



## What Not To Wear To Work - [Forbes](#)

By **Kristi Hedges**, executive coach, leadership development consultant, and author of  
*Power of Presence: Unlock Your Potential to Influence and Engage Others*

How a person dresses is both a physical expression and a nonverbal communication. As a coach, I see dress delicately placed in feedback that a client isn't polished, lacks executive presence, or fails to exemplify a corporate leader. Many times, supervisors are delighted to share this feedback with a coach because they would never tell the person themselves. Telling someone they are inappropriately dressed feels way too personal (not to mention potentially over the human resources line).

Despite its importance, for many professionals, attire is fairly unintentional. We may choose comfort over impression. I'm not advocating for a right way to dress — *just that it be in alignment with the brand you want to communicate*. If you're climbing the ladder at a Fortune 50 healthcare company and your intention is to be credible, you're better off dressing like the CEO regardless of the corporate policy.

Over the years I've seen, and heard, a lot of commentary around executive attire — most of it behind people's backs. Here are my best tips for dressing to strengthen presence, not detract from it:





- The adage to “dress for the job you want, not the job you have” always applies. See what the most senior executives wear for guidelines. Whenever you get promoted, your attire should be promoted as well — no exceptions.
- Keep your wardrobe updated. Styles change (yes, even men's suits), as do waistlines. At least once a year, add new pieces to your professional wardrobe.
- Make sure your clothes are properly fitted. This makes a tremendous difference.
- Don't dress for comfort; dress for presence. Casual Friday, or casual every day, does not mean sloppy. There's a difference between dress jeans and washed-out jeans.
- A blazer goes a long way toward looking professional. It also allows you to dress up or down as needed during the day. (You can always keep one at work, too.)
- For women, never, ever wear revealing clothes at work. Even if you look fantastic in them, you won't be taken seriously.
- In general, the younger you are, the more conservatively you should dress. As you get more established in your career, you can add a bit more flair to your wardrobe because you have more gravitas. In your early years, your wardrobe should be professionally nondescript.
- Anything connected to work counts as work: plane rides, retreats, office happy hours or parties, etc. The workplace rules still apply.
- Finally, different audiences require different attire. Dress similarly to the group in front of you. If you don't know them well, dress more formally.

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		<b>FOR MEN</b>		<b>FOR WOMEN</b>	
<b>INTERVIEWING</b>	<p>Interview attire for men is a full suit with matching jacket and pants; vests are also acceptable. A crisp, collared shirt should be worn with a black belt and tie. Shoes should be a complementary color. A suit with mismatched pants and jacket is not a good choice.</p>			<p>The most traditional option for women's interview attire is a black skirt suit. Skirt suits are highly recommended for women in fields such as accounting and education. Pants suits are acceptable in most fields, and suits of other neutral colors are also acceptable. Professional suits come in a variety of styles. In any interview situation, a matching top and bottom should be worn. Also, limit suit options to a skirt or full-length pants—not shorts or Capri pants.</p>	
<b>BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL</b>	<p><b>Business professional</b> attire should be worn during the most professional situations such as presentations or meetings. Ties dress up the look, while sweaters dress it down. However, a suit with mismatched pants and jacket is not a good choice for a presentation or meeting but would be acceptable for the office on a daily basis.</p>			<p>Business professional attire should be worn for the most professional situations, including meetings and presentations. Many styles acceptable for business casual are too informal for professional wear. The best choice for business professional is a suit in a neutral color with either long pants or a skirt. Women should wear either a collared shirt or a simple shell top underneath a suit. Shirts should be a relatively subtle color that is flattering to the wearer. With skirt suits, nude or black panty-hose should be worn with dress shoes. Unlike interview wear, tops and bottoms do not necessarily need to match; complementing colors and subtle patterns are acceptable.</p>	
<b>BUSINESS CASUAL</b>	<p>Business casual attire should be worn in every-day work situations. A sweater or nice collared shirt without a tie is acceptable. Khaki slacks are also perfect for the business casual look. Polo shirts are a great option for business casual, as long as they are worn with nice slacks. However, jeans are unacceptable in this category, even when worn with a collared shirt and jacket. In addition, shirts should always be tucked in.</p>			<p>Women have a range of options for business casual attire, which is worn for everyday work situations. Either pants (slacks, not jeans) or skirts are acceptable. A variety of tops, including blouses and sweaters, may be worn as long as they are comfortable, flattering, and fit well. Styles to avoid include short skirts, skirts with revealing slits, outfits with a lot of ruffles or flounces, and any outfit that shows excessive skin.</p>	