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# The Beauty Premium: Why Attractive People Get Paid More and What You Can Do About It

**By Catherine Kaputa**

It's pretty disconcerting to find out that the workplace is a beauty contest – but that's what a new study by a Harvard and Wesleyan economist proves (Maybe a lot of us suspected it wasn't just about hard work!).

The economists set up a mock labor market with employers and job seekers. Some employers only considered the resumes. Others saw a resume and photograph or a resume and a telephone interview. Others received resume, a telephone interview and a photograph. The last group had a resume, telephone interview and an in-person interview.

The findings were startling. Of course, those with good looks were no better at performing the “job” in the research than less attractive people. And when employers saw only the resumes of job applicants looks had no effect on their evaluation.



But in all the other cases, the beauty premium kicked in. Employers showed a bias for good-looking candidates and predicted they would be more productive (and paid more). The researchers determined that 15 to 20 percent of the beauty premium comes from self confidence, while 40 percent each comes from oral and visual communications skill.

Good looks have what social scientists call the halo effect. Because someone is attractive, we assign many other positive attributes to him or her that have nothing to do with looks. So how can you level the playing field if you are not one of the beautiful people?

Here are five tips from my new book, *You Are a Brand! How Smart People Brand Themselves for Business Success*:

1. **Package yourself.** Clothes won't make a difference in how well you do your job, yet they will have a significant effect on how you are perceived on the job. Clothes are a quick read and one of the easiest ways to communicate a message about who you are.
2. **Emphasize an unusual or different feature.** Having different looks can be very effective in building a powerful and attractive image. Think how Barbra Streisand, Andy Warhol, and Arnold Schwarzenegger all dramatized their usual looks, features or shape.
3. **Have a trademark.** Larry King has his suspenders, Steve Jobs has his jeans. And Bono has his tinted wraparound glasses.
4. **Focus on "soft power."** Soft power uses things like your values, style and point of view to attract others to you. One thing to think about is executive presence. How do you enter a room? Do you stand tall and walk purposefully? Or do you slouch and look distracted?



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5. **Hone your oral communications skills.** The ability to sell yourself and your ideas – to communicate to another person, whether it is your boss, employee or mate – is a critical skill for personal success. And how you say something is as important as what you say.

After all, you've got eighty percent of the beauty premium licked if you create a dynamic oral and visual communication style.