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The Hosiery Dilemma

WOW! It's hot outside, and that's the naked truth! It's summertime, and the living is easy. At least some employers are trying to make it easier, by allowing their female employees to come to work without hosiery. Usually, this is considered a perk. As we shall see, however, the facts of the matter leave us with barely a leg to stand on!

For several reasons, the image presented by a woman with no hosiery can be inappropriate for the workplace and may lead to problems there. For instance, when "given an inch", sometimes the unfortunate tendency among workers is to "take a mile". Once an employer permits a relaxation of the company's dress code in one area, employees may assume that they have their boss's tacit approval to make comparable adjustments throughout their wardrobe. Soon, the company's dress code will have faded into the mists of memory, a relic of bygone days.

During warmer weather, women may elect not only to leave their hosiery at home, but also to arrive at the office in short skirts, sundresses, and other types of casual clothing that generally reveal more skin. This casual, more revealing clothing can make a woman appear less-than-serious about her career, or frivolous about her professional goals within the company. Studies have shown that women who dress in this manner at work earn less money and are taken less seriously than their male counterparts who dress more traditionally. The woman who dresses too casually at the office relinquishes her business power to her male colleagues who are clad in polo shirts, slacks, and loafers with socks. While their attire may be equally casual, the men's clothing reveals less skin, allowing them to retain some level of personal comfort while maintaining their professional image.

Additionally, the more revealing attire may make an unwanted “provocative” impression on male managers, particularly those who are older and may have more conservative tastes. Leaving a male manager with this type of impression may be the last thing that a female employee intends to do. Nevertheless, she must remain mindful of the potential for misinterpretation.

Many women find it quite a challenge to present attractive legs and feet without benefit of hosiery. If you decide to report to work without hosiery, please take the time to properly prepare for it! Ensure that your legs are carefully waxed, thoroughly moisturized, and evenly tanned. Apply fresh polish to toenails. Smooth out rough heels and soles (using a pumice stone, if necessary). Always wear sandals that fit your feet perfectly.

An attractive lady with a flat stomach, nice legs, and a deep tan **should** have fun showing off her figure! Those short skirts and navel-revealing midriff tops are perfect for social outings or weekend activities. But, they seldom work at work! At the office, the female employee is more likely to enhance her career by paying attention to the company’s figures rather than her own. The only statement that her clothes should be making is, “I’m here to work.” Simply put, the more skin a woman reveals in the workplace, the fewer promotions, salary increases, and other benefits she reasonably can expect.

In summary, here are the Top 10 reasons why too-casual clothing may be perceived as provocative or questionable ~ and therefore should be considered inappropriate for the workplace:

- 10.** Embarrassing situations ~ or even sexual harassment cases ~ may become more prevalent.
- 9.** Human Resources may be forced to act as the Fashion Police, sending employees home for dress code violations. This could lead to decreased office productivity.
- 8.** Discussions of wardrobe concerns between managers (particularly males) and employees (particularly females) may cause anger and resentment among staff.
- 7.** Lax dress codes could lead to lax behavior and/or manners among employees.
- 6.** Current and/or prospective clients (particularly visitors from abroad) may perceive the too-casual clothing as a lack of respect for the company’s brand. This could lead to a loss of business and/or revenue.
- 5.** One’s own colleagues may misinterpret the message one

sends when wearing inappropriate clothing to the office.

4. Class and age differences may become more apparent, resulting in interpersonal conflicts.

3. Certain employees (particularly those who are “differently advantaged”) may appear less capable and/or powerful.

2. Managers may assume (correctly or otherwise) that an employee’s too-casual clothing indicates a too-casual attitude toward his or her job responsibilities. This assumption could result in closer supervision (sometimes referred to as “micromanagement”) and more frequent performance reviews.

AND THE #1 REASON THAT TOO-CASUAL CLOTHING SHOULD BE CONSIDERED INAPPROPRIATE FOR THE WORKPLACE:

1. More skin revealed equals less money earned!

The bottom line is this: the “perquisite” of too-casual clothing ultimately may cost both managers and employees a great deal of time, money, and other resources. Here are some solutions that have been implemented successfully by U.S. companies:

- The company announces a move to upgrade its image and atmosphere on all levels (such as dress code, environment, public relations, and marketing) in order to polish the company’s brand.
- Mentors are appointed to offer guidance in the area of “image investment”. Younger employees learn to dress in a manner that reflects their professional goals, modeling their wardrobe on that of their mentor. They appear at work dressed more appropriately, regardless of the weather or the time of year.
- Full-length mirrors are installed in all of the employees’ restrooms.
- Dress code examples, with detailed illustrations, are printed in the company’s employee policy manual, ensuring that all employees are informed as to the types of clothing that are considered acceptable, as well as those that are **not**. Additionally, these images may appear on the company’s website. Posters or life-size cardboard cutouts may even be displayed in employee common areas, thus reinforcing the Do’s and Don’ts of workplace attire.
- Clear guidelines are established, ensuring that all employees are

aware of the consequences of arriving at work dressed inappropriately. (For example, an individual may be sent home to change his or her clothes.)

- A local department or clothing store arranges to sponsor a “fashion show” and offers discounts to employees.
- Monthly E-mail suggestions on ways to maintain a professional image in the workplace (including corresponding visuals) are sent to all employees.
- A “clothing drive” is organized. Employees clean out their closets, removing all articles of clothing that no longer are being worn. (There may be various reasons for this. Perhaps the items do not fit, are outdated, are faded, are in bad repair, or create unpleasant memories.) For whatever reason, all unused clothing is removed from the closet, discarded, and donated to local charities.
- Monthly tele-seminars are held. These mini-courses provide specific dress code pointers, helping employees acquire confidence in such subjects as shopping on a budget, organizing one’s closet, discerning differences between Weekend Casual and Business Casual, and defining one’s body shape (and learning to dress accordingly).
- A Train-the-Trainer program is established. The company has a reference manual published for use by in-house trainers when instructing employees on the ways in which their professional image can be adjusted to complement and positively reflect the company’s brand.

The Hosiery Dilemma

Not Wearing Hosiery	Wearing Hosiery
Sends a casual message in the workplace.	Makes a professional impression at work.
Requires time-consuming and expensive preparation.	Provides a quick, inexpensive solution.
Legs MUST have a deep, even suntan.	Instantly provides a “tanned” appearance.
Skin tone MUST appear perfectly smooth ~ free of ANY blotches or blemishes.	Helps to “smooth out” the appearance of pale, blotchy, or uneven skin tones.

Legs and feet MUST be moisturized.	Makes dry skin less noticeable.
Legs must be waxed WEEKLY or shaved DAILY. (Shaving leaves an appearance of "stubble" after only 24 hours!)	Slight "stubble" is camouflaged.
Provides NO support for legs with varicose or "spider" veins.	Support hose will protect legs and prevent additional damage from broken veins.
Pedicure MUST be kept current. Nails MUST be freshly polished.	Toes are invisible in pumps or sling-backs.
Heels and soles MUST be kept moisturized and smooth. If necessary, a pumice stone should be used on feet to prevent a cracked, crusty, rough appearance.	Pumps keep heels and soles invisible.
Bare feet with bunions, damaged toenails, corns, hammertoes, extra long toes, blue veins, or injuries are frequently distracting.	Unsightly feet are hidden and therefore create no distractions.
Unnecessarily emphasizes the legs and feet, minimizing the effect of "continuity".	Creates a streamlined appearance.
Requires the wearing of open-toe sandals or back-less mules to prevent damage from body heat and perspiration*.	Hose absorb moisture from body heat and perspiration (which naturally gravitate to our shoes) ... slowing damage to footwear.

* Sandals should fit the feet **perfectly**. Toes should neither extend over the edges nor should they touch the ground. Heels should not spill over the back of the sandals. There must be no pudginess between straps ~ either at the toe or along the straps of the sandals.

Linda Thomas AICI, CIP, Corporate Image Advisor and author of **My Closet, My Boutique: How to Organize Your Image**, designs training for companies who wish to encourage their employees to present themselves as positive, professional, and effective. For a list of programs and products, visit Powerful Appearance web site.

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