

Dress the Part – Proper Attire Aids in Job Search

*John Challenger
Chief Executive Officer
Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc*

July 22, 2009 - Even as the recession slows hiring, many industries continue to fill positions in anticipation of the coming recovery.

With the unemployment rate at 9.4 percent in May and hiring managers seeing a plethora of talent from which to choose, job seekers are realizing the importance of the first impression. Potential employers will consider only the best, most professional candidates for the job, and the candidate's wardrobe is key to landing the position.

During the tech boom in the early 2000s, young talent flooded the job market, demanding individuality. Companies were forced to adapt to less traditional styles of workplace dress and in some cases, abandon dress codes all together in order to retain the talent they needed.

While tattoos, piercings and other forms of body art are typically accepted in the workplace now, hiring managers can be pickier as a growing talent pool competes for fewer jobs.

A younger generation brought on the wave of dress code alternatives. However, during this recession, older workers have seen considerable job gains, whether through postponing or coming out of retirement, and many may feel work is no place for casual wear. We may see the workplace standard swing back to ultra-professional.

In any event, it is always a good idea to dress professionally for an interview. Even despite employers embracing and promoting diversity in all its forms, during an interview, you do not want to stand out because of ripped jeans or skin-tight clothing.

Moreover, there are definitely certain industries where more conservative standards of appearance persist. We may never see tattoos on bankers, lawyers, accountants or the clergy.

However, areas such as advertising, marketing, sales and technology are more inclined to be ahead of the curve and more accepting of new fashion and lifestyle trends.

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While a growing number of companies may be abandoning traditional dress codes, many job seekers donning body art say they are not quite feeling the love.

- A Vault.com survey found that 76 percent and 81 percent of respondents respectively say visible tattoos and piercings other than in the ears are unprofessional
- Another 42 percent of managers said their opinion would be lowered by a person's visible body art

Most tattoos are hidden, but some are prominently displayed on people's hands, lower arms and necks.

Body piercings can be anywhere!

As a job seeker, you have to judge whether the employer you are interviewing with is going to be accepting of your body art. If that is not the case, and that is where you really want to work, then you will have to make an effort to conceal your tattoos and take out your piercings.

The best way to determine if body art is acceptable is by asking someone at the company, preferably not the person you are to meet. However, if you know someone else at the company or if you have established rapport with another employee, you can ask that person.

Challenger offered some additional advice on issues that could come up for young job seekers steeped in the latest fashion and youth-oriented trends:

Tattoos

Show them off, unless they are offensive, in which case you should plan on concealing it in the interview and even after getting the job. The other time you would want to conceal your tattoos is if you know that a certain employer would frown upon such decorations.

Piercings:

- Beware! With increased security at many corporate offices, wearing too much bling could set off metal detectors. You do not want to be late to the interview because you were forced to remove 12 body piercings at the security desk
- In addition to the security issue, too many piercings might be a distraction for the interviewer and could hurt your chances.
- Also, it would be prudent to remove tongue and lip piercings, as these often make it difficult for others to understand what you are saying.

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Baggy Clothing

Avoid blue jeans, unless it is how everyone else in the office dresses. It is possible to look presentable in loose fitting khakis and a button-down shirt. For the interview, refrain from wearing pants that ride below the waistline (often showing off one's undergarments or bare body).

Wild Hair

Streaks of blue, green or fire-engine red will not scare off most hiring authorities, but a Mohawk or hairdo resembling a bird's nest might.

Cell Phones

Cell phones have no place in the job interview. They should be turned off and stashed away in a bag or briefcase. Imagine being in the middle of answering an interview question and your personalized ring tone featuring the latest hip-hop anthem interrupts. Even on vibrate, a cell phone going off can be a major distraction in the interview.

Portable Music Players

Although it seems that everyone has them attached to their pocket, purse or hip, keep the iPods at home. If co-workers see you with ear buds in your ears all day long, they will assume you are not listening, and possibly not working very hard.

Dress For The Job You Want

The old adage is still true today. Upper management will be likelier to recognize you if you begin to dress and groom yourself professionally. They may see it as taking initiative or acting as a role model for the office.

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