



By Allen Anderson

Appearance and Job Development Confidence

I am asked, at times, when training in job development skills, about what job developers should wear when they go on an employer call. I find it interesting that I would be asked, as I did not think my lousy sense of fashion was so well hidden. So here are some of my dress insights, if you choose to believe them.

It's true that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Making first impressions is generally a time of some anxiety. We want to make the best impression and we may not have a lot of experience or knowledge with how to do this well. Most of us have fallen into a comfortable appearance routine that the people around us like, or will tolerate. We don't change this routine very often and when we do, it is for the momentary event – like the wedding or funeral where our appearance mistakes are easily forgiven and forgotten. Sometimes, job developers think they can extrapolate their appearance requirements from these one-time events to doing job development. Generally, this doesn't work. A business call has a different set of goals than an event and we work with different criteria.

Here are some of the basic rules I have learned in my vast experience doing job development and business consulting. Take everything with a grain of salt, except the first rule - recognizing that everyone is different and all employer visits are different.

1. The basic rule for all first contacts is to try to look like, sound like and act like the person you are visiting. The more similar you are in appearance to the person you are seeing, the more they will believe what you are saying. For the businessperson, you will need to dress like a businessperson in your community. For the blue-collar person, you will need to look like a blue-collar person in your community. Thinking about whether these people are more formal – business attire, or less formal – more casual wear, is the key. There is no need to copy the bad habits of the person you are visiting.
2. It is better to be conservative in your appearance than flamboyant. It is better you look like everyone else than you look unique. Nothing wrong with standing out, if you have the confidence to pull it off. Confidence from fitting in tends to make your presentation

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much more confident too. So much of the job development success is based on your own sense of confidence, that getting what ever you can from a common appearance is helpful.

3. If you do not know how the other person is going to dress, err on the side of caution and go with business attire - suit and tie for men and the equivalent for women possibly the skirt and jacket. Sorry, women's clothes are not my strong suit, so can't give much more of a description.

Darker colors, blues, and grays seem to work the best. Social service professionals often tend to the counseling, rumped, casual look used to put people at ease. It's funny how this often brings to the employer ideas of out of touch with business and too soft on hard questions. We often need a crisper feel to our appearance. Employers will accept a business appearance when not necessary, more than they will accept a casual appearance when a business one was needed.

4. Use combinations of clothes that can be made more formal, or casual, as needed. I generally never wear a suit, choosing slacks and a jacket instead. It always looks good enough for the business attire and could be made more casual by removing the tie and jacket and rolling up my sleeves. I also find shoes important - always try to have very good basic black or brown shoes that could be seen as both casual and more formal.
5. Obey the rules your Mom taught you about dressing and appearance – unless she was a terrible dresser - then do the opposite. The old standards will keep you safe in most situations. Don't go in with out-of-date fashions, poorly maintained apparel or clothes that make you look like you do not care about your appearance.
6. Wear an accessory that makes you feel good about yourself. A piece of jewelry, belt or tie that reminds you of a favorite moment or person. It will give you support in an unfamiliar environment and boost your confidence. You will always know, if things go badly, that you have a life outside of this moment and that the moment will pass.

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7. You always need a briefcase or a nice bag to carry your papers. Do not go in with a folder tucked under your arm. Also a writing pad that opens neatly and folds away neatly is a big help in appearing professional. A pad that is half used, that you have to flip through to get to a blank page, may make you look overwhelmed and unprepared. Have a pen that works and a backup if it does not. Have brochures, business cards and your “leave-behinds” organized, so they are easy to access and you are not hunting for them when it is time to hand them out.
8. Recently, there have been more and more negative reactions to strong perfumes or after-shave lotions, as some people have allergies or sensitivities to them. So probably the best advice is to avoid the stronger scents, if you can live without them in your job development world.
9. Finally, your appearance is all about confidence, trying to build it in yourself by fitting in, trying to display it by how you express yourself and being able to forget how you appear because you know your appearance is okay.

Last word! - your appearance is significant and as long as you realize that the visit to the employer is important, your appearance will follow the degree of importance you place on that employer call.

Sincerity in dress and presentation will get you the farthest.

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