

Does this outfit make my professionalism look big?

By Mary Cole

Let's face it. Whether or not we consider ourselves a fashionista or a "Dapper Dan," we all have trouble deciding what to wear some days. One of the most important times to carefully consider what to wear is in the workplace. How you present yourself has important ramifications in business, and can subtly (or not so subtly) affect the amount of respect your co-workers and managers have for you.

How you dress in your personal life can tell others a great deal about you: are you conservative, a risk-taker, sensible, frugal, or an attention-seeker? In the workplace, people will also question: do you know the fine art of restraint, and do you pay attention to detail? I know of one candidate who failed to get an offer after an otherwise great interview because he was wearing two different-colored socks. The hiring manager couldn't help thinking that if this person wasn't detail-oriented enough to dress carefully for an important interview, he would fall short in a job that required great precision.

While there are countless sources for fashion tips in the workplace, here are just a few basic guidelines for professional appearance:

1. For an important presentation or interview, you can't go wrong with a basic dark or neutral suit. Check for wrinkles, spots, lint – and matching socks!
2. Please, save any cleavage, short skirts (more than 3 inches above the knee), spiky heels, and flashy metallic jewelry for the nightclub or the weekend.
3. Ladies, if you are uncertain if you are over-accessorized at work, here's a tip: don't wear more than 7 (total) pieces of jewelry. That includes each earring, ring, bracelet, necklace, watch, and headband. If you have to ask whether an anklet counts – yes, it counts as seven pieces! Leave the anklet at home.
4. Here are the "never too's". Never wear anything too: tight, old, wrinkled, stained, sparkly, casual, low-cut, short, revealing, worn, or FRAGRANT (easy on the perfume, folks).
5. A tip for an affordable wardrobe – invest in a couple of basic bottoms (pants or simple skirts) in solid dark or neutral colors. Spend less, choose brighter colors, or pick more trendy choices in your tops or ties - no one is likely to notice the bottoms! Check out internet auction sites, Goodwill stores, or consignment shops for some great deals.
6. Finally, here is a good rule of thumb. If you would ever think of asking someone before you headed out the door, "Does this look okay to wear to work?" just go change your outfit without a

second thought or second opinion. If you have to ask, the answer is probably “yes,” and you will be much more comfortable throughout the day if you choose a simpler outfit.

Some people love to plan their outfits to express themselves, while for others, dressing is just a thoughtless start to the day. Whatever your level of interest in fashion, you must remember that how you present yourself on the job most definitely can impact what co-workers think of you. If you want to make an impression at work based on what you can offer on the job, then keep your appearance professional and neat. Keep others focused on your results, not your looks.

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