

Leading with your Chin

By

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You don't have to be good-looking to succeed. But it doesn't hurt. By Paul Edwards.

Next time you look in a mirror, ask yourself if your face is likely to help or hinder your career – and what you're going to do about it.

According to a recent national survey about two-thirds of Australians believe good-looking people are more likely to succeed in their careers.

And 80per cent believe the good-looking have an advantage in job interviews, with 75per cent believing employers are more likely to prefer good looks.

But that's not sufficient reason to face the scalpel - only one in 10 Australians say they might have cosmetic surgery to improve their career prospects.

"Aristotle apparently said that beauty was a better introduction than any letter, and this survey would seem to support that," says Chris Crook, chief executive officer of Nature, which did the survey.

"A US survey found that people who are better-looking earn more than the average person," Dr Crook says.

The chin's the thing, apparently - Businessweek magazine in the US last year reported that prominent, authoritative chins were a characteristic of many Fortune 500 chief executives. Evidently people equate such chins with confidence and character.

"Some commentators say that we are programmed from birth to seek out the leader of the pack," says Dr Crook. "Good looks may be a traditionally presumed indicator of such a characteristic."

The Australian survey suggests many of us are concerned that looks play a part in how successful we are, how well our career progresses, and how well a job interview goes.

"This doesn't necessarily mean that good looks actually do make a difference, but instead means that people think they do," Dr Crook says.

"The research findings tell us a lot more about the degree to which individuals are willing to blame their successes or failures on traits, which should have no impact on career and life success, than it does about whether or not good looks actually make a difference."

There are more important factors than good looks when it comes to hanging on to a job, Dr Crook believes.

These include how well you do the job, how well qualified you are, how hard you work, whether you meet the requirements of your job description, whether you are a good team player, and whether you are prepared to go the extra distance for the organisation.

"It seems some Australians are concerned that if you're not good-looking you might not do well in job interviews or succeed in their careers, but these other factors are a much more important part.

"One's looks should not be at all relevant, but bearing in mind the attraction we humans have for things that are pleasant in appearance, it is conceivable that good looks will be an advantage, if unstated."

Dr Crook says a recent study, *The Economics of Beauty*, found that people who are better-looking earn more than average and plainer people earn less.

But, he says, Australia's Equal Opportunity laws ban discrimination on the grounds of such factors as height, weight, or a disfiguring birthmark.

Good looks often have no bearing on having an attractive personality, which translates to being able to work effectively in any organisation. A good personality also points to a team player.

"A pleasant or attractive personality is something that one can develop," says Dr Crook.

"Dale Carnegie's legendary book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* preaches that one can change oneself to bring about personal improvement; a key goal of which is career and personal enhancement."

Organisational psychologist Christopher Shen says the facial features of attractive people are often perceived as common rather than odd, so good-looking people are regarded as more trustworthy.

As a result they are likely to be chosen when recruiters and decision-makers need to trust the candidate - such as for more responsible jobs.

"Attractive leaders are often perceived as more charismatic by their staff. Scientific research demonstrates that charismatic leaders are found to be more effective and successful in stressful contexts - such as after some crisis.

"Thus, in a challenging and stressful situation, good-looking leaders may be viewed as more charismatic and more effective by their team.

"This tendency is especially common in industries that relate directly to beauty, such as hairdressing and beauty therapy."

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Based in Melbourne, Australia, Christopher Shen Consulting brings organisational psychology solutions to workplaces, helping people become stronger leaders and teams become better performers.

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