

Dress to impress by Donna Obstfeld



Fashion has changed significantly over the years and many of the trends of the past have also seen revivals, but what of dress trends at work? Do people dress to impress? Do people look at themselves in the mirror before leaving for work and think "am I dressed appropriately?" and for that matters, what is appropriate? Like fashion, dress in the workplace has also changed significantly over the years. It is of course, job environment specific and what a mechanic wears would not be appropriate in an office environment, but on the whole, do people still power dress for work? Are there different standards for men than those for women and do employers care what staff look like as long as they get the job done - in fact *should* they care what staff look like?

I once interviewed someone for a job in the finance department of a large company and the candidate came in wearing a tracksuit, this is absolutely true! I was so disgusted that anyone would turn up for an interview looking such a mess and having taken so little pride in their appearance that I have to admit, I paid little attention to the content of the interview, spent as much time as I needed to be polite and terminated the discussion at the first opportunity that I had. Was I right to do so? In my opinion, yes - if someone can't make an effort for an interview, it says a lot about their personality and you would wonder how much effort they would make in the working environment.

As an HR Advisor, I work with a lot of businesses of varying sizes and cultures and dress code does differ considerably. On my first visit to a company I will always wear a suit, after that if the company is less formal, I will wear trousers and a top. I will always wear shoes never trainers or sandals and as a woman, I will always wear discreet makeup and jewellery. It is about image. I am influencing, building credibility and delivering tough messages, it is easier to do this if I feel I am dressed appropriately.

Over the years many businesses have become less formal and not everyone needs to wear a suit, but being appropriately dressed is important. Would we want our child's teacher or doctors and nurses in clothes more appropriate to a night club? Would we want builders and decorators walking round in a suit? The key to dressing for work is to find out what the policy is on dress code and make sure you have suitable clothing in your wardrobe. If a uniform has to be worn, it can make life easier and for this reason many employers issue either full or part uniforms to their staff, or provide a clothing allowance and stipulate the colour or the type of clothing to be worn.

So if you are interviewing someone for a role in your business, take into account how they are dressed, remember to communicate your desired dress code when offering a job, if this is documented in the contract or an employee handbook - even better. You should also be dressed as you would expect your candidate to be. Likewise, if you are attending an interview or starting a new role - do some dress code homework first!