

LEVIN, SILVEY, ZELKO & Co., P.A.

Certified Public Accountants

MITCHELL H. SILVEY, CPA
ROBERT A. ZELKO, CPA
BONNIE L. MACKEY, CPA, CSEP

2699 STIRLING ROAD, SUITE B-205
HOLLYWOOD, FLORIDA 33312-6543
(954) 985-8808 (BROWARD)
(954) 985-8839 (FAX)
WWW.LSZCPA.COM

Dress For Success

The faces of entrepreneurs have changed over the past 50 years. Today, the work force is more diverse racially, gender-wise and age-wise. Companies tend to accommodate personal lifestyles and are accelerating into global industries versus the past family owned business on Main Street and knowing most of its customers. More women and minorities now take part in lobbying, pushing governments to address entrepreneurs' concerns versus the past white male, relatively homogeneous and static individuals. Though we may see the future entrepreneur as more diverse, devoted to family time, globally focused, better educated and concentrating on services, we will still need some core traits to succeed.

First Impressions – we only get them once! Do you know what your customers expect? The general public perceives the look of a CPA differently from the look of a retail entrepreneur. This perception may also vary depending on your business location. For example, an entrepreneur in a downtown office may dress differently than one having an office near the beach. Do you have a mental picture? The answer is yes: suit versus casual dress. The point is that we must anticipate these perceptions and/or mental pictures, maybe more so as women.

Are women taken seriously? The results of a 2001 poll suggested that a woman's appearance does have an affect on raises and promotions, as well as whether or not they're taken seriously. Appearance can also affect whether or not a woman is given new challenges, responsibilities and opportunities. Nearly 78% of respondents believed that clothing, makeup and hair affect a woman's confidence in her ability to do her job well. Who greets your customers first? Usually, a receptionist, who is probably the lowest paid person in your organization. Have you ever considered a clothing budget to assist this highly visible individual?

According to Fortune's Field Guide to Power, we could spend hundreds to thousands of dollars on "power" attire and accessories. Do we need to? Of course, not! Properly coordinated, a few pieces mixed and matched may give you more than a week's worth of business and casual attire. However, different departments within a company may have different dress codes. For example, outside sales and drivers may have a different dress code policy than inside sales and administrative personnel have. Therefore, you'll want to check on that "jean" policy, before purchasing the accessories to coordinate.

Is our dress dependent on clientele and/or location? How about if our customers are building contractors versus attorneys or doctors? Absolutely! We should always have a jacket available in order to "dress up" our attire, depending on the circumstances. Likewise, if your customer is on a construction site, you may want to take off that jacket and NOT drive up in a Mark VIII!

First impressions hold true at networking events and seminars as well. Business appropriate and business casual do not include capris or sunflower tattoos! For more information or a seminar on this topic, please contact: Bonnie Mackey.

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