



Reprinted from the November 2014 issue of BIC

# Dress to win for interview success

**M**any people assume talent, experience and hard work are the only tools necessary for achieving success in the workplace. They discount appearance as a potential asset, but appearance does count. Wardrobe, grooming and your overall demeanor can speak more eloquently about you than anything you actually say. When you dress inappropriately, the fight for credibility is much harder and it may take longer to achieve your career goals.

Many of us will remember Procter & Gamble's Tide-to-Go "talking stain" commercial that aired during the 2008 Super Bowl where a candidate tries to explain why he's the best fit for the job. But the interviewer is so distracted by the large brown stain on the man's shirt he imagines the stain talking to him. As some of us may have experienced, one little detail can have a major impact when it comes to making that positive first impression during an interview.

You may be skilled, determined, sincere and knowledgeable; however, if your personal appearance is inappropriate, an employer may take a quick look and then move on to another candidate who looks more suited to fulfill his workplace needs. There's no getting around it. The reality of it all is we are judged by the first impression we create — how we look. And in today's competitive global society, every message we send needs to be positive.

So, beginning with the obvious,

pay attention to your appearance. Your wardrobe is something over which you have total control. While there is no magic outfit designed for instant hiring success, you should keep in mind it is always better to err on the conservative side when dressing for an interview.

Your goal is to create a strong, positive first impression. Pay attention to the details. Remember simplicity and good taste are desirable. Also keep in mind what is appropriate is determined by the profession, industry and position for which you are interviewing.

So what should you wear? My son, who is retiring from the Navy as a naval aviator, recently interviewed with a company in the oil and gas industry. In the documentation discussing all the interview details, he was told to not wear a jacket or shirt with a tie. Business casual was to be worn. On the other hand, my grandson interviewed with one of the "Big 4" accounting firms, and he was decked out in a good-looking, well-fitting suit, shirt and tie.

Guidelines for traditional corporate businesses would be a suit, shirt and tie for men; a skirted suit or pantsuit with coordinating blouse or sweater for women. A more relaxed look for some industries would be dress slacks, dress shirt without a tie, and blazer for men; skirt or dress slacks with blouse or sweater and jacket for women. Keep in mind wearing a jacket generally adds to your credibility. On the other hand, you can always take off the jacket

if the look seems to be over the top. And, as with my son, in some cases khaki pants and a polo shirt will do the job. For women, a skirt or casual slacks with a blouse or sweater will work. If you're still not sure what to wear, ask someone whose judgment you trust. Whatever you wear, however, your clothes should be clean, neat and pressed with shoes polished.

**Wardrobe, grooming and your overall demeanor can speak more eloquently about you than anything you actually say.**

The way you present yourself is the single most powerful nonverbal statement you can make. Even if you personally believe too much emphasis is placed on appearance, it's human nature for an employer to be favorably inclined toward the well-qualified job candidate who also looks the part.

In the final analysis, consider your image as a form of communication. With it, you want to send out messages that will bring forth positive responses from others. In today's competitive business world, those messages can make the difference between "You're hired" or "No thanks. We're not interested."

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