

JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS COVER

By: Sdr. Chow Chee Meng



This article was written after I suffered a gash on my head which required stitches after an accident during a football match. Well, to cut a long story short, my opponent and I went for a 50:50 ball and both of us ended up clashing our heads and it resulted in me having to bear with an unsightly bandage on my head and my opponent hospitalised for a serious scar on his face (I hope he has recovered). To all readers, please try to picture a person with parts of his hair shaven with a brownish iodine soaked bandage on his head. If you still have difficulties picturing that, then imagine a person with a peanut stuck in a crater right in the middle of his head! Anyway, life goes on and I am fit for work although my appearance is a bit funny just to put it mildly.

Well, you thought that things would not get any worse. But then, I realised that the following week I was supposed to attend many briefings and meetings where first impression was of utmost importance. First, I was afraid that my boss would actually asked me not to go for fear of embarrassing the company and myself. Thankfully enough, that did not happen but I still needed to convince those people with my less than pleasant appearance (in any circumstances, I am not a good looking chap to start with.) So, I tried to convince myself that appearance is not all that important. I shall win them over with my charisma and in-depth knowledge of my job. Well, at least that was what I thought before attending those briefings and meetings.

I had always believed in the old saying that "one should not judge a book by its cover." At least, I wanted to practise that although I must admit that books with nice glossy covers are definitely more attractive than dull-looking ones. Well, the first impression is very important. Now, back to my "adventures". Well, it went all the way downhill from the moment I introduced myself to the chairperson. His first glance was naturally aimed at the "peanut" on my head and then his face reacted with the sort of expression of someone seeing an alien or something disgusting. From then on, it went all the way downhill. When I was presenting my report and I tried to make eye contact with the audience (as recommended by all prominent speakers to attract the attention of your audience), I cannot help but notice that most of them were looking at the "peanut" on my head and maybe

wondering what kind of disease this fellow had contracted and was it contagious? I guessed by now, most of you can predict the outcome of the presentation.

The lesson I learnt from all this is that appearances are actually very important. As engineers and being a professional, we should always appear in a manner which gives confidence to the general public. How do you expect the public to trust our professional opinions if we were to appear before them in shorts and slippers? It is a sad fact that people do judge us by our appearance before we are given the opportunity to prove ourselves. Please don't get me wrong. There is no substitution for knowledge acquired through hard work and experience. What I am saying is that it does not hurt to pay some attention to how we look. Most of my peers whom I have spoken to actually agree with me that engineers have the worst dress sense amongst all the professionals. This actually started in university days. During my studies in the university, many engineering students actually turned up for lecture in shorts and slippers and with their hair showing evidence that they had just stepped out of bed. Reality sank in when some engineering students were required to attend certain subjects in other faculties like law. The contrast couldn't have been more obvious.

Previously, I also regarded clothes as something to cover my body and that I should not waste too much time on it. Well, my recent experience suggested that maybe it is time to get myself some new clothes to replace those that have turned from a dark colour to a fair colour or from white to yellow. And those with holes around the armpit or have "shrunk" until it is body hugging also have to make way lest we want to display our masculinity to the public (or indecent exposure!). It is also high time to polish away those "clayey" soils on my shoe from my various visits to the site.

Finally, the good news is that I am given another opportunity to give my presentation again the following week. Hopefully, with a more confident look and of course with my "peanut" removed, the results would be different. If that still doesn't work, it is time that I start improving on my presentation skills and contents instead of accusing others for being biased towards good-looking people. ■