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## ***Office Cool – What to Wear when the Weather Warms Up?***

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With summer on the way, now is a good time to revisit your dress code for the warmer months.

Your industry, working conditions, and clientele have a big impact on your dress code. Industrial, warehouse, and construction work require a different dress code than a restaurant, law office, or retail store. In a warehouse, open-toe shoes create a safety risk. In many corporate settings, open-toe shoes are unprofessional, and in the food service industry, open-toe shoes are unsafe and unhygienic.

Other than industry and safety concerns, the biggest determinant of your company dress code is company culture. What does your organization stand for, support,

and who does it serve? The answers should provide guidance on whether you endorse Casual Friday attire, and business casual during the summer months.

Like attitudes and job descriptions, dress codes have changed a lot in the past ten years. Silicon Valley took the *business* out of *business casual*, to create a spirited, comfortable, creative workplace environment. As the instability of a constantly unstable economy begins to wear off, professional dress is again becoming a factor in workplace dress codes.

### **Seasonal attire: Create a dress code that works for your company**

The right dress code accommodates your company culture, compliance concerns, and sends a professional message about the direction of your workplace. Consider these points for the summer season, and beyond:

- **Have a policy:** No matter how casual a company or start-up, a dress code is important. Write down and circulate your dress code. Just as part of your employee handbook notes the importance of punctuality, or your inclement weather policy—be sure you establish guidelines for acceptable apparel in your workplace. If your expectations are in line with your company culture, employees will appreciate knowing boundaries instead of having to create them.
- **Product and productivity:** When sketching your dress code, consider your product, and your productivity. Arguments are made both ways that casual attire boosts—or bumps down—productivity. *Dressing the part* is a time-honored maxim for people striving to get ahead in the workplace. Commercial and business success relies on credibility—and credibility is often established, or lost, at a glance. Create the right impression and dress code if your workforce routinely interacts with the public, government agencies, or other companies. Consider the impact on attitude and deliverables if workers roll into the office dressed the same as they do on weekends. Does it help or hurt?
- **Tis' the season:** What about hot weather? In tropical climates, dress codes are bound to be different across the board. In the United States, where hot

weather is generally more seasonal, the limits are yours to create—but keep the following in mind:

- Clothing that is too casual can be distracting. Shorts on either gender, sundresses, halter tops, thin, barely-there clothing, or sandals can be troubling for many reasons. Do you want to see tank-tops on your employees? The concern and care shown for apparel during a job interview should not go out the door when your new hire walks in.
- Treat your workforce the same. Women often wear sleeveless shirts—men do not. Be sure your policies are equal.

No one wants to police clothing policies and send employees home to change. A good rule of thumb is to create a dress code that you would expect to see in the workplace of your most successful competitor. When the aim is to create a professional, successful workplace environment—be sure your company dress code looks the part.

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