

Wear Professional Attire

THE OLD SAYING, “To become a professional, you need to dress like a professional” is truer than you know. Think about athletes, police, firefighters, doctors, nurses, and military personnel who all dress the part. The hospitality industry is no different. The chef’s uniform is recognized worldwide and has a nearly 400-year history. People understand and respect professionally dressed workers, and professionally dressed people respect themselves and their work.



Objective:



Identify professional attire in the hospitality industry.

Key Terms:



apron

attire

back of the house

baggy chef pants

bib apron

chef coats

chef pants

clogs

closed-toe shoes

customer service

front of the house

hairnets

ID

neckerchief

polo shirt

professional

side towel

slacks

sport coats

toque

uniform

Professional Attire in the Hospitality Industry

Attire is the group of clothing items typically worn at one time—from hats to shirts to shoes. Proper attire in one situation (e.g., on vacation) may be completely inappropriate in another. This basic standard of dressing appropriately in the workplace is one element of being called a professional or exhibiting professionalism. A **professional** is a person who conducts himself or herself in a manner consistent with the characteristics of the business or workplace.

UNIFORM

Professional attire for customer service jobs has a number of variables. The constant is that a uniform of some type is standard. In a professional kitchen, uniforms are donned (put on) after you arrive at work. Wearing your uniform in the car, on the bus, or while walking to work is a sanitation hazard for the foodservice. A **uniform** is the prescribed or required attire for a job and usually serves to identify a group within an organization. For example, a hotel's front desk staff would probably be required to wear a standard jacket and shirt that is different than the valet staff uniform. Employees who work in areas in which the public is not permitted are **back of the house** employees or kitchen staff. Employees who work in areas in which the public is permitted are **front of the house** employees or customer service staff. Positions in **customer service** are jobs in which employees have direct interaction with customers (e.g., servers, managers, hosts/hostesses, front desk clerks, housekeepers, bartenders, valet attendants, and bellhops). Uniforms tend to look inappropriate when worn in public in a non-work setting.

Chef Coats

Chef coats are comfortable and lightweight double-breasted jackets with traditional cloth knotted buttons, plastic buttons, or plastic “studs” running down the front. The industry standard is white to make dirt stand out and to make it obvious when a jacket needs to be cleaned. Double-breasted jackets are still the norm today because they allow the chef to reverse a soiled jacket side for a clean one. It is also common for an employee's name and title to be embroidered or sewn onto the coat over the single front pocket. Sleeve length should extend down to the wrist, but shorter sleeves are available. The material should be easily washable, durable, and comfortable. A clean, unstained coat is an essential part of the start of each chef's day.

Chef Pants

Chef pants (baggy chef pants) are slightly oversized and baggy attire, coupled with an elastic waistband. The design is intentional and helps to ensure the highest comfort during hectic days and long hours. Industry standard colors are black or black and white hound's tooth check. Other colors and patterns, however, are becoming more acceptable. Pants should be properly fitted and never worn as “low riders,” with the waistband worn lower than the actual waist. Pants must be professionally hemmed and should never be rolled or cuffed. Pant legs dragging on the floor are a safety and health issue. Freshly laundered pants should be worn daily.

Head Covers

All back of the house staff wear head coverings when in the kitchen to prevent hair from falling into food (a sanitation violation) and to prevent hands from coming in contact with hair (another sanitation violation). The highest standard of professionalism is the chef hat or toque. A traditional **toque** (toque blanche) is a brimless cylindrically shaped hat adorned with vertical folds all around. Other chef hats are soft and floppy. Some kitchens provide stiff, tall, and round paper hats in a cylinder shape for one-time usage. Clean head coverings are donned each day.

Hairnets

Hairnets are single-use head coverings made of a stretchy mesh material placed over all the hair on the head. In some kitchens, beard nets are required for men who have facial hair. More relaxed kitchens may allow ball caps as head coverings. Others may use short paper “cook” hats, but the highest standard of professionalism is the chef hat or toque.

Apron

Regardless of your position in a kitchen, an apron is a standard part of the kitchen uniform. An **apron** is a large, rectangular piece of cloth with a string waistband to be tied over clothing at the waist. An apron with an extension designed to partially cover the front top of a chef coat with a string going around the neck to hold it in place is a **bib apron**. The purpose of both styles is to protect the uniform underneath from becoming dirty with food splatter or other debris. Again, white is the industry standard for reasons of cleanliness and sanitation.

Closed-Toe Shoes

Safety is the reason all kitchen workers are required to wear closed-toe shoes as professional footwear. **Closed-toe shoes** are shoes that cover the toes. Sandals or any form of open footwear is forbidden. Shoes must be clean and free of holes or damage. Some employers may permit gym or tennis shoes, but it is common for professional kitchens to require standard leather shoes for the best protection, which includes non-skid or oil-resistant soles. **Clogs** are common professional kitchen shoes designed to lift the heel and move weight forward on the foot. Clogs come open or closed heel (which is not a safety issue) and are available in leather or human-made materials. They are universally black.

Neckerchief

Some kitchens require—and some employees simply choose to wear—a neckerchief as a mark of professionalism. A **neckerchief** is an item worn around the neck and is tied into a knot under or to the side of the throat. It is similar in shape to a handkerchief. Aside from a professional appearance, a neckerchief can be colorful and is designed to absorb sweat that runs down the face or collects around the neck.

Side Towel

Professional kitchen attire should include a **side towel**, which is a hand towel worn on the side of the



FIGURE 1. This chef is professionally dressed in a full clean uniform—chef coat, pants, apron, and toque—including a neckerchief.

uniform, positioned over the edge of an apron. It is a natural response to want to wipe your hands on an apron, which is absolutely inappropriate. Wearing a towel at the side as part of a uniform completes the uniform and makes hand wiping (or a makeshift hot pad) accessible.

PROFESSIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE ATTIRE

Customer service employees are also required to wear closed-toe shoes. In this case, clogs or tennis shoes are inappropriate. Proper work or dress shoes are required. Certain employees (e.g., housekeepers, bellhops, valets, servers, and front desk clerks) may have formal and specific uniforms that identify them by job tasks. A uniform could be a specific style shirt or vest designed in a specific color or pattern and may include specific headgear (e.g., a cap). When aprons are worn, the style and color would be determined by the business.



FIGURE 2. This server has a formal uniform that would look completely inappropriate worn in public. At work, he is the height of professionalism.

Job Specific Uniform

In some cases, there may be just one element of clothing that is job identifying. For instance, a knit shirt with a collar is a **polo shirt**, and it may have the company logo embroidered on it. The employee may wear any **slacks** (dress pants) of his or her choosing. Jeans or other casual pants or shirts would not be considered professional. All front of the house uniforms should be clean and neat at the start of every work day.

Management Attire

Managers typically dress more professionally to draw attention to their position within the organization. Hosts in high-end restaurants, desk clerks in major hotels, and managers in most settings may be required to wear a suit and tie or a sport coat and tie. In many cases, these “uniform clothes” may come from their own wardrobes. **Sport coats** are items sold individually, without matching slacks. Sport coats are professional but slightly less formal than suits.

Not Gender Specific

Suits, sport coats, slacks, and ties are not gender specific. Male and female hotel front desk clerks may be required to wear sport coats and ties. It is perfectly appropriate, however, for women to wear dresses, skirts, and blouses, depending on the job and employer requirements. Employees who wear suits or sport coats are generally required to wear button down shirts and

neckties (or bow ties). Coats, shirts, and slacks must be neat, clean, and properly fitting for a professional appearance.

Appropriate Colors

When employees are required to dress in business attire from their own wardrobe, appropriate colors are mandatory: dark formal colors or neutral colors (e.g., beige, brown, or blue). Bright, loud, or pastel colors are never appropriate. Typical attire and appearance standards for male employees include dress shoes and socks, no visible piercings, and no extraneous jewelry. Men should also be clean shaven, have a proper haircut, and have clean hands and fingernails. Typical attire for female employees is a necktie (where appropriate), dress shoes or high heels and nylons, no visible piercings (aside from simple earrings and/or minimal jewelry), appropriate makeup, a professional haircut, and clean hands and fingernails.



FIGURE 3. This restaurant manager is dressed in her own clothes rather than in a specific uniform, and her attire is perfect for a businesswoman at work.

Identification

An **ID** (identification badge) is appropriate, professional, and often required in the workplace. It usually includes a photo of the employee and his or her job title. It may include the date printed and imprinted bar code information. IDs are commonly worn around the neck on a chain or clipped onto the front of a coat or jacket. An employee name badge is usually a simple and small pin-on plastic or metal badge with the name and/or employee number. It is worn on the front of a jacket or shirt. An ID is typically larger than a name badge. In certain instances, part of the professional uniform may require a name badge or ID be worn visibly at all times.

Jewelry

In the front and the back of the house, jewelry should be kept to a minimum. Generally, simple wedding bands and wristwatches are the only acceptable accessories allowed, primarily due to sanitation rules. Simple necklaces, bracelets, and rings are generally acceptable within company guidelines for front of the house employees.

Summary:



Dressing appropriately in the workplace is essential for your success and for being promoted. Therefore, professional attire is necessary at all times on the job. Some jobs require specific uniforms that identify a worker's task just by the clothes worn.

Other jobs allow employees to wear their own clothes or a combination of their own clothes with only specific uniform-related clothing items. Regardless of required attire for any job, clean, neat, and freshly laundered clothing is required every day at work. An ID and/or a name badge are also becoming standard.

Kitchen workers typically wear chef coats, baggy chef pants, a hat or toque, an apron, a side towel, and closed-toe shoes. Customer service workers may need a specific uniform or something more relaxed (e.g., slacks and a polo shirt). Other establishments require more formal attire (e.g., a dark or neutral color suit or a dress with appropriate dress shoes). Wrinkled, dirty, or partial uniforms are never professional, and jewelry should be kept to a minimum at all times.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Why do chefs and kitchen staff wear aprons?
2. Why might a bright blue suit not be considered professional attire?
3. Why would someone wearing a suit with a necktie look more professional than someone who is wearing the same suit without a necktie?
4. People tend to work well when they are comfortable, and sandals are comfortable. Why are comfortable sandals inappropriate in the foodservice workplace?
5. What is the difference between an ID and a name tag?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Some jobs have uniforms that are required every day, and others require professional attire from the employee's own wardrobe. If a person is applying for a job where a specific uniform will be required—such as a chef—should that person's interview attire be different from a person who will be required to wear a suit at work? If the job is in a casual setting (e.g., a server in a diner), how should the candidate dress for the interview? Dressing for success starts with interviews. Conduct some online research to expand your knowledge.

Web Links:



Interviewing: Professional Attire

<http://www.uwgb.edu/careers/Attire.htm>

Professional Dress Code Tips

http://www.dba-oracle.com/dress_code.htm

Dress for Interview Success

<http://www.hcareers.com/us/resourcecenter/tabid/306/articleid/252/default.aspx>

Proper Business Attire

http://www.sideroad.com/Business_Atire/proper-business-attire.html