

## **Introduction**

Does your company have a dress code? While only 3% (Human Resources, ?) of people surveyed are not sure, it is an important issue how one dresses. A Google search revealed that there is no comprehensive list of companies with a strict dress code. A similar search for a listing of companies with a lax dress code also proved fruitless. Why does this topic matter? It matters because dress codes are believed to effect performance. Some people swear by a strict dress code while others believe lax dress code standards increases productivity. Despite much debate, there is no clear cut answer as will be shown in the following paragraphs and quotes.

## **Dress Code and Productivity**

Strict dress codes are believed to instill discipline into a work force. A disciplined work force is more productive and treats clients better. That is why professionals dress up. It is thought that professional dress helps a client feel like she is in capable hands. Would you want a man in flip flops to perform eye surgery on you? If not, would you want a poorly dressed person to manage your money, help you with legal trouble, or any other difficult task? Clearly, people want professionals to help with their needs.

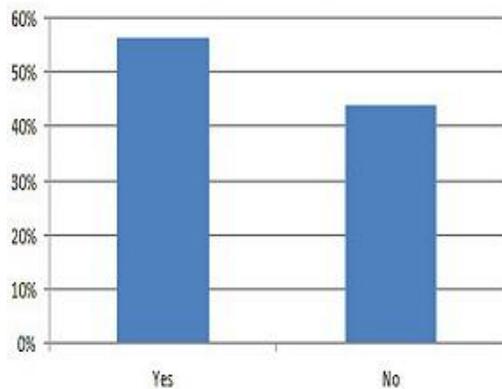
However, it can also be argued that a strict dress code stifles creativity. Companies that do not innovate (eg. be creative) will not be a good place to invest if expecting rapid growth. Also, non-creative companies are more likely to do things that are more comfortable instead of finding the next product that will revolutionize the industry. Steve Jobs came up with innovative idea after

innovative idea. It can even be argued that he saved the music industry (Nash, 2011).

That paragraph nicely connects into the next paragraph which is that lax standards are better than strict standards. Apple, Google, and other tech companies are known for their low dress standards. It is thought that it helps their companies be more creative so they can get to the next big idea even faster. There is evidence to support this view. One can merely look at their stock prices and profits to see they have something going for their company culture. But clothing is just one part of how people see themselves. Tech companies hire only the best people. There are other companies with poor dress standards that are not doing well.

This statement brings us full circle back to appearance. Would you trust a man to perform brain surgery on you if he looked like he was in vacation clothing? Whether you trust him or not, many people do in fact judge people based on appearance. Do you expect a poorly dressed man to be a slob or an impeccably precise accountant? While stereotypes are not usually viewed as a good thing, people make value judgments all the time. Do you trust more the poorly designed website or the one that looks well-polished? While the content on the poorly conceivably could be better researched, people are often guided by first impressions. For example, 56% of respondents in a Business Salary poll (Human Resources, ?) indicated that they judged their co-workers based on their appearance.

### Do You Make Assumptions About Co-Workers Based on Appearance?



While hardly fair, people do care about first impressions.

### When of Dress Code

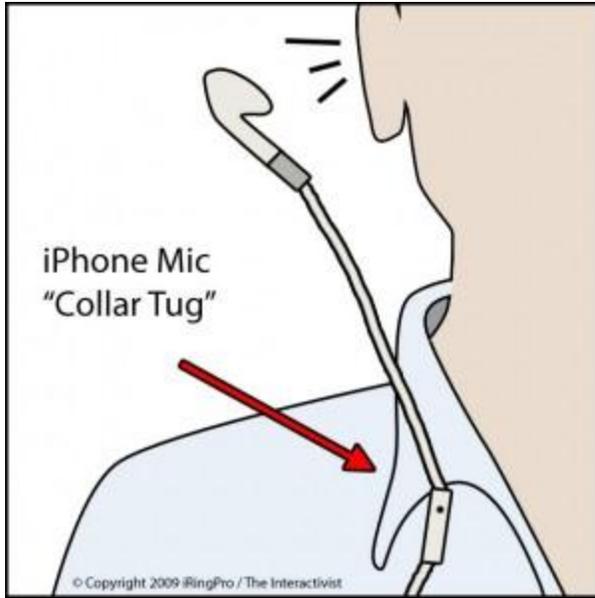
When do dress codes matter the most? It depends on the industry and the location. For example, it would be unusual to walk into a surf shop on the beach and find the cashier in a tuxedo. Similarly, it would be unusual to go to a Wall Street firm and find everyone wearing Hawaiian shirts.

"Depending on what you do dictates your dress code... If I was a lawyer, I wouldn't have on baggy jeans and a backwards hat. I would have a nice slim-fitting suit. As long as you feel comfortable, no matter what, the dress code should be what's comfortable. Which can be a suit. Donald Trump probably isn't going to feel comfortable in acid wash jeans." (Kurtz, 2011)

Also, if the firm deals in complex transactions and wants to make a good impression, they will most likely be more formal. When offices do not interact with the public, then it would be easier for them to have lax standards. But on the other hand, they might want to have high standards for each other's sakes.

### Apple

One company well known for its lack of strict dress code is the tech company Apple. This is deeply ingrained in their culture. In 1983 when the company had barely reached 80 employees, Steve Jobs was worried about the company becoming more formal so he coined the phrase, "It's better to be a pirate than join the navy" (Anonymous, 2011). He continued this trend when he returned to Apple in 1997 by wearing cutoff shorts and a black shirt (Anonymous, 2011). Apple is also known for their "intense work ethic" (Anonymous, 2011) but not all is rosy. Some people believe that the lax dress code has an unfortunate side effect. On TheInteractivist, Joel Hladecek is complaining about when he wears collared t-shirts, the iPhone mike catches on his collars and pops out of his ear. Is that minor? Perhaps to some people but to others, it is a big flaw and Joel is convinced that if people at Apple wore collared shirts, they would have caught the flaw (the assumption being that Apple products are normally perfect). So it appears that even in companies known for high quality, unintentional side effects can occur.



maybe you want a feeling of discipline of professional behavior from the company employees. Regardless, input from those around you should be considered regarding a company dress code. As for the importance of clothing, that shall be left to Mark Twain: "Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society."

## UBS

A company known for its high standards would be UBS. It is a Swiss bank operating out of Basel and Zurich, Switzerland. Wanting to be professional, they wrote a dress code that was 43 pages long. However, it was leaked and became a sensation practically overnight. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, "...most reactions to the code have been overwhelmingly positive." They seemed surprised that it wasn't ridiculed. As for UBS, they were surprised and said that they would not release it to the public. In fact, the spokesman said that "the advice dispensed in style bibles doesn't differ much from the bank's dress code" (Berton, 2010).

## Conclusion

While there are many strong opinions concerning the direction of dress code, there is not easy answer of what is best for each individual company. Maybe you believe it is important to be relaxed at work or

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