

Weathering a Storm Over Summer Dress Codes

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Now that summer is upon us, your dress code at work may be feeling the heat. It's a constant balancing act to keep everyone cool and comfortable while maintaining a professional work environment that minimizes distractions and liabilities

If you already have a dress code, the question is whether to throw out your existing policy and implement something new or leave things as they are. The best answer may be to leave your more restrictive policy where it stands and turn up the A/C. After all, a drastically relaxed dress code with vague standards that shift with the seasons may also cause employees to relax their approach to dealing with co-workers, customers and the public at large. That puts your organization's public image at risk and may even expose you to perceptions of discrimination or harassment that can tear at the morale of any workplace, not to mention your pocketbook.

If you presently lack a written dress code, then perhaps now is the time to put one in place. While many offices simply rely on employees to use common sense in terms of acceptable attire, experience also tells us that when the temperature hits 95 degrees, the summer heat can get the better of employee judgment. This is especially so when the latest fashions encourage even traditionally conservative employees to test the waters as if they were dressed to go out clubbing or to the beach.

The bottom line is to try and maintain a policy that makes good sense for business reasons (such as upholding a positive public image), and to be prepared to explain the rationale behind it. If you can satisfy yourself in each of these areas, chances are you are well on your way to a successful summer – casual or not.

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