Determine Proper Business Workplace Attire

HAVE YOU EVER walked the streets of a big city at rush hour? It is interesting to notice the different styles of business attire. Often you can guess the job or at least the level of the job of a passerby from the way he or she dresses. What does your manner of dress say about you and your business aspirations?

Objectives:

1. Describe stated and/or unstated company dress code policies.
2. Explain how to dress appropriately for a professional business environment.
3. Explain how to dress appropriately for a business casual environment.

Key Terms:

business casual clothing
company culture
corporate casual clothing
dress code
professional attire

Proper Business Workplace Attire

Is there a dress code policy where you work? If it is unstated, how do you know what to wear? Do you wear a uniform? Are you ever not sure of what you should wear? Why is this topic so important? Properly dressed employees reflect positively on the company that employs them.

STATED AND/OR UNSTATED COMPANY DRESS CODE POLICIES

Businesses take great care always to look professional to their customers no matter what the specific profession. A company usually has a dress code policy. There are some specific places to look for that policy; and in the absence of a stated policy, it is always safe to dress in similar

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fashion to your boss or supervisor. Many employees are required to wear full or partial uniforms. Great hygiene is always the policy.

Dress Code Policy

Companies differ in their expectations and requirements for employee attire. A **dress code** is a set of guidelines provided to employees that outlines appropriate work attire and is usually sensitive to the amount of contact employees have with customers. This means that if you are in a position in which you have a great deal of customer contact, you would likely be required to dress in more formal work attire.

A dress-down day, such as "Casual Friday," may include jeans and other more casual clothing but nothing that would be potentially offensive to colleagues and clients. Dress codes are generally of three types:

1. Professional work attire (formal business dress)
2. Business/corporate casual (comfortable but professional)
3. Casual (informal)

Sources of Company Dress Code Policy

An employee handbook usually includes a section on employee dress code, with examples. Interview discussions with managers usually include specific company dress code policies. When no company dress code is mentioned during the hiring discussion, ask about any stated and/or unstated policies.

Dress Like the Boss/Supervisor and/or Colleagues

In the absence of an explicitly stated (written) dress code policy, dress like your boss/supervisor. New employees can get a good sense of dress by observing the **company culture** (the standard and acceptable behavior, including dress, within a particular company). Asking other employees or superiors specifically how to dress for the environment shows care and concern for the newly acquired position. Regardless of the dress code, always be well groomed (i.e., have clean hair, hands, nails, and teeth and no body odor), especially when working directly with customers.

Partial or Full Uniform

Some companies supply full employee uniforms. Other companies provide guidelines for specific clothing to be worn on the job. For example:

♦ Different uniforms may be given for different occasions, as for the military.
♦ A company may provide polo shirts with the company logo, and the employees may be responsible for the purchase of dark slacks.
♦ A restaurant may provide front-of-the-house aprons, but the dining room employees may have to provide their own white shirts and black slacks.

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HOW TO DRESS APPROPRIATELY FOR A PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Professional business attire is required in some settings. There are colors to adhere to, general hygiene rules, and specific requirements for both women and men.

Professional Attire

Professional attire generally means suits for both men and women. The same general rules for professional office wear apply to men and to women. A solid business wardrobe is an investment in the future.

Color Guidelines

Experts highly recommend the following colors for a professional image:

♦ Gray (conservative)
♦ Black (polished and chic)
♦ Navy (trustworthy)
♦ Red (assertive)

Women should complement these professional color choices with pastels and ivory and avoid loud or shocking prints. Men should complement these professional color choices with unique ties, pocket squares, and belts.

FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: NBA Players Have Dress Codes, Too

The purpose of this activity is to examine the dress code policy for NBA players and to generate an individual reaction based on the information.

Examine the dress code policy for NBA players at http://www.nba.com/news/player_dress_code_051017.html. Highlight the requirements and exclusions that are most interesting to you. Then write a five-paragraph essay, using the following guidelines.

• Paragraph 1: Write an introduction to the essay.
• Paragraph 2: Discuss the NBA dress code requirements, highlighting those you find most interesting.
• Paragraph 3: Discuss the NBA dress code exclusions, highlighting those you find most interesting.
• Paragraph 4: Give your personal opinion of the NBA dress code policy in general. Is it good? Is it fair? What, if anything, would you change? Be specific about the changes you would implement.
• Paragraph 5: Give a brief summary of the essay, touching on points from each paragraph. Conclude with a statement that describes why you believe the NBA has this dress code policy.

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General Hygiene Guidelines

Excellent personal hygiene is essential. Men are encouraged to use after-shave after hours only. Women may wear light fragrances. The following details are important:

♦ Well-groomed and manicured nails

♦ Neat hair

♦ Polished shoes

♦ Well-fitted clothing

♦ Appropriate hosiery (for women, no runs; for men, color and weight that complement the suit or slacks)

♦ No clothing with prominent logos

Men's Guidelines

A man should wear a conservative navy, gray, or black suit (solid or pinstripe). The quality of the material is important to a professional look, and the jacket should be large enough to button. Solid white or blue long-sleeve shirts (silk or silk-like fabric) should be worn. The more color and pattern on a shirt, the more the focus is on the person rather than the person's professionalism. Ties of silk or silk-like fabric are preferred. Cartoon and similar characters should be avoided on business ties.

A man should wear socks at calf length or above, and the socks should match the suit. Shoes should be conservative, clean, and polished. Laced shoes are preferred over slip-ons in corporate settings. Flip-flops and sandals are not acceptable. Belts should coordinate closely with shoes.

Jewelry should be kept to a minimum: a watch, a wedding band, and perhaps a college ring. Acceptable accessories include a briefcase and a fine pen. Ballpoint pens from area businesses should not be used.

Women's Guidelines

A skirted suit or a pants suit is the most conservative look. A woman may opt for a professional dress instead of a suit, but usually a dress should be topped by a jacket. The jacket should be large enough to button. Skirts should be knee length or slightly above or below the knee. Skirts that are too short or too long should be avoided. Slacks should break at the top of the foot or shoe, but Capri pants may be appropriate in some work settings.

Blouses and sweaters should complement the suit or pants and should have appropriate necklines and waistlines for business settings. Neutral or flesh-tone hosiery should

FIGURE 1. A suit is always in style in the professional business environment.

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be worn. Keeping an extra pair of hose at the office is recommended. Shoes should be low heels and conservative, not flats or high heels. Open-toed and backless shoes are not business attire, and sandals are not acceptable.

Jewelry should be minimal: one ring per hand and one earring per ear. Jewelry that clinks or makes other noise (e.g., multiple bangle bracelets and long, chandelier earrings) should not be worn. Accessories should be structured. For example, a woman may use a small to medium-size briefcase, a handbag, and a conservative pen.

HOW TO DRESS APPROPRIATELY FOR A BUSINESS CASUAL ENVIRONMENT

Business casual and corporate casual seem to be the trend in most corporate venues. Although they are less formal, they are still very polished looking.

Appropriate work choices	Inappropriate work choices
Slacks and pants (similar to Dockers®) made of natural fabrics (e.g., cotton or wool)	Sweat pants, spandex exercise or bike shorts, bib overalls, leggings, or short-shorts
Dresses and skirts in which you can sit comfortably in public (slightly above, at, or below the knee)	Mini-skirts, sun-dresses, and spaghetti straps
Casual, dress, and polo shirts, sweaters, and turtlenecks	Tank, halter, backless, and midriff tops; sweatshirts
Most suit or sport jackets	Hooded sweatshirts or windbreakers
T-shirts worn under a blouse, shirt, jacket, or dress	Shirts with words, slogans, or images potentially offensive to colleagues and clients
Company-logo, team, fashion-brand, or university clothing	Beach, yard, exercise, or sport-event clothing
Pressed, clean, and tidy clothing	Wrinkled, dirty, or torn clothing
Conservative athletic, loafers, dress heels, closed-toed, boots, flats, walking shoes (Closed-heeled shoes may be required in some manufacturing settings.)	Bedroom slippers, flip-flops, or open-toed shoes
Jewelry, perfumes, and colognes in good taste; limited visible piercings	Overuse of jewelry, perfumes, colognes; extreme and visible piercings and tattoos
No hats or head covers in the professional workplace (other than those worn for religious or cultural purposes)	

FIGURE 2. Business casual chart.

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Business Casual Clothing

Business casual clothing typically allows for slacks, skirts, or dresses with button-down or collared tops. Jackets and ties are usually optional with a business casual dress code. Men wear collared shirts (or turtlenecks) and slacks without jackets or ties. Women wear slacks or skirts with blouses or sweaters and without jackets. Typically, no jeans or T-shirts are worn in a business casual environment.

Clothing should be neat and clean without any frays or tears. Shoes should be closed-toed, unless the business specifically allows the wearing of dressy sandals. Revealing clothing (including that which shows the back, stomach, or chest) in any workplace situation is unacceptable. Jewelry should be tasteful and minimal.

Corporate Casual Clothing

Corporate casual clothing usually implies elements of both the professional and the business casual attire in a dressy context. More jersey, silk, and synthetics replace cotton and wool. A typical outfit would be a dressy shirt or blouse and dressy, tailored slacks.

FIGURE 3. The company sets the dress code. A business or industry with younger employees may offer a casual code as a perk to employees.

Summary:

Businesses take great care always to look professional to their customers no matter what the specific profession. A company usually has a dress code policy. There are some specific places to look for that policy; and in the absence of a stated policy, it is always safe to dress in similar fashion to your boss or supervisor. Many employees are required to wear full or partial uniforms. Great hygiene is always the policy.

Professional business attire is required in some settings. There are colors to adhere to, general hygiene rules, and specific requirements for both women and men. Business and corporate casual seem to be the trend in most corporate venues. Although they are less formal, they are still very polished looking.

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Checking Your Knowledge:

1. In the absence of a dress code policy, how might an employee determine how best to dress for work?

2. Describe an employee who is well groomed.

3. Describe what good hygiene looks like in the workplace.

4. Describe corporate casual clothing for a woman.

5. Describe the professional attire expected for a man.

Expanding Your Knowledge:

Proper business attire is important not only on the job but also at a job interview. Check "What Not to Wear to an Interview" at http://www.careerbuilder.com/JobSeeker/careerbytes/CBArticle.aspx?articleID=462&cbRecursionCnt=1&cbsid=ae7a61c6768e48d9841ea1fd2e4620e6-272496402ww-6&ns_siteid=ns_us_g_what_not_to_wear.

Web Links:

Casual Dress Code
http://www.busreslab.com/policies/goodpol2.htm

Dress for Work Success: A Business Casual Dress Code
http://humanresources.about.com/od/workrelationships/a/dress_code.htm

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