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Workplace dress for the summer heat: Do's and don'ts

It's that time of year again. With the warm weather moving in, now is the perfect time to discuss what to wear in the office to stay cool and comfortable while also avoiding the distractions and the lack of visual credibility and professionalism that can occur when you wear clothing and shoes that are too revealing, too casual or in poor taste.

While every workplace has its own guidelines or dress policies and cultures, appropriate attire can vary depending on the geographic locale, industry, company, type of job, and even the level of client involvement and exposure. Read ahead for basic do's and don'ts that will assist you in your efforts to present a polished, professional image and reflect positively on your company while also surviving the sweltering summer heat.

- Do pay attention to company policy. Check to see what your company's dress policy is on summer office attire. If there are no guidelines, check with your manager as to what is appropriate.

- Do avoid the "bare flesh" look. Tank tops, halter and strapless tops, spaghetti-strap dresses, low-cut blouses, "midriff-baring" outfits, showing too much cleavage or too much shoulder (cut-out trend in tops), and anything too sheer are "don'ts" for a professional office setting. Though a shrug, cardigan or jacket may offset some items, especially since many offices are freezing in room temperature, it's best to make sure your office attire consistently projects a professional image for you, the company

and your clients.

- Do keep in mind the more "flesh" you expose, the more unprofessional you could potentially appear. Ladies, avoid mini-skirts and skirts or dresses that look better at a party or beach resort, as well as leggings or tights. In addition, for both men and women, "don'ts" include anything too tight, too loose and sagging, or that looks as though you are on your way to the beach or gym.

- Do pay attention to your footwear. Flip-flops, slippers, some sneakers or any type of beach sandal are among the "don'ts." For a top-notch look, wear slip-ons such as loafers or lace-up shoes with socks for men. Leave the "no-socks" look for strictly casual wear. For women, pumps and sling-backs with a "closed, open or peep-toe" or conservative sandals with toenails neatly pedicured will work. Pantyhose are optional, but I strongly recommend they be worn when attending special meetings or making presentations in order to project a polished, professional appearance.

- Do consider lightweight fabrics. Choose natural fibers such as cotton, linen or cotton/silk/linen mixes. In addition, there are many synthetics that, when blended with natural fibers, greatly reduce wrinkling. These fabrics are great for suits/jackets for both men and women. When combined with lighter colors such as tan, taupe, beige and white, these garments often feel cooler, especially in the hot, humid summers in the South.

- Do pay attention to your under-

garments. Gentlemen, I suggest you wear an undershirt with your dress or polo shirts to help control perspiration. Make sure you purchase a properly fitting one so it presents as few wrinkles as possible and your outer shirt drapes nicely. Choose a style of briefs/boxers that is comfortable and allows your slacks to fit properly. Ladies, underwear is essential and should not show through your garments (bra straps showing is not appropriate office dress). Remember, we're talking perception and credibility, so dress the part even underneath.

One of the most important points to keep in mind, as you may have seen me write before, is the organization's image comes before your image. What you wear to the office should work for the greater good, not against it. No matter how sizzling the summer heat, the temperature for dressing professionally doesn't drop. In the end, business is still business, and you should dress accordingly.

Readers, what are your office-appropriate go-to garments and shoes for the summer? Please email your thoughts to info@successimages.com.

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