for a client, Lori visits stores that she knows well. Although some clients pay Lori an extra fee to preshop for them, most go with her. Occasionally, Lori shops for clients—but she'd rather have them go along.

One obvious reason why Lori wants clients to accompany her on shopping trips is so that they can help select what to buy. But Lori also uses these trips to educate clients about what to look for when they shop on their own.

This includes pointing out the styles and cuts of clothing that might flatter the client's figure.

Shopping trips typically last about 4 hours, and Lori likes to shop with each client at least twice. "I could shop for 8 to 10 hours straight," she says. But for some clients, says Lori, "shopping is physically and mentally exhausting—and overwhelming." Part of her job is to help make the experience less stressful and to provide encouragement. "If I weren't there, they'd leave," she says.

Lori is involved in other projects related to image consult-



As an image consultant, Lori Johnson helps clients assess their wardrobes to determine their own style.

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ing, such as doing makeup and stylist work for photographers and videographers and speaking about image and attire at conventions and corporate meetings. She also volunteers her skills. Recent endeavors include presentations about image to a local Girl Scout troop and to people at a homeless shelter.

Because most image consultants are self-employed, they must spend part of their time on business-related tasks such as managing finances and billing clients. They also must dedicate significant resources to marketing.

These administrative tasks are the part of Lori's job that she least likes. "I'm a people person," she says. "I don't like sitting in front of a computer because I'm not with people."

Being a people person means that Lori has empathy and patience when dealing with clients. Many people first visit an image consultant after they have experienced a life-changing event—a marriage, perhaps, or the loss of a job. These clients are often seeking to become more self-assured by redefining their image.

Assisting clients in this way comes naturally to Lori. "Ever since I was a little girl, I've known this is my gift: to help others feel good about themselves," she says, "to increase their self-esteem and self-confidence."

Along with these inherent abilities, Lori has acquired other skills that she needs to succeed in her career. She gained some of her skills and knowledge from training and certification programs offered by image consulting associations and product vendors. And she keeps her skills current by reading everything about appearance that she can find.

Although the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)



Photos courtesy of Lori Johnson

Through color analysis, image consultants identify which shades of makeup best complement each client.

does not collect data about image consultants, it does collect data about several other occupations in which workers help people to improve their image. Examples include personal appearance workers and retail sales workers.

Industry sources suggest that earnings of image consultants vary considerably, based, in part, on geographic location. Their hourly rate ranges from \$50 to \$500. For some services, such as color analysis or makeup and stylist work, many image consultants charge a flat fee of about \$100 to \$200 or more. For presentations, they usually charge a base fee plus expenses.

Many image consultants start their careers by working part time in the occupation, often while employed in another job, until they gain a steady stream of clients. It's critical for image consultants to build a clientele and a reputation that grows by word of mouth from happy clients.

Thanks to an image consultant's work, the most satisfied clients usually are those who've gained new confidence along with their new style. Such results are the most rewarding, says Lori. "The best part of my job," she says, "is seeing someone blossom."

