

Dress for Success—but Do You Know How?

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Prior to the era of business casual, people were very clear on how to dress for work. Men wore a dark business suit and women either wore dresses or suits of some kind. In the 90's, particularly with the dot com explosion, business casual became the norm and gone were suits and ties and formal dress of any sort for most companies. A lot has happened in the past 17 years and many of us are "unsure" as to how to dress for success. People wonder, "What is the correct attire for business casual environments?"

To clarify the situation, many companies have imposed a dress code. Legal experts agree dress codes are acceptable, as long as they are appropriate for personal protection and not discriminatory. But if your company does not have a written dress code, there are guidelines to consider.

First impressions are powerful. People often base how they feel about others on their dress and appearance. For example, a well dressed person is perceived to have a higher level of intelligence and a sincere interest in advancing. Conversely, a person who appears disheveled is perceived as only marginally interested in their performance and career. Thus, image consultants say people should understand the statement they are making with the current image and assess whether this will enhance or hinder their being perceived as the consummate professional. For example, clothing that denotes the image of "cute" or "sexy" isn't likely to send the right message to one's manager. Neither is clothing that seems better suited for the outdoors. Your clothing choices should show respect for yourself and your performance.

When making a presentation or meeting with clients, women should save sheer clothing, form fitting pants, backless dresses, short mini skirts, tank tops, halter tops or blouses showing cleavage for a more appropriate venue. Men should reconsider tee shirts, tank tops and shorts. Flip flops and jeans do not make it into the professional category.

It is always a safe bet for men to wear a shirt with a collar and kaki or dress pants at any type of business meeting. Muted tones are better than wild colors.

If there is any doubt in your mind as to how to dress, it is a good idea to observe how your managers and senior executives dress. Typically, they set the stage for what is acceptable and preferred in the company. Also, Image Consultants are available in most major department stores to help with colors, fit and style. It takes six more perfect encounters to erase a bad first impression. Dress and appearance is an easy way to score points with an audience.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our website, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.