

Wearing Proper Attire

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If my personal preference dictated my clothing for the day, I would wear jeans and a T-shirt, except in the winter when I would put on a heavier shirt. This works fine in my home office; but when I meet with clients and prospects, I generally wear business casual. For me this means good slacks and a collared shirt. Sometimes I might wear a jacket and tie because it seems more appropriate. Other times I may slip into a slightly more casual shirt. My goal is to dress at least one level above the person I meet with.

If I'm meeting a client in a shop and I know they're going to be wearing blue jeans with a work shirt or T-shirt, I may go in with blue jeans and a nice collared shirt. My point is that it's important to dress appropriately for the circumstance.

We see an example in scripture where the Lord told a parable and said, "But when the king came in to see the guests, he spotted a man who was not dressed in wedding clothes. He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless." (Matthew 22:11-12, NIV) I understand the Lord was talking about more than clothes. See Matthew 22:1-14 for the full account.

I've talked to a number of business people who feel that dress is unimportant. They believe it should be about what they know and can do rather than how they look. At one level I understand their perspective. However, if you're 28 years old wearing sandals, T-shirt, and jeans calling on a 50-year-old corporate person; are you really going to make the type of impression that's going to land you a customer?

When I encounter this subject, I frequently share the following scripture: "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'" (1 Samuel 16:7, NLT) The key point is that people do judge by outward appearance. At least in the marketplace, I don't feel like I can afford to give up any edge. Perhaps you or others can, but why should you?

I remember a phone call I received in my corporate days. It was from our largest customer requesting an immediate meeting regarding a problem from their director of logistics. That day happened to be a casual dress day and I had worn slacks and a collared shirt. However I was in the habit of keeping an extra dress shirt, jacket and tie in my office mostly in case I spilled lunch over my clothes and needed a quick change. This allowed me to shed the casual attire and show up to our largest customer with a jacket and a tie. I could've made the meeting in more casual dress, but didn't feel that would've been appropriate.

When you want to establish trust and dress according to your role, choosing to dress a step up will assist you to be seen as more credible than others. It might be the edge you need.

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