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Dress for Success – Part II Dress Code Policies

Creating a professional, visual image is key to our success. That first impression could make or break a deal! Our image should reflect our company's personality, industry and expectations. Once we've determined the image desired for our company, policies should be established. Although styles and standards have changed since the 1950's, the following standards can still be maintained.

Professional attire for men may be easier than for women. Basically, suits, jackets and ties work for them, but women need more flair and color. Therefore, along with flair and color, accessories must be carefully chosen. In addition to a policy listing business appropriate dress, a list of "not appropriate" dress may need to be added. For example, tailored dresses may be appropriate, but sleeveless dresses without a jacket is not. Likewise, shirts with collars are acceptable unless they are denim or flannel. According to Business & Legal Reports, the trend toward more conservative workplace dress standards is reemerging; although it's not expected to return to the strict formalities we saw in the 1960s.

Casual Fridays can pose another problem, in that we'll want to maintain and define "business casual." A clear point needs to be made to personnel that casual Friday still means we portray a business atmosphere; it's not a "slop" day! Again, a good list and/or definition should be established, right down to the toenails. For example, if sandals are allowed without hosiery, toenails must be all polished or not polished at all. Denim shirts or dresses may be acceptable, while denim pants are not; hence, a "jean" policy. However, our "weekend" casual dress may be more relaxed, but will need to address it in the policy. Everyone will have a different perception of "what's comfortable."

Grooming plays a key role in dress code policies for that first impression as well. Stating, "neat and clean" may not be enough. The trend is to be more specific in listing what's not appropriate. For example, we can say tattoos and body piercings may not be visible. However, to have a "no beard" or clean-shaven policy may be challenged as a discrimination case, due to individuals with a particular skin condition.

Dress code policies should be revisited and updated periodically, to allow for changing times. Personnel Policy Service, Inc. has a **Model Policy** in a free download to assist in developing your dress code policy at ppspublishers.com/pdf/PPM/dresscode.pdf.

There is **no federal law** specifically covering dress codes. We may stipulate dress codes as long as they are consistent with workplace and safety laws and are not discriminatory. Religious accommodations may need to be addressed as well. For instance, unless it's an undue hardship like a safety concern, we cannot ban a head covering or beard. We can, however, state that the beard must be neatly trimmed. We cannot prohibit women from wearing pants or require them to wear a uniform, unless it's the same for the men. An employer may be held liable if an employee is required to wear a provocative uniform and the employer does not respond to the employee's complaints of harassment. Therefore, we also need a sexual harassment policy to handle these complaints.

In summary, there's a noticeable difference in work performance on casual Fridays versus business attire days. The attitude of "look good, feel good" has a definite correlation to work ethic and success. However, those casual days do help to promote employee morale. We have to keep in mind it's a give and take world in today's work environment, but **appearance equals success!**

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