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LEGAL MARKETING

A Marketing Consultant's Argument for the End of 'Dress Casual'

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Special to the Legal

My job as a law firm marketing consultant is to always give lawyers the best advice to help them get more business. I am going to give you my very best advice today that could make all the difference in your practice. It will be very short and sweet and I am sorry, but you may not like it.

Here it is: Put your weekend clothes away from Monday to Friday. Dress up for work every day.

Let's play a quick game to make my point:

You are wheeled into the operating room for brain surgery. You get to choose between the two neurosurgeons who enter the room as to which one you want



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to operate on you. Their credentials are both stellar. One is in hospital scrubs and the other is in a golf shirt and khakis. Who do you choose? I would argue that you would choose the one who walked in wearing the uniform of the profession. The neurosurgeon who is "dressed to operate" conveys silently his extreme attention to detail, his confidence in his own abilities and his acknowledgement that you need to see him "dressed to play." I argue the same rules apply when you are meeting with a client, introduced by your colleagues to someone, or just

interacting with people outside the office on a workday.

In today's world, I am seeing far too many lawyers shy away from our acknowledged "uniform"—business attire. I think this is a huge mistake. It is silently hurting your marketing efforts as you will never ever be told that by potential clients.

Here are the facts: Within one to three seconds of someone meeting you, you are being sized up. You are being judged by the clothes you have on, your hairstyle, your grooming, and jewelry, breath, handshake and eye contact. Someone who meets you is subtly thinking all kinds of thoughts about you—just on the basis of these, yes, superficial things. So we have to deal with this very true reality.

And a recent study suggests you might work smarter if you dressed

up. According to Lydia Dishman in an article in Fast Company, “Though there have been plenty of studies that prove clothes and appearance affects the way others perceive us, Northwestern University researchers Hajo Adam and Adam Galinsky found that certain clothing can systematically influence the wearer’s psychological processes. To prove their [thesis]the two discovered that when subjects put on a white coat they were more focused. But it couldn’t be just any coat. ‘Wearing a lab coat described as a doctor’s coat increased sustained attention compared to wearing a lab coat described as a painter’s coat, and compared to simply seeing or even identifying with a lab coat described as a doctor’s coat,’ the researchers wrote. ‘The influence of clothes thus depends on wearing them and their symbolic meaning.’”

By definition, I would argue great lawyers never want to be “casual.” Webster’s Dictionary defines “casual” as: “happening by chance: not planned or expected: done without much thought, effort, or concern.” Is that what we want to be the first impression we give to someone when we want them to give us an important piece of legal work? Casual

dressing almost suggests you wish it were the weekend rather than the workweek.

One of the greatest lines in the 1999 Oscar-winning movie “American Beauty” is uttered by the king of real estate, Buddy Kane. He turns to Annette Bening’s character and says, “In order to be successful, one must project an image of success at all times.” He was not the king of real estate for nothing.

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Kane is right and this message is being lost on too many lawyers today. In my opinion, dress casual in the legal profession does not project success. Lawyers today charge hundreds of dollars an hour for their advice and help. Shouldn’t we look the part to deliver that level of assistance? There is no question that if you are in court, you wear a formal suit. Why do the rules change when we are meeting with clients in the office or simply going to

work in our offices?

And if I still have not swayed you, check out what Mark Zuckerberg, billionaire and perennial T-shirt lover, is wearing on the cover of this month’s Fast Company magazine—a business suit.

Ladies and gentlemen of the court of public opinion, I believe we honor our profession by dressing appropriately at all times and we make a silent yet open statement that we care to bring our best to the table when we dress like chairmen and chairwomen of the board. Have I made my case? •