

Business Casual!

Does it Erode Confidence in Your Company?

by Clare Spiegel

Yes! Lifestyles have become more casual all over the world! And quickly the workplace has become a reflection of that feeling. If Corporate Casual is allowed in your organization, has there been **guidelines** established to give this new freedom some **direction**? Or is it up to each employee to determine what Casual means?

The First Impression! Whether we agree with it or not, or whether we feel it is fair or not, studies have established that 93% of a first impression is derived from personal appearance and body language. Words spoken are as little as 7% of the perceived initial package. Thus, keeping a smart visual image must not be lost. How we look and act will have much to do with the confidence perceived by our customer.

Change Marches On! Now, our head would certainly be in the sand if we didn't realize that life and business is full of constant change. We either move forward with change and make our businesses grow or we stagnate and create a backward decline.

Fact: Our lifestyles are definitely moving toward more leisure living and many work situations are quickly following that trend.

Yes, change in our business wardrobe is upon us. How do we handle this and not send the wrong signal to our customers?

I am in favor of Business Casual *but only* with well thought out direction and structure.

“Appropriateness” is the answer. There are many levels of leisure wear between Corporate Career Clothes, the tailored suit or professional dress worn by those in the banking, finance or law and the clothes worn for housework and garden, clubbing or your work out. The latter categories of dress are not appropriate for any indoor workplace at any time. It's the “Nice Casual” and “Snappy Sportswear” category we are looking for so that we will still project professionalism, trust and caring to our customers.

Learning to dress comfortably yet appropriately for Corporate Casual is a learned skill and can be acquired by all with a little tender loving help. Following are some of the general rules that will help in setting up acceptable guidelines for your relaxed Fridays or dressed down corporate looks on a more frequent basis.

Here are 25
Do's and Don'ts
to get you started!

Do's For the Guys!

- Blazers are very appropriate when respect and authority are an issue. This may only be a portion of your day but have them handy for those specific appointments - in house or out of the office.
- Open collar woven shirts create a relaxed look. Polo styled knits with collars or the new jewel neck knits in fiber blends such as linen, silk, cotton and rayon all give newness to the look. Band collar woven shirts worn closed at the neck are also great.
- Khaki pants work and wool gabardine trousers lend class.
- Knit vests add a special newness.
- Luggage or chocolate brown casual belt a must.
- Loafers or tie front nubucks work.
- Sox with subtle intargia patterns are a must. Match or blend with pant and shoe.

Don'ts For Guys!

- No Jeans.
- No Shorts.
- No Tee Shirts - solid color or printed with logos or messages.
- No Tennis shoes.
- No white sport sox.

Do's For the Girls!

- Cotton or silk shirts. Camisoles and tanks work well under the shirts for added color and flair. Knit polo shirts OK under jackets only - too casual without jacket.
- Vests and a great selection of *styled* tops, both knit and wovens, create a finished look without a jacket.

- Use jackets from your career suits to mix with your separates and give a completed look. Wear open for casual.
- Skirts are slightly above the knee to ankle length.
- Pants and trousers add variety to bottoms.
- Flats, tie front oxfords, flat loafers, and loafers with thicker higher heels all work.
- Trouser sox with pants. Perfect legs can wear no hose. Age and no tan will create a need for hose with shorter lengths.
- Soft dresses with appropriate coverage look great.

Don'ts for Girls!

- No men's style tee shirts - solids, screen prints, painted or studded.
- No low scooped necklines or midriffs.
- No Jeans.
- No Shorts.
- No Leggings with Big Tees and Sweatshirts.
- No tight short skirts meant for night clubbing.
- No Tennis shoes.
- No large loud prints.
- No pumps with bare legs.

The look - relaxed and comfortable yet smart and well put together.

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