

Dress Code in
Business: Good or Bad?
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Dress code is probably one of the most commonly debated topic among students at private schools, but for some reason, the debate seems to peter out as students become employees. It is very rare to hear an employee publicly complain about a dress code, but it is still something that should be put under scrutiny. The effectiveness and necessity of a dress code is still very much up in the air, and to presume that they are a necessity simply because many other companies use them is foolhardy. Whether or not a dress code is beneficial or even necessary is a question that needs to be asked from many angles. Many people believe that a dress code may benefit the perception of the employees, while others believe that it actually increases an employee's ability to get work done, and these presumptions as well as others need to be examined to determine whether or not there is weight to either side of the argument. From a biblical standpoint, there is certainly no direct mention of such a thing in the Bible, but there are still many ideas that can be applied to the discussion to determine what is the right choice. Dress codes have existed for a very long time, but have they really helped employees or even employers?

To begin, it is important to analyze perceptions. While in many things, perceptions are not very important, as they can often be wrong, when it comes to business, perceptions and first impressions are absolutely vital. A study done by Amber Chatelain examined the effects that gender and, more important to this study, dress, had on students' perceptions of professors. Her article states, "The results of this study suggest students at career-arts institutions perceive female teachers as less approachable and less likeable than male teachers, and teachers in casual attire less likeable than teachers in business casual or professional attire. However, the results of the two-way ANOVA suggest there is no statistical significance in students' perceptions of the

approachability of teachers based upon attire, and no statistical significance in students' perceptions of the approachability or likeability of teachers based upon attire and gender.” (Chatelain, 2015) In other words, there is a noticeable difference in likeability and approachability based on dress, but not to a significant enough margin for it to be statistically accurate. The statistics are not clear enough to confirm the hypothesis that it affects perceptions. This unfortunately does not provide much information, due to the inconclusive results, but it does at the very least prove that there is not a huge difference. This means that while there may be some perception changes, it is not a big deal. A different study based around high school students and teachers, had drastically different results. The study done by Dorothy Behling states, “Significant differences were found in perception of intelligence and scholastic ability for both student and teacher subjects based on clothing styles and sex of the model.” (Behling, 1991) While this is clearly a different environment, it is absurd that the results are so different. Significant differences being found in these perceptions imply that dress may actually have a large affect on perception, and the previous source certainly did not refute this, it only failed to prove it. A separate article examined these same things, again in professors, and the results were shocking. The article states, “Style of dress and form of address resulted in significant differences in ratings of the professor's trustworthiness, expertise, and likeability.” (Sebastian, 2010) This is further evidence that perception may be significantly affected by dress, as two out of the three articles support this, and the first simply failed to prove it, but still leaned towards this presumption. In other words, it is likely that at the very least, dressing more formal effects the way one is perceived, and while this may not make it necessary for business, it is at the very least an important fact to know continuing.

Another thing to examine relating to dress in business is how dress may affect the ability of one to get a job at all. It is a well known fact that dressing up is a surefire way to separate oneself from the competition, and it certainly provides an advantage. However, evidence has shown that this may be even more significant than the public realizes. An article that specifically examined the hiring of CPA's, and the effects that dress and gender had on these hiring's, states, "The rating of professionalism was significantly affected by the dress. Interactions of the 3 main effects were significant for several other variables including the likelihood of hiring the CPA. Male clients showed a preference for the casually dressed CPA, while the female clients preferred the formally dressed CPA." (Chawla, 1992) This article is very interesting because it shows that the impact that dress has on hiring can be more important depending on who does the hiring. It is unfortunate that people are not hired based on merit, but instead based on any number of random factors that affect the person making the decision, but the fact that the gender of the interviewer can determine whether or not one should dress up or down is absolutely incredible. In addition to interviews, another interesting effect that dress can have is in the food industry. A study done on Chinese restaurants sought to determine if the outfits the employees wore could affect the appetites of the customers, and even impact what food they desired, and the answer was a resounding yes. The article states, "The analysis results indicate that the gender, style of dress and degree of color coordination of a waitperson's clothing can significantly influence consumer perceptions and feelings." (Chen, 2018) In other words, customers can be influenced even by things as simple as the color coordination of the clothing that the waitstaff wears, which is an absolutely shocking revelation. Clothing can affect perceptions and even effect subconscious decisions such as hiring and ordering food, so it appears that it may actually matter a great deal in business.

Dress does not stop its effects there however, because it can significantly affect other things as well. One of the most interesting studies done on dress examined the effects that a customer's clothing can have on other customers in the same store. An article that examined this states, "The results from our experiment show that customers' approach behaviors among observers with a low sense of power were significantly higher when other customers' dress styles were formal rather than informal. Conversely, the effect of other customers' dress styles was minimal among observers with a high sense of power. Results from this study indicate that approach behaviors mediate the impact of other customers' dress styles on word-of-mouth intentions among customers with a low sense of power." (Choi, 2015) This quote is fascinating, because it implies that the social status that comes from shopping can affect purchase decisions that customers make to the extent that what other shoppers are wearing can impact their decisions. It is ridiculous to see that the social strata in culture have gotten to the point where certain people feel comfortable or uncomfortable depending on the clothing of others who do not even know them. An article by Keisha M. Cutright went even farther and examined the effects that the dress of an individual can have on his or her own purchasing decisions. Cutright states, "We demonstrate that when people wear more formal, professional attire, their propensity to purchase goods is heightened—a finding replicated across a diverse set of categories and not intuited by either retailers or shoppers. We find that formal styling can increase purchasing behavior because it enhances a specific form of confidence, social confidence, which buffers individuals from the social anxiety associated with decision making. In addition to addressing alternative explanations (e.g., mood, status, or resource priming), we also demonstrate a reversal: in environments where norms dictate that formal styling is viewed negatively (i.e., counterculture stores), formal dress decreases purchase intentions." (Cutright, 2019) This long

quote helps to explain when and why the dress of an individual can have such a huge affect on purchasing decisions. The information provided by this article can lead to the assumption that the ability influence customers to dress nicely may also influence their decision to make purchases, a discovery that is very beneficial to marketing strategies. Finally, another article examined something similar. This article states, “Mystery shoppers visited stores in three different business contexts. For each context, 30 mystery shoppers paid three visits each, once in sloppy, once in casual, and once in fashionable attire. Supporting research hypotheses, dress had conflicting effects on employees: customers wearing fashionable/casual clothing received better service than those dressed sloppily, while the latter were offered goods and services at lower prices.” (Vilnai-Yavetz, 2014) This is fascinating because the better dressed customers were offered better service, but the customers dressed less nice were offered lower prices. The simple fact is that in a situation like this, employees should be trained not to discriminate based on dress, as it can lead to very dangerous presumptions. To summarize, dress has effects not just on the employees, but even on the customer.

One of the first biblical truths that applies to dress code is found in Colossians 3, verse 23. This verse (NIV) states, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,” While at first, this may not seem related to dress code, the reason this is related is due to the research conducted earlier. If the research shows that dress has a significant positive affect on perception and other things that impact the success of a business, then to ignore these positive effects would mean to not work with all your heart. This biblical truth only effects situations where dress code can have a significant effect on the success of the business, such as customer service, and really any job that implies contact with a customer. For jobs that do not involve contact with a customer, there was a significant lack of evidence to

support the commonly stated belief that dressing up helps employees to work harder. While perceptions were significantly affected, and purchase decisions were as well, it did not seem to affect the work ethic of the employees. This means that in a job where employees are not seen by customers, such as IT or other office based jobs, there is a significant lack of evidence to prove that a dress code has any benefit. From a biblical standpoint, there is no verses or passages to support this idea of dressing in formal attire to attend a job that it will not affect. However, this is not to be confused with the idea that employees are under no obligation to dress nicely. It is commonly misunderstood in Christian culture that if something is not ordained by the Bible, Christians do not have to do it, however this is not the case. Romans 13:1 (ESV) states, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” This verse speaks to the biblical truth that we are to submit to those in authority, and while this does not mean we cannot peacefully suggest change, it does mean we are to follow the rules put in place for us. If an employer says to dress up for work, regardless of whether or not the employee will see customers, he or she is obligated to do so not just based on the avoidance of getting fired but also based on following the rules that God has given us. Dress code may not be mentioned in the Bible, but if its mentioned by someone put into authority, then it matters to God.

Concerning the atheist belief on dress code, many people who do not believe in the Bible likely fall into the belief system that was previously mentioned. Atheists probably believe that if studies show positive effects when working with customers and dressed up, but no positive effects when working alone, then there is no reason for employees to dress up when they are alone. The reason this can become such a big problem is when people lose their respect for authority. Whether Christians agree with what the authority says to do or not, so long as it does

not contradict other biblical beliefs, we are to follow it. From an atheist perspective, there is little incentive to follow what authority says other than to avoid repercussions. This can often lead to employees exhibiting inconsiderate behavior such as skirting the line. When employees do things such as wear the proper clothes, but without a tie, or wear the proper clothes but leave a shirt untucked, they are very clearly indicating that they have very low respect for their employers, and furthermore, indicating that they do not hold tightly to their word. Without the morals and instructions that the bible gives Christians, there is little reason to follow instructions other than to avoid repercussions, thus, when it comes to dress code, it is very likely that non-believers will not listen to authority unless it will harm them not to. As far as the actual development of the rules go, Christians and atheists likely agree that dress code has little affect when an employee is alone, but it does matter when an employee meets with customers.

Finally, dress code is one of the most interesting topics to examine in business, because almost every business has some form of one, and rarely is it explained well. Vague terms such as professionalism and presentable are thrown around without any real reasoning or substance. This does not mean that dress codes are useless, because they are not, but an explanation is necessary as it provides reasoning for when it helps and when it does not. The results showed that dress code had a very large impact on perception of people, specifically on intelligence and professionalism. In addition to this, it was proven that dress can affect purchase decisions. It was found that what customers wear can affect what they purchase, what employees wear can as well, and even what other customers wear can have an impact. There are an innumerable amount of effects that clothing can have when making contact with a customer, but again, there was little to no evidence proving that formal dress impacted work ethic of employees when no customers were around. This leads to the belief that a formal dress code is not necessary when customers

do not interact with employees but is very necessary when they do. In addition to this, Christian viewpoints support the idea of dressing nice when around customers as the Christian viewpoint supports working as if unto the Lord, to the best of one's ability. However, the Christian viewpoint does not necessarily require that a dress code be followed if it will not affect the business performance. The atheist perspective is similar, but without the added bonus that the Christian viewpoint demands submission to authority. Atheists have very little reason to follow rules put in place by an employer unless they will face serious repercussions. For this reason, it can often be dangerous to live the life of an atheist, with little guidance other than one's own feelings.

To conclude, dress code matters. It matters because it impacts the way customers perceive employees, and it matters because it impacts purchase decisions. There may be even more things that it impacts, but there is not presently enough evidence to support that. Perception and purchase decisions are enough to make it significant when working with customers. In addition to this, following the rules set in place by an employer is vital to the Christian worldview, and ignoring something because an employee does not want to do it is strictly against the teachings of the bible. For these reasons, while an argument may stand for the potential of removing dress codes from certain businesses, for the time being, there is not enough evidence to suggest that it is worth avoiding them, and certainly not in customer service. Any steps taken to further the success of a business are in line with the verse in Colossians 3, and this includes dress code as well as general unity, which is impacted by following the rules. Finally, as Christians, we should always seek to do our best, and this means wearing the dress code that an employer asks, doing what he asks how he asks it, and not grumbling or complaining so as to maintain unity and love throughout the organization.

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