



Corporate world grows more casual with dress codes

By: Christian Moises, News Editor | May 11, 2011 | 0

Dress to impress.

It's a term fashion-minded folks use, but you also hear it in the business world.

Your work wardrobe can give clients or customers a glimpse of how you do business. Look dapper and you're in like Flynn. Appear sloppy and it may reflect in your bottom line.

But times are changing, and so is the corporate dress code. Summer is rapidly approaching and with New Orleans turning into a sweatbox in the coming weeks, now is a great time to revisit your guidelines if you haven't already.

Online professional development and job database website CareerBuilder.com released its Top 10 job trends for 2011 in January. Coming in at No. 10 was "going casual," saying employers are becoming more relaxed about dress codes as they try to enhance the overall work experience. Of the 2,482 hiring managers surveyed, 15 percent said they would provide a more casual dress code.

John Kerlish, president of the Human Resources Management Association of America, says the standard for traditional small- to medium-sized businesses has been casual for the past 15 years, and it's now not uncommon to see people wearing jeans and a T-shirt. A lot of companies are even moving to an everyday dress down day instead of just on Friday.

Of course that depends on the company and the nature of the work, he added.

Attorneys, financial professionals, sales representatives and some upper-level management may be out luck and stuck in the suit. But those who can alter their restrictions should consider doing so.

Take auto-documentation software development firm ReadSoft, which has its North American headquarters in Metairie.

ReadSoft employees don't see clients and customers all that often, and when they do, it's accounts payable employees who tend to be internal. But ReadSoft works with several Fortune 500 companies, including Apple, IBM and Kraft.

"And you ought to see the clothes they wear," said President Bob Fresneda, singling out Apple. "It's just unbelievable. Executives will wear sports coats and jeans and the rest of the guys will wear shorts."

Fresneda made the switch last summer to an all-casual, all-the-time dress code that includes shorts, tennis shoes and flip-flops. But he draws the line at tank tops.

He also brings up an important point about telecommuting.

"We give them the advantage of a virtual office," he said, referring to a growing trend of people working from home. "When they work at home, they can just walk out of their bedroom in a T-shirt and a hat and you don't even have to put on make-up."

Not to mention, shorts, flip-flops and T-shirts are much cheaper than your typical business attire, and employees can save on dry cleaning. And with everyone trying to stretch paychecks further these days, it's just another reason to back down if you are an employer.

It can also serve as a morale booster.

ReadSoft had always had a casual tone, but Fresneda said his employees were still a little reluctant to make the switch. That was until he started wearing shorts every day during the summer.

When they finally saw it was OK, Fresneda noticed people were smiling more and willing to stay in the office longer.

"They'd get a kick out of it, arranging crazy sock days and Hawaiian shirt contents," he said.

At the end of the day, it all comes down to trust. Trust that you hired people who know how to make professional decisions based on the circumstance and will portray themselves and your company in a professional light.