

Business Casual for Men: Just How Casual Should You Be?

Gone are the days when a suit was the only acceptable attire for business.

Business casual is so hard to define that many companies have become frustrated with the whole concept.

Recently, there has been a backlash against business casual because the failure to adequately define or adhere to a dress code creates problems. Some companies are reverting back to formal business attire. Others are defining their own ground.

This may be because certain people operate under the assumption that dressing down means you no longer must dress for success. But unless you're working in a job situation that leaves you isolated from others, you're apt to be judged by the image you present, and your clothes are a big factor in that equation.

Unfortunately, the trend toward business casual has blurred the line between what's acceptable and what's regrettable in office attire. While times have changed, some career fashion rules remain.

How to Dress for Business Casual Days

While every organization has its own culture and standards of dress, there are a few universal guidelines.

First Impressions - Always think about the impressions you may be generating and decide if they match your objectives.

Studies have shown that first impressions are made within 7 seconds of meeting. That's about how long it takes for the other person to look you over from top to bottom and back up again. It's human nature to assess and decide - "friend" or "foe".

Conservative doesn't mean Boring! - Begin with the notion that you are representing not just yourself, but also your company, and your team. Unless your job is in the entertainment or fashion industry, clothing should never be distracting. Your personal style still can shine through - just don't let it shout.

Think: Would a client spend more time focused on what you're wearing than what you're saying?

Mirror Image - The old rule--dress for the position to which you aspire--still holds true. What are your manager or other professionals in your industry wearing? Notice what they wear and follow their lead.

This doesn't mean, however, that if your boss sports an assortment of oversized glittering watches, shiny designer suits, and mod ties, you need to

max out your credit cards to do the same. While the idea of dressing one rung up the organization's corporate ladder is usually a good one, it's important to recognize the broader corporate culture so that the idiosyncrasies of one person do not unduly influence your choice of attire.

Here are some general **Do's & Don'ts** to help you determine what's "in" and "out" when it comes to Business Casual.

Do ask your human resources department for official guidelines. Business casual means different things at different companies.

Do wear shirts with collars.

Do wear short or long-sleeved tops.

Do wear long pants - khakis, chinos, corduroys or other non-denim slacks.

Do choose oxfords, loafers, or rubber-soled leather shoes.

Do wear socks that match the colour of your pants. Leave white socks in your gym bag.

Do observe what others are wearing to get an idea of what is acceptable if your company has no written guidelines.

Don't wear jeans.

Don't wear T-shirts, tank tops, sweat pants or workout attire.

Don't wear tennis shoes or sandals.

You might consider keeping a jacket or blazer in your office in case you are called into an unexpected meeting. Of course, standards vary depending on the type of job you have and your industry.

Before you go casual, check your daily planner to make sure you don't have any meetings that require formal business attire.

A SPECIAL NOTE ON SCENT

Any cologne, or perfumed grooming product should not be noticeable at normal business proximity. This means that you can exit the elevator and no one entering should be able to guess that you were there. Scent should never be a distraction.

WANT TO USE THIS ARTICLE IN YOUR PUBLICATION OR ON YOUR WEBSITE? You can, as long as you include this complete bio and let us know when/where it will appear.

About the Author

Cathy Kuzel, author of *Are you a Collector or a Connector*, publishes "Connect!" a monthly ezine providing free information and resources for entrepreneurs. She is a professional speaker and trainer on sales, customer service, professional development and a guru at networking.

For more information visit www.cathykuzel.com