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**The Dress Code, Handled with Emotional Intelligence**

**By Susan Dunn**

**The Dress Code, Handled with Emotional Intelligence by Susan Dunn, M.A., The EQ**

**Coach™**

It strikes terror in the heart of some of us, while others ignore it completely. Some of us are relieved there is one; others of us resent it. The Dress Code: Does it affect your career, affect whether you're hired or not, affect how you're treated on the job? Definitely.

How do you 'manage' this particular area of your life? It requires emotional intelligence - some awareness, creativity, flexibility and intuition, and a whole lot of common sense.

For instance, in former years I applied for a job at a major international law firm. At the interview, we were handed one sheet of instructions. The second item they chose to put on this piece of paper was, "Since you have chosen to work in a conservative work environment..."

It went on to outline their strict dress code. Two of us were hired. The other one later complained to me about the dress code there. I maintain – she knew when she signed up, she agreed to it, she had no leg to stand on.

If you like to work out certain, um, conflicts in your life via the dress code, that's your choice. Otherwise, here are some tips.

**THE POLICY**

Believe what you read. Part of EQ is reality-testing. If you're a free spirit who likes to express herself through wardrobe and accessories, don't work for a conservative law firm. Being provocative is not emotionally intelligent.

**THE REALITY**

## The Dress Code, Handled with Emotional Intelligence

There's the P&P manual, and then there's what really goes on. They don't always coincide. Once you're hired and working, EQ would suggest that you observe those around you and fit in. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

### THE BASICS

- Start with neat and clean. No rumples, stains, frayed edges, hanging hemlines. Your clothes should look and smell clean and tidy.
- Make sure your clothes fit.
- Go easy on trends. A zebra–striped accent is okay. A total zebra look ...save it for a social occasion.
- Watch "heaviness". Don't load yourself down with big jewelry or weighty fabrics.
- Watch what you do around your face. You should `set your face off,' not outshine it.
- Aim for a smooth look - no underwear lines, for instance.
- Get the classics. The Little Black Dress really can get you everywhere - wear the right `tone' of jewelry

depending on your skin tone - pearls, gold, silver, it makes all the difference. Experiment. Black slacks and a white blouse (ivory, if you look sick in white, like I do) can take you anywhere.

- De–clutter. Less is more.
- Look at yourself in the mirror and see what you see.

If you're applying for work at a business or corporation, err on the side of conservatism. If you work in an artistic field, you will, of course, have latitude. You likewise have some latitude if you're really good in a highly competitive field. Though I might not go so far as my young friend and computer genius with the 4.0, who told me, "I could show up for an interview with a bone in my nose and they'd hired me."

### CASUAL DAY

Often a nightmare for managers. Have you seen that memo circulating the Internet that starts out "Starting May 1 we will have Casual Day on Fridays", proceeds through "dashikis, turbans, bikinis, and gold lame jumpsuits are not..." and ends with "Casual Day has been canceled."

Some companies use phrases like "client dress code" and "meeting dress code" to help the good–taste–challenged. If they don't, use your common sense, quintessential EQ. If there's a big meeting, or clients coming to the office, dress accordingly.

### WHAT'S IN & WHAT'S OUT

The other day a friend of mine (we live in TX) was heading for the D. C. area and asked for my advice re: wardrobe. I told her no florals, no bright colors..." She interrupted with "How do YOU know?" Well, because I get around. I look around. I care.

My family moved every 2–3 years when I was growing up and in the summers I went to my grandmother's in a rural Texas town. I got tired of being made fun, so I learned to learn quick. "Being made fun of" in the adult world can mean missing promotions, or being fired.

## SO HOW TO FIND OUT MORE?

- People–watch. When you see someone well put–together, who looks really good, analyze why. Color? Fabric? Accessories or lack of them?
- People–ask. I can't think of anything more flattering than to be asked how I manage to look so good. Ask and you can learn theory. One thing you'll likely pick up, a la EQ, is that the person delights in dressing as they do. They're having fun. They're creative. Then remember, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."
- Read magazines. Find some middle–of–the road magazine, something down–to–earth. Try "Marie Claire." It's a bit pricey but you can apply what you learn in a resale shop. FOR INSTANCE: They have "The Best Jeans to Flatter Your Shape." "Great–fitting jeans are the ultimate wardrobe essential—and the hardest to find," they say. I agree. The editors' pick for all figures happens to be \$138, but I'd pay that just to see if they actually flattered me: <http://magazines.ivillage.com/marieclaire> .
- Watch tv shows with fashion in mind. Anchor people are good, too.
- Use the Internet.
- Watch who compliments you. One time I had on something I will not describe to you, and a teenaged boy with purple spikey hair and 5 earrings brushed past me in the store and said, "Like, dude, cool outfit." It went in the trash. What was I thinking?
- Work with a coach.

Like everything else, dressing appropriately and attractively can be learned, and it can make a difference in your life. The greatest accessory you can have is self–assurance. If you do your homework, you'll know you look right, and then you'll feel right. Personal Power!

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## **Is It Possible to Have Too Much Emotional Intelligence?**

**By Susan Dunn**

### **Is It Possible to Have Too Much Emotional Intelligence? by Susan Dunn, M.A., The EQ Coach**

Someone emailed me recently, "Do you think it's possible to have too much emotional intelligence going on? To the point that perhaps logic takes a backseat?"

Good question. The fact is, we need both IQ and EQ. You can't have "too much" emotional intelligence, but that doesn't mean at the expense of logic.

It's time to use logic, for instance, when figuring out a budget, or making a timeline for a project. Then there's a time to use emotional intelligence – using leadership skills, for instance, to get those people to make that timeline and project happen.

## The Dress Code, Handled with Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence means using all your faculties, including logic and reason, to bring about results that are favorable. It means having the flexibility and creativity to see alternatives.

Say you're presented with a highly-charged emotional situation, for instance. You're furious with your partner and would like to hit him. Your EQ would tell you to manage that emotion, to stop and think. Your "thinking brain" would then consider the possible consequences of your act — seriously hurting him, going to jail, harming the relationship irreparably, feeling shame and guilt afterwards, and other things that are not in your best interest. At the same time, you could use your empathy to try and see things from their point of view.

There are times when logic does need to take a back seat, for instance when we need to use our hearts in managing a misbehaving toddler. Logic and reason aren't of much use with a two year old. They also aren't of much use in figuring out the big questions in life, like why bad things happen to good people.

Emotional intelligence means managing emotions so you can take action in the best interest of all concerned. This also requires using your thinking brain!

To learn more about emotional intelligence, go here: <http://www.susandunn.cc/EQ.htm>

Susan Dunn, The EQ Coach, offers personal life coaching, transitions, career, relationships, emotional intelligence. Visit her on the web at [www.susandunn.cc](http://www.susandunn.cc) and <mailto:sdunn@susandunn.cc> .



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