



## Dress for Success

People generally are very casual in North America. They value comfort before anything else. Unfortunately, comfort now means tattered jeans, dirty shoes, ripped shirts/tops, etc. Men are no different than women...the all-occasion ball caps?? I wonder if this all started with Casual Fridays at work. Definitely, there has been a downward shift in dressing well.

Just the other day, I was speaking with a group of women who also were lamenting the deplorable lack of taste in how people are dressing at work or going to church or any other formal gathering. All of this came to mind when I was reading the notes from a seminar entitled "Career-Building Style" written by Diana Pemberton-Sikes ([FashionForRealWomen.com](http://FashionForRealWomen.com)). She argues very persuasively to encourage people to dress well particularly on the job.

Diana outlined the **10 most common mistakes people make with their business attire**. Her main premise is that we should "costume" ourselves. Just like in a play, the character is costumed in a certain way so the audience immediately identifies who he/she is. In real life, it's not that different. If I am a lawyer, I need to dress like one rather than looking like a college student.

1. **Many people don't think it's important to dress well. Or they think that no one follows these dress codes anymore.**

Wrong...as Diana says there are specific rules and it's very important.

2. **They don't realize there are rules.**

There are rules for dress just like there are rules for board games, sorting the laundry, playing sports. Learn them, master them and you're off to a great start.

3. **They don't think the rules apply to them.**

Diana says this is very common among college graduates. They spend copious amounts of time & money to acquire their education. Then wonder why they get no further ahead in their career. So YES, the rules do apply to them.

4. **They think that being fashionable is the same thing as being appropriate.**

In our younger years, who hasn't made this "faux pas"? If one is employed in some kind of creative industry like entertainment or fashion, then it is appropriate. However, fashion means little or nothing to industries like engineering, medical services, computer science. If you are more interested in looking fashionable, it can give the impression you are not serious about the job or getting ahead.

5. **They prefer comfort over fussy business clothes.**

Comfort, again is the deciding factor. Now clothing should be comfortable even if it's more formal. Maybe this is a good time to get help from an image professional to understand proper fit. Often, I am bothered by

shop clerks who make little effort to be dressed or groomed well.

**6. They don't follow what the leaders in their industry are wearing.**

The reason they are leaders is that they understand the rules according to Diana. She urges to make notes of what they are wearing, how they're wearing them. Chances are good that dressing well got them far and the same will happen for *you*.

**7. They feel that their personal style is more important than their employer's corporate image.**

Wild hair color, tattoos, multiple piercings, black fingernails are expressions of a personal style. There's a time and a place for that but NOT at work unless you're employed at a Tattoo Parlour.

**8. Too much skin.**

I know of many women who would agree. This is a huge problem. Diana mentions the numbers of young and not so young women dressing for work in low-cut tops, cropped tops, mini skirts, low rise pants. Exposing décolletage has become routine for shop clerks as well as receptionists, etc. The main reason for business is to *conduct business*. It's not meant to show off the body or pick up men. If you want to be taken seriously on the job, cover up.

**9. They don't understand their audience's need.**

Your clients/customers expect to see you dressed in a certain way whether you're a doctor or lawyer, etc. Remember the costume?? If you dress in this way, people see you in that role much more easily.

**10. If, by chance, they do dress appropriately at some level, as they go up the corporate ladder, they don't adjust their clothing.**

Diana stresses that as you go up the corporate ladder and the income increases, your clothing needs to reflect that in order to remain credible to the people you do business with. This is crucial.

To sum up, Diana's recommendations include the following ideas. If you begin to understand what your industry dress code is and follow it, then people will turn to you because of your perceived credibility. It's all about how the clothing matches the brains & the savvy of the individual.

What is *your* game plan? The first thing is become more aware of what happens in your industry, look at the level of formality. Determine what that level is for your corporation or company. Is it Traditional, Creative, People-oriented or Casual?

Then go to your closet. Assess the clothes you have and what pieces you already own that would fit into that level of formality. Don't feel that you have to buy a whole new wardrobe. Shop in your closet, first. Then think about what you need. Do I need to up-date my look? Decide what is going to have the biggest impact.

Finally, Diana's advice is to think about your industry, think about the image people have of your industry and dress accordingly. As you *costume* yourself appropriately, then you will be well ahead of the competition.

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