

Bulletin Board: Want a promotion? Change your clothes

by Amy_Winter

You may want to rethink what you wear to work if you want to get ahead in business. A professional wardrobe could be as important as showing up to work on time and getting the work done.

Sixty-eight percent of employees believe an employee's office attire affects his or her outlook for a promotion, according to a survey by Yahoo! HotJobs and Banana Republic. And 82 percent of human-resource professionals agree.

"Wardrobe choices really can make or break an employee's chance for promotion," says Tom Musbach, Yahoo! HotJobs managing editor. "A person's workplace attire is a reflection of the overall professional image that they want to portray, and it speaks to the care and consideration they place on their work."

Most employees (61 percent) aren't familiar with their company dress code or have no interest in finding out about it. Musbach recommends asking the human resources department if there is a dress code in order to appear professional in the office culture. Question co-workers for wardrobe tips. And take a look at the boss to discover what is appropriate.

It is doable to balance comfort and professionalism; it just requires good judgment. Eighty-one percent of employees value appearing professional as most important, while 78 percent prefer comfort. Forty-eight percent believe dressing conservatively is essential, and 46 percent like having their own style.

"Dressing for comfort, style and advancement all at the same time can be challenging," says Deborah Lloyd, executive vice president of design and product development for Banana Republic. "Professionalism doesn't need to be sacrificed for comfort or style. Instead, choose versatile looks that allow you to infuse your own personal style."

Business casual is a common wardrobe practice in many offices; however, it is not the same as casual. Musbach says to avoid clothing with slogans, rips or tears, and loud or distracting elements. Steer clear of items that appear sloppy.

Some employees face difficulties keeping to a professional wardrobe. Thirty-six percent find it hard to keep their wardrobe up to date and stylish. Twenty-five percent confess to tardiness due to a wardrobe malfunction or indecisiveness when picking an outfit. And 13 percent of employees have been lectured by a supervisor for inappropriate clothing.

Although employees may need some practice in discovering proper workplace attire, many are willing to improve. Fifty-eight percent say they will re-evaluate their wardrobe, and 57 percent would spend the money for new clothes if it meant a promotion.

Another tip is to keep an extra jacket or nice shoes in the office; a last-minute meeting may come up.

For more information, visit hotjobs.yahoo.com or BananaRepublic.com.

RULES OF OFFICE FASHION

Employees lacking professional wardrobes may want to seek fashion guidance. Ninety-three percent of managers agree a person's office attire influences his or her odds of gaining a promotion, according to a Robert Half International survey.

Flawless style doesn't guarantee a promotion; however, inappropriate attire could greatly hurt advancement possibilities.

Robert Half International, a staffing firm, offers tips on what not to wear at the office:

- Put away flip-flops during the workweek. Leave the summer attire for the beach, even if it is casual Friday.

- Iron clothes in order to appear less sloppy.

- Understand exposed skin isn't necessary. Leave tank tops, low-rise jeans and short skirts at home.

- Save athletic wear for workouts at the gym.

- Avoid wearing political buttons in the office; it is better to keep political views private.

Executives from the survey reported the craziest office wardrobe malfunctions. Here are a few examples:

- "A job candidate showed up for an interview in a new suit - with the price tags still hanging from the sleeve."

- "A colleague had lost a lot of weight, and when he got up to shake hands, his pants fell down."

- "A candidate came to his interview wearing sunglasses and licking a lollipop. He commented to the hiring manager, "This is my style, you can take it or leave it."

Other office fashion no-nos include wearing a yoga outfit, pajamas, paratrooper pants or a fur skirt.

For more information visit www.rhi.com.

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