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How to dress professionally and stay cool in summertime

June is here. With the warm weather upon us, now is a perfect time to chat about what to wear in order to stay cool while also dressing professionally. Though most companies have dress code expectations and policies based on organizational culture, industry, geography and extent of customer contact, there are some general guidelines to consider. Read ahead for six basic tips that will enable you to present a polished, professional image that reflects positively on you and your company — all while surviving the summer heat.

1. Avoid being too casual. Leave the t-shirts, tank tops, cargo pants, leggings, tights and shorts for the weekend. In some offices, even capris and cropped pants are unacceptable. Also, your sunglasses on top of your head are not a hair accessory. I suggest you remove them while working in your office. Be sure you are aware of your dress code. Check with your human resources office or your supervisor if you need clarification.

2. Wear clothes that fit well. Anything too tight, too loose and sagging, too short, too long, or tops/shirts hanging out and sloppy-looking are inappropriate in a business office environment.

3. Consider your footwear. Flip-flops, slippers, sneakers, Crocs or any type of beach sandal do not send a professional message. For a better image, men should wear loafers or

lace-up shoes. For women, pumps and sling-backs with a closed, open or peep-toe, and conservative sandals with feet neatly pedicured, would be appropriate. Hose is optional, but I strongly recommend they be worn in order to project a polished, credible, professional appearance when attending special meetings or making a presentation.

4. Avoid the “bare flesh” look. 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 “no-nos” 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. Keep in mind, the more “flesh” you expose, the more distracting you can appear to customers and co-workers, which can ultimately impact your credibility and productivity.

5. Consider lightweight fabrics. Choose natural fibers such as cotton and linen/cotton/silk or rayon mixes. 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

or beige, these garments often feel cooler, especially in the hot, humid summers in the South.

6. Maintain your professionalism. Even if your employer has an informal dress code, they still want you to look professional for the workplace environment and the duties you are performing. If you think an item of clothing would be inappropriate for the office, it probably is.

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A few final words: One of the most important points to keep in mind, as you may have seen me write before, is that 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.

If you have any specific questions relating to dressing professionally, email Dr. White at successim1@yahoo.com.

For more information on Dr. White’s programs and publications, visit www.successimages.com or call (225) 769-2307. ●