

When Job-Hunting: Dress for Success

by Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D.

It's probably one of the most overused phrases in job-hunting, but also one of the most underutilized by job-seekers: dress for success. In job-hunting, first impressions are critical. Remember, you are marketing a product -- yourself -- to a potential employer, and the first thing the employer sees when greeting you is your attire; thus, you must make every effort to have the proper dress for the type of job you are seeking. Will dressing properly get you the job? Of course not, but it will give you a competitive edge and a positive first impression.

Should you be judged by what you wear? Perhaps not, but the reality is, of course, that you are judged. Throughout the entire job-seeking process employers use short-cuts -- heuristics or rules of thumb -- to save time. With cover letters, it's the opening paragraph and a quick scan of your qualifications. With resumes, it is a quick scan of your accomplishments. With the job interview, it's how you're dressed that sets the tone of the interview.

How should you dress? Dressing conservatively is always the safest route, but you should also try and do a little investigating of your prospective employer so that what you wear to the interview makes you look as though you fit in with the organization. If you overdress (which is rare but can happen) or underdress (the more likely scenario), the potential employer may feel that you don't care enough about the job.

How do you find out what is the proper dress for a given job/company/industry? You can call the Human Resources office where you are interviewing and simply ask. Or, you could visit the company's office to retrieve an application or other company information and observe the attire current employees are wearing -- though make sure you are not there on a "casual day" and misinterpret the dress code.

Finally, do you need to run out and spend a lot of money on clothes for interviewing? No, but you should make sure you have at least two professional sets of attire. You'll need more than that, but depending on your current financial condition, two is enough to get started and you can buy more once you have the job or have more financial resources.

Hints for Dress for Success for Men and Women

Attention to details is crucial, so here are some tips for both men and women. Make sure you have:

- clean and polished conservative dress shoes
- well-groomed hairstyle
- cleaned and trimmed fingernails
- minimal cologne or perfume
- no visible body piercing beyond conservative ear piercings for women
- well-brushed teeth and fresh breath
- no gum, candy, or other objects in your mouth
- minimal jewelry
- no body odor

Finally, check your attire in the rest room just before your interview for a final check of your appearance -- to make sure your tie is straight, your hair is combed, etc.