



DRESS TO THRILL OR DRESS TO KILL

The Chilworth Partnership

In recent years firms are increasingly adopting dress down policies in their offices. Companies in the retail sector in particular, have been dressing down for some time.

Is dressing down workplace appropriate?



Rod Hutchings

For a dress down policy to work, I think it is important that there is clear guidance on what is acceptable or unacceptable. The same policy then needs to be implemented consistently across the whole business at all levels.

If there is no clarity the policy can become skewed, with everyone's opinions varying. To some people, dress down could mean an open neck shirt whilst to others, shorts and flip-flops.



Richard Carter

I was listening to a radio interview with a representative from a large retail business based in Manchester a few weeks ago. He said that they have had a dress down policy in place for over a year, and to date, no one has abused the system, always appropriately dressed.



David Hodges

There are certainly circumstances and industries, especially in London, where you do not wear a tie. Retail, Media, Technology and some Financial Services tend to adopt dress down policies. Their philosophy is that if you can't think outside of your suit then you are not creative enough for the industry.

Some argue that you can easily hide behind a suit. Anyone can pick up a matching shirt and tie and look smart with minimal effort. There is a theme with suits that can be easily followed. Dressing down is a challenge of creativity.

What implications does this have on recruitment?



Ian Brown

If a company has a dress down policy, they often want candidates to dress down for interviews as well. If a candidate turns up to an interview in a shirt and tie, they can actually be less likely to get the role because it shows that they don't have an understanding of the business.



Stephen McKee

Unless you know the company well, dressing down for an interview can be risky. A candidate might be aware of the policy but not know the level of acceptability. Get it right and you could be on to a winner, get it wrong though and an interview could go down hill very quickly.

I think candidates need to research the business prior to interviews to understand their culture. If you don't want to take the risk, turning up smart is still the safest bet.



Chris Judd

There is an argument that people feel more relaxed when dressed down and therefore more productive in the workplace. What you wear doesn't necessarily affect or shape you or your work as an individual, however it does have a clear affect on the way you are perceived. It is important to get it right.



Matt Whitton

As a recruitment consultancy, we should do everything we can and have a responsibility to make our candidates aware of the dress code situation. A savvy candidate will of course anticipate the situation and contact the hiring company prior to his or her interview, asking for guidance and what their standard practices are. Using a friend who works in the company or the recruitment company who referred you is the safest way to find this out.



Chris Judd

As recruiters, there is an expectation of us to make every effort ourselves to match the dress code of a company we meet. A business won't use us if they think that we don't understand the company's culture.

We certainly don't wear ties though as much as we used to.

How much has it changed over the years?



Richard Carter

When I first started, dressing down was unheard of and women were not even allowed to wear trousers. It has changed massively over the years. I use to feel uncomfortable turning up to a meeting without a tie, now the opposite can be said.

There is still a large difference though between London and the regions. There is a concentration in London of Technology, Retail, Media and Financial Services companies who are several years ahead and more enthusiastic about dress down.



Rod Hutchings

I believe that the change in dress code policies coincides with the way technology has vastly developed over the years. With quick access to work emails and remote desktops, it is now easier to work from home where you naturally relax your dress code.

Summary

Dress codes have changed dramatically over the years. We are now in a period where opinion is divided. Some companies and candidates feel comfortable dressing down, whilst others do not. With each company having a different policy and expectations, it is more important than ever for recruiters and candidates to carry out as much research as possible.

For an interview, wearing a suit is a wise and safe option, unless you know it will be looked down upon, in which case this is an opportunity for a candidate to show that they have thoroughly researched a company and to express their creativity.