

Does what you wear really matter?

by Darrell Fincher

Does what you wear really matter? If someone says that it doesn't – they're lying. It doesn't matter if you're trying to make a first or last impression, what you wear speaks volumes about who you are and what you're going to bring to the table. The first thing that people see is how you present yourself. And many times, you may gain or miss out on opportunities based on that impression.

Is it fair, probably not, but we live in an extremely competitive environment and it is important that we not only come correct on our academic and professional achievements, but we also have to come correct on how we present ourselves to the world. The purpose of this article seeks to provide insight on why your appearance matters and to provide some cost effective ways to ensure that you dress for success.

Why is it important? -

The most important reason why your appearance matters is - for you! When you know you look good, you feel good about yourself. I know that when I look good, I am more self confident and feel that I am ready to take on the world. When you put on that of pair jeans and torn t-shirt you, unknowingly, take on a more casual attitude. Don't get me wrong there is a time and a place for everything. But, when you put on a nice pair of slacks and neatly pressed shirt, you have a different outlook on life. When you take that extra bit of effort, you definitely get a return on your investment. Not only do you feel good about yourself, but other people see it too. Don't

ever underestimate the value of self-confidence. It can be a factor in getting that next opportunity!

The second reason is that as you seek employment you want to make sure that you are dressed for success. The first impression is a lasting one and serves as a critical factor in the hiring decision. The main reason for this is that in many organizations, image is important especially in jobs dealing with the public. They want their employees to have a professional appearance that will appeal to their clients. I know from my own personal experience in corporate America, if someone came to an interview dressed inappropriately, right off the bat, they turned from a possibility to a NO. This may seem harsh, but it's real.

For the record, I am not suggesting that you should sell out and forgo your own values to be apart of something that you don't believe in. However, when you join an organization you are expected to conform to some extent. Conforming is okay as long as you don't lose a sense of who you are.

Tips on dressing for success without breaking your wallet -

I know many of you are thinking, "I can't afford to buy expensive suits!" My response to that is that you don't have to. You can dress for success without spending a lot of money. This is how you do it:

1. *Know the environment.* Find out the type of setting that you will be attending. For example, if you are interviewing for a job, do a drive-by prior to the interview. This will

give you an opportunity to see what the employees are wearing. A lot of organizations are moving from the traditional suit and tie to a more business casual environment. There is no need of investing in one type of wardrobe if it's not necessary.

2. *Invest in one dark suit.* Everyone should have one nice suit in their closet. When I say I dark, I mean blue or black. To accompany this outfit, a nice white shirt/blouse. For the men, a nice solid color tie will never do you wrong. A suit will come in handy for job interviews or special events.
3. *Mix and match.* No one needs to know that you bought a pair of slacks that you can wear with three different shirts! This by far is the most economic piece of advice that I can give you. Buy a few pair of pants and many shirts so that you can mix and match. No one will know the difference!
4. *Buy clothes off season.* Listen folks, I know when spring comes rolling around you're not thinking of buying winter clothes. But, you can get some great clothes for cheap, as retailers try to get rid of their off-season apparel.
5. *Keep your shoes up to snuff.* This is an unwritten rule. I can not tell you how many times that I have been in interviews, personal conversations and presentations when people have scanned down to check out my shoes. I know it sounds a bit crazy, but it has some merit. If you have a nice suit on and shoes that are scuffed up – it really makes one wonder what else is scuffed up!

So in closing, stay true to yourself and know that perception is part of life. Know the messages that you are sending to help you get your foot in the door of that next great opportunity. Finally, take pride in the clothing you wear, and remember, whether it's a button down shirt with a nice pair of slacks, or a three piece suit with golden cuff links - what you wear really does matter.

Darrell Fincher has twelve years of experience in the financial services industry specializing in talent management and organizational development. He is currently in a leadership role at JP Morgan Chase where he is responsible for managing the underwriting operations within the Business Card space. Darrell has a Bachelors degree in Organizational Dynamics from Wilmington University and is currently pursuing his Masters in Organizational Development from the University of Delaware.