

## Dressing for Success: Have the Rules Changed?

What happened to the good 'ole days? Dressing for success used to be so clear and easy. You could write the book, couldn't you? ...*dresses or suits with skirts for women (navy, gray, or black) and dark suits with a white shirt for men, one ring per hand, no nail polish, no perfume, conservative earrings for women (did anyone even consider other body piercings?), polished shoes, clean eyeglasses, light makeup for women, wear deodorant, brush your teeth, don't chew gum,...*). The only room for error was in not reading the book. "Business casual", "casual professional", high fashion, and trendy styles have really made our decisions much harder, haven't they? Or have they??

Consider your goal in business. Is it to make a fashion statement? Not unless you are in retail. Is it to expose your "wares"? I won't answer that one. For most people, the ultimate goal during a job interview is to get the job. What we learned fifteen plus years ago regarding "professional attire" probably still holds true today. In that case, dust off that old book! Whether you are interviewing for a new job or just waiting to be noticed for your next promotion, here are a few tips for dressing the part:

1. Select conservative attire for an interview or business meeting. Conservative still equates to a pantsuit or traditional skirt suit for women and a coat and tie or suit for men. With very few exceptions, for an interview, your "interview suit" is the way to go. Even if your potential employer's dress code is business casual, save it for when you are an employee—and even then, keep it conservative. You only want your skills and abilities to shine through. You also want to be taken seriously by your coworkers, clients, and vendors. I'll repeat this for emphasis: *you do want to be taken seriously at work, don't you?*
2. A stylish presentation is fine, overly trendy or sexy is not. The runways and manikins in the windows of the department stores are not a friend to us workin' folk. The example they set is often wrong. Women: wear your hair neatly; keep makeup and jewelry to a minimum, and no lace please. Men: keep hair neat and short, and no jewelry (sorry, guys!) except a ring per hand at most. Another word to the wise: cordless headsets don't count as jewelry. They are not flattering or polite to use in a business meeting (unless you work for a cellular phone company possibly). We recently represented a less than conservative young candidate who told a potential employer, "If you want me, 'this' is me. I don't want to work for someone who doesn't want me for who I am." Guess what: "me" is still looking for a job. .
3. Leave the fragrance at home. What might be a pleasant scent to one may be an allergic reaction to your interviewer. That would not be a great way to make your first impression! Enough said.
4. Research the environment and dress code prior to an interview with a potential employer. Though I'm not advocating anything other than "Julie's traditional interview attire", your look can be presented differently depending on the environment. Do you remember the IBM blue suit? Why are most financial institution executive suites still adorned by professional men and women in conservative dark suits? Who are you inclined to trust with your money, your

legal matters, your taxes? Think about it. Advertising agencies or other creative industries may warrant a more stylish, yet still conservative presentation.

5. Make sure that it fits! This is an easy one. A \$100 suit that fits will flatter you more than a \$1000 one that does not. Not too tight, not too loose! Not too short, not too long! You don't have to spend a fortune on a suit. Greenville is blessed with many good, reasonably priced tailors —mine knows my name as well as my children's!

Can you tell that I'm passionate, if not slightly preachy, about this topic? Call me old fashioned, but have you ever heard of "dressing for the position you want" rather than for the position you have? This is age old wisdom in corporate America for good reason. A wise person once said, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." I really wish I had thought of that!

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