

Dress for success during the summer months

Ah, the lazy, hazy days of summer. That time of year when many businesses slow down, close their offices at noon on Fridays, and do fun things like host BBQ's. It's also a time when many office employees (especially women, I'm sorry to say) lose all perspective on what is appropriate business attire. Don't misunderstand me – having lived through the days when wearing a three piece suit was the only way to be taken seriously, I'm all for business casual. And for the most part, good judgment seems to be shown by people in the fall, winter and spring seasons.

But every year, as soon as the hot, sticky weather arrives, some people put their need for personal comfort above the need to appear professional. By mid June employers have started calling me for help with developing and/or enforcing dress code policies.

Here are the things that concern them most. Ladies:

1. Cleavage is for the ballroom or the bedroom, not the boardroom. Please spare the rest of us the "global view." Don't wait for your boss to have this embarrassing discussion with you – look in the mirror before you leave home and be critical.
2. Avoid spaghetti straps – we really don't want to see dirty, stretched out bra straps. Wear a cardigan or blazer over your tank tops and sundresses in the office.
3. Flip flops were once only for the beach but now we see them everywhere. Most employers don't like flip flops – they have a cheap, sloppy look. And just because there's a one inch "kitten heel" on them, doesn't make them OK. If it looks like a flip flop and sounds like a flip flop, it's a flip flop.
4. Super short skirts and dresses are cooler, but inappropriate. No higher than

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four inches above the knee is best. If you are showing your personal assets at work, they may speak louder than your business attributes.

5. No shorts or skorts, please. (No gentleman, that is not a typo, there really is such a thing as a "skort.")

6. Hair clips, combs and pins are a great way for women to keep long hair up and stay cooler. But how about putting it all up...or leaving it all down? The "just-got-out-of-bed" look with pieces of hair hanging down appears unkempt and gets worse as the day wears on. This hairdo works on TV, not in real life.

Gentleman, I'll keep it short for you. Four things.

1. Shower and wear deodorant. Every day.
2. Don't wear sandals.
3. Do not wear ties with short sleeved shirts. Too geeky.
4. Short pants are for boys at play, not men at work (unless they work outside).

Recently, Premier Dalton McGuinty approved a summer dress code for the provincial government offices to compensate for adjusting the air conditioning to conserve energy. This makes a great deal of sense and certainly the private sector should follow suit. So what acceptable changes can be made to one's attire to be a little cooler and yet appear professional? Most employers seem to find the following wardrobe choices to be acceptable; however, check the dress code at your workplace before making a decision:

- Choose natural, lighter fabrics that breathe, like cotton and linen blends
- Short sleeves can replace long sleeves
- Wear lighter shoes that provide some ventilation
- Men can wear cotton "chinos" instead

- of wool dress pants
- Capris may be acceptable for women if they are tailored (i.e. not cargo style)
- Sundresses can be worn if topped with a light jacket or cardigan
- Most employers don't mind men losing their ties and jackets when not in client meetings
- Women can opt for bare legs under dresses and skirts in most offices

When in doubt, err on the side of the conservative, especially if you are serious about your career. You may end up with a boring office wardrobe but will likely be taken more seriously and make more money than those with a "hotter" look.

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