

It is commonly believed that what separates the men from the boys is grit and determination. Most people think that, to climb the corporate ladder you have to be willing to put everything into your job. People believe that this, combined with some natural skills, is enough for anyone to succeed in the American dream. They are wrong. What is needed, more than anything else, is a sense of theater. Although people are rarely consciously aware of symbols of rank and status, unconsciously we know all about them. Although people are rarely consciously aware of symbols of rank and status, unconsciously we know all about them. More important than hard work, more important than ruthlessness, more important even than competency, is self-confidence.

As a matter of fact, you can see the evidence of rank in almost any artifact of your typical office environment. Take executive chairs, for example. I work in a large office, and many of the lower ranking employees are forced to work in cramped, uncomfortable cubicles. Their executive office chairs are nothing to look at, and in fact are part of their low rank. The executive chairs of the partners, by contrast, are made of genuine leather - comfortable, sumptuous, and conspicuously expensive. This is probably much like any office environment, and something that most people wouldn't glance twice at. A closer look at the executive chairs, however, reveals some important distinctions between those who will one day make it and those who won't.

Contrast the executive chairs of any of the junior partners, and you'll see important distinctions. Mike Smith, for example, has received promotion after promotion although he has only been here for a few months and is not all that bright. On his plain desk chair, he has added a leather pad. ostensibly, it is for ergonomic purposes, but in fact it conveys a powerful subconscious message. It says that his current status as an underling is only a temporary thing, that already management and greatness or within his grasp.

Right next door, James Jones' cubicle tells a very different story. His executive chair also has pads on it, but they are merely functional. They serve to help his back problems, but their undecorated features tell the story of his life at the company. He will never sit in one of the sumptuous executive chairs - He has twice the smarts of Mike, but less than half the ambition. His chair looks too comfortable, in fact, and he is too comfortable as well, wallowing in his position of insignificance.