

Dress for Success: Tips for Building a Professional Wardrobe

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Whether you are a recent grad or someone re-entering a professional work environment, building a work wardrobe that strikes a balance between professionalism and personal style is key.

“Dress for the job you want, not the job you’re being hired for,” says Stephanie Thomas, fashion instructor at The Art Institute of California – Los Angeles, a campus of Argosy University.

“Your job description, and that of the next step up your career ladder, should be the driving force behind your apparel purchases,” adds Stephanie Pierotti, fashion instructor at The Arts Institute of Las Vegas. To get you started, fashion experts from The Art Institutes system of schools offer tips to have you dressing for the corner office.

Suit Up

“I know it sounds boring, but a suit is an absolute must,” says Thomas. “Look upon your suit purchase as a long term investment,” adds Pierotti. “This is not an area where you’ll want to skimp. Seasonless fabrics, like lightweight wool, worsted wool and wool crepe are your best bets.” She recommends purchasing a suit in a classic color such as black, gray, tan or navy blue and saving the more trendy colors and patterns for your accessories.

Thomas says to also think about the colors in your current wardrobe and look for a suit that can be interchangeable with pieces you already own. For women, a suit with both pants and a skirt will offer more variety. You should also feel comfortable in your suit. A good fit will make you look polished, professional and more confident. “The chances of you finding a suit that fits you perfectly off the rack is slim to none, so be sure to budget some funds for tailoring,” says Thomas.

Wardrobe Building Blocks

You will also need some staples that will serve as wardrobe building blocks that enable you to walk right into a new job. “Women should purchase two or three button-down shirts of a good fit and quality. Men may want to purchase five, if button-downs are a staple in their field,” says Pierotti. For women, a wrap dress is a great alternative to pants and a button down. Women can also incorporate knit shirts that will mix and match with their suit separates.

For men, a sports jacket in an all-weather fabric is a good investment. “Think less trend, more modern classic that will cut across many seasons,” says Thomas.

“Men and women need a great blazer and some type of sweater they can dress up or down.” Both men and women can mix in sweaters and cardigans to go with their separates. Pierotti advises, “Look for versatile items that can take you from desk to dinner and from workdays to weekends. Also consider a dark or black jean for casual days at the office.

Shoes

To put your best foot forward at a new job, make sure you also have professional footwear to go with your new wardrobe. Pierotti recommends two pairs of practical shoes for day-to-day work life and one or two for more formal events, in neutral colors such as brown, gray and black. And for women, 4 inches should be the maximum height for a professional setting.

Accessories

Don't forget about accessories, which can add personality to your outfits. "Men should have a couple of ties with a little bit of personality, meaning different patterns or maybe a bold color," says Thomas.

For women, necklaces and bracelets can add a pop to an outfit, but less is more when considering jewelry. Make sure you don't forget to use an appropriate purse or messenger bag and no matter where you live, you should have a professional trench in your wardrobe.

Tailoring and Maintenance

Once you've built your wardrobe, you'll want to keep it neat and polished. To make your clothing look custom made, find a good tailor who can make small tweaks to your garments. A garment steamer, a clothes shaver, stain remover sticks and fabric freshener sprays will help save on dry cleaning costs, by helping your garments looking and smelling fresh.

"Investing in core pieces lays a solid foundation for your new professional wardrobe," says Pierotti. "You'll create a classic yet stylish work collection that makes you feel confident and professional."

*http://www.insidetucsonbusiness.com/online_features/fashion_beauty_fitness/dress-for-success-tips-for-building-a-professional-wardrobe/