

## Dress Code Dilemmas

Business dress standards, casual dress code, dress down Friday, business casual, professional dress code, smart casual attire. What a dilemma and what does it all mean?

For so many businesses dress code is a dilemma that doesn't get worried about until someone over steps the mark, and then all hell breaks loose.

In the article **Dress for success: does it matter what people wear to work today?** ACAS comments:

*"The trend for casual style at work became popular during the 1990s, following the lead of laid-back Californian internet and new technology companies. Employers seeking to evoke a relaxed, fashionable and forward-thinking environment began to encourage their workers to come in wearing whatever they felt comfortable in. Many found that the emphasis on individuality and creativity made for a happier, more productive working environment.*

*On the other hand, formal dress and business suits are not likely to disappear anytime soon. People wearing business suits are still seen as more professional and 'able'. In a recent survey 82 per cent of workers thought they should 'dress to impress' and 65 per cent found it easier to respect a colleague in a suit."*

### So which way to go?

The jury is out on whether it's casual or formal and actually that isn't really the point is it? Wherever you stand on the formal vs. casual debate what is important is that your dress code is crystal clear to your employees and that you have a clearly articulated standard that everyone can find and refer to.

There are a number of considerations when defining your dress code.

1. The dress code should reflect the business and its culture. It is part of the unspoken handwriting of your business
2. The dress code must take into account all equality and diversity issues. Is it suitable for both men and women and does it take into account the religious beliefs and cultural differences?
3. Are there any health and safety or security concerns you need to take into account? Some business have statutory obligations regarding the provision of health and safety equipment e.g. a hard hat, protective uniform
4. Good practice dictates that employees or their representatives should be included in the discussion and debate when considering the requirements of your dress code. They are the ones who will have to wear it every day, be open and inclusive and strive to reach agreement and where you cannot gain consensus be clear about your justification.
5. Have you written down your dress code policy? It is not always easy but it is a good exercise in clarifying your thoughts. Is what you have written down, fair and reasonable? Cajun HR can help you define and write your policy ensuring it meets your statutory obligations.

6. Is the dress code policy available for all employees? Ideally this is in an employee handbook which is issued to each employee when they join your business.
7. Have you communicated your dress code to your employees? Was it included as part of your induction programme? If not, it should have been covered early on.
8. When an employee falls short of the standard, does the line manager know how to bring it to their attention without embarrassment? If not, perhaps they need some support or training on having a “difficult conversation”. Cajun HR offer a wide range of soft skills training that are designed and delivered in house. **Talk to Jenny on 07836 724464** for more information.
9. Do your own standards reflect the dress code? If not why not? As a leader of your business your employees will look for your example and if you don't demonstrate how it should be done, why would you expect them to either?
10. Do you know what to do if an employee refuses to wear the dress code? Have a plan in place and be clear on your procedure for managing this eventuality.

**Cajun HR Services specialise in guiding owner managers of successful growing businesses through the minefield of employment matters and HR legislation. Call us now for practical, straightforward and no nonsense HR advice which allows you to improve your business performance through people.**

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