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## FIRM MANAGEMENT

# Dress Code 1,2,3

Now when it comes to dress code in the workplace, you cannot fall back to one single answer, you need alignment. This means before you take a generic workplace and virtual meeting policy you find online and deploy it where you work, stop and think ...

**Garrett Wagner, CPA** • Jul. 06, 2021



Do you remember back when you were a kid getting dressed for school and you would on many, and I do mean many occasions “freak out” on your parents about what you could wear to school? Sometimes the logic was sound, you wanted to dress to impress, other times your logic was flawed. That color itches, those pants are not comfy enough, or you just had to wear shorts in the middle of winter. No matter what your generation, we all can remember those mornings getting dressed for school and now those of us who are parents, see another side of that situation.

Luckily for all of us, once we got jobs in the workplace, we still had to dress to impress, but the modern “business casual” provided a pretty flexible range of workplace attire. Gone were the days of suits and dresses, like we have all re-lived through mad men. In the accounting landscape we also tended to avoid the super casual workplace scene of shorts and flip flops. After all we were the most trusted advisors and trusted advisors don’t wear flip flops, at least most of them didn’t.

Our dress code at work at the most basic level is all about representing the brand our firm organization team culture portrays. The dress code is the external visual show case of what you stand for and what makes the organization and you unique to those

you interact with. The nice thing about this unlike many other subtle social cues or non-verbal's, is that attire is rarely mis-understood. For most people a suit is a suit and they don't draw the distinction between a \$10,000 and \$1,00 suit. Whereas the line between suit and tie, business casual, and flip flops is large and distinctive.

Given this, we all have had to adjust to working remotely and the line between business casual and flip flops gets greyer by the day. After all, on a "zoom call" you can wear shorts and flip flops since no one sees them. But what does your top half show and represent and is your new virtual working attire sending the right message?

## **The Right Message**

As we talked about before, your attire either in the office, working from home, or on a virtual meeting isn't just about you being comfy. The goal at the granular level for any organization is that your attire represents the brand and its culture. Your culture is what makes your organization unique and different from everyone else around and many articles have been written at length about the value and purpose of culture so we won't re-tell those stories here, you can just go and read prior issues, trust me. As you move into a post covid world, now is a great time to think about your dress code and make sure it aligns with your culture to drive true success.

## **Dressing the Messengers**

Now when it comes to dress code in the workplace, you cannot fall back to one single answer, you need alignment. This means before you take a generic workplace and virtual meeting policy you find online and deploy it where you work, stop and think about where you actually work. Answer this question instead:

What makes you unique, do you seek to be the best, the most customer friendly, or the most economical provider?

The answer to that question will help you draft your new dress code policy and actually take a successful step to align your culture and behavior of your team members. Each of those three questions are drastically different cultures, which all can be highly successful with different dress codes both in person and virtually. Your goal is to match the two together, just like making sure your kids don't go to school with polka dot neon pants and a non-matching top.

## **Three Buckets**

- **Best:** If this was your answer, then your dress code both in person and virtually will benefit from being more formal. Think about that high end restaurant or the high-end car dealer, the dress matches the high price tag and drive to be the best.
- **Customer Friendly:** For those who picked this one, you will want to continue to maintain a certain level of business casual attire in all situations to keep your brand strong and formal for the professional level of work we do. Focus on not dressing too fancy for your clients, but instead showing them how you can be trusted and depended on.
- **Economical:** In this area, customers look to you for a consist product at a great value across everyone on the team. For those who's this culture describes, your dress code will shine with consistent styles and color choices. The consistency helps customers feel valued and that they are getting the same level of service no matter who they work with.

As we all adjust to working more virtually, now is not the time to ditch the idea of business casual and just give in to wearing t-shirts, now is the time to focus on success and growth. With this one small step you can help provide better direction to those in your organization and actually take a major step in aligning your culture and actions, a step for guaranteed success.

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