

Dress For Success

What you wear to an interview or on the job can send a message that you are serious about your work.

When you walk in the door for a job interview, sure, it's important to have a good sales pitch ready, to convince people you are the right person for the job.

But do your clothes look good?

That is because what you wear is crucial to your chances of landing the new position.

"I would say that the way you dress on an interview will not necessarily get you the job, but it could prevent you from getting the job," said Frankie R. Francese, managing partner at Fortis Consulting Group, a Tinton Falls recruiting firm.

Don Cowan, managing partner at accounting firm Cowan, Guteski & Co. in Toms River, put it this way: "I look at somebody and, I think, in those first 30 seconds, their appearance and their handshake means a lot to me."

He added, "I want to see a business suit, properly groomed individual, hair combed, so that I know that this person would be presentable and represent the firm well when he or she is meeting various clients."

In this day of corporate couture, with words such as business casual, dress-down day or business attire in the lexicon, recruiters say the proper dress for that job interview has not changed. For a man, a business suit, and, for a woman, a suit with a jacket or skirt that ends at the knee.

"You want to go conservative," said Francese. "You should send the message that you are serious about

your career and you want to look your best when interviewing for a job."

Still, things have changed. The traditional view saw business attire as a blue suit, with a white shirt and a red tie. Men can wear a black or gray suit and maybe a colored shirt or one with a pattern, Francese said.

And wear a conservative tie, not your New York Giants tie. "We always use the guideline, do not wear a suit or a shirt or a tie that you would wear out to a nightclub," Francese said.

Women should look to wear a navy blue, gray or brown conservative pantsuit or skirted suit, said Barbara Davis, owner of Barbara Davis Employment Services in Red Bank. Blouses should not be low cut and skirts should end at the knee, according to her firm's recommendations.

Some recommendations carry over to both men and women. Shoes should have a polished look. Your clothes should be pressed, Francese said.

"It should be the first time you are wearing that suit from the dry cleaner," he said.

How an applicant is dressed matters to Howell resident Brian Abartemarco, a hiring manager at a pharmaceutical company.

"You look for those types of things," Abartemarco said. "If they are pretty sharp when it comes to dress and how they carry themselves, that should transcend to their work as well."

“If someone comes in and is dressed pretty sloppy and isn’t put together fully, you start to wonder . . . “Is that the way they look at their work as well?” “

The fashion decisions don’t end after you get the job.

Accounting, legal and bank offices are conservative. But other offices can be more casual, Davis said.

A friend who works at the job or the employer’s human-resources department can give you the lay of the land. Many jobs have rules called “business casual.” That doesn’t mean jeans, said Davis.

For a man, a pressed collared shirt and pressed slacks are appropriate.

“In my opinion, for a woman, business casual means dressing in a comfortable fashion, but still looking professional,” Davis said. Possibilities include slacks and a blouse and sweater or a jacket.

Like business attire, blouses should not be too tight or low cut, Davis said.

“You might be putting out the message that you are looking for a date rather than looking to get the job done,” Davis said. “Many times women don’t realize that because they want to be fashionable. They don’t mean to give that message, but they do.”

For instance, a member of her firm had to talk to one temporary summer employee, who was doing an excellent job, but was wearing a skirt that was too short.

“It really was giving the wrong message. It was distracting people around her,” Davis said. “This woman was totally appalled. She had no idea.”

In another example, Francese once told an applicant that they would be dressed casual for a meeting.

“When the person came in I was shocked to see that their interpretation of business casual was a sweatshirt and sweatpants and sneakers,” Francese said. “That’s not even dress down.” (Dress-down might be jeans and a golf shirt, not a T-shirt, he added.)

In the end, a person should dress for work in a way that’s in line with the company’s culture, he said. It’s also important not to overdress.

“If you go to a company that is business casual, you want to be in that realm of business casual,” Francese said. “You may send a message to people that, “I think I am better than you, that is why I put a suit on.” “

At Cowan & Gunteski, employee dress depends on what the staffer is doing that day, said Cowan.

For instance, a pair of slacks and collared shirt is appropriate for a day at the office. If meeting with a client, the dress is a suit, unless the client’s own corporate culture is more business casual, he added.

“We believe it actually makes the client more comfortable,” Cowan said.

Some flexibility in dress is good for morale, he said.

“If we can make their workplace more comfortable for them, we think it is an environment where it helps create creativity,” he said.