



Don't Stress Over Interview Dress

Q: I'm a physicist currently doing an academic postdoc. I'd love to find a position in industry. One problem really perplexes me: How should I dress for job interviews? I have worn a suit with a skirt to two interviews and had a strange reaction each time. The people interviewing me were in casual dress, and I know that once I get a job, I will dress casually. A female physicist whose opinion I admire advised me that if I wear skirts at work, men will be less likely to take me seriously. Much of the business dress designed for women in the office doesn't fit the image I have of myself as a professional scientist. Let's face it: Most of the people I will be working with are men, and I need to make the right impression—in the job interview and after I'm hired. Any suggestions?

A: You're right to carefully choose your job interview attire. Interviewers often make unconscious judgments based on what interviewees wear. It may not be fair or even rational, but it happens. The traditional rule is to dress like the interviewer or just a bit dressier. Or dress just a little dressier than what people in the company wear on a regular workday.

How can you find out ahead of time what people in that office or lab wear? Use your network. Ask people you know until you find someone who knows someone who works there—your neighbor's brother-in-law, perhaps, or the wife of a friend's graduate-school professor.

Or try this tactic: Wear what you think would be appropriate and drop by the office a few days before your job interview to pick up the annual report or company newsletter. (This is a good idea whether or not you feel the need to check out the dress code. Developing answers to typical job interview questions after digesting the information in these publications will definitely make you stand out as a candidate.) Be observant about the "dress code," and dress accordingly on the day of the interview. You and the interview-

ers will feel as if you "fit in."

The company Web site is another possible source of information on dress codes. Savvy organizations post information to attract new employees. They know that dress—which is often a reflection of the "culture" of the workplace—is of keen interest to potential hires. Again, the Web site offers information you will want to be familiar with anyway before your interview. So it's not as if you're making an extra trip to the site.

In your case, see whether you get a better reaction by wearing a very tailored pant suit with little jewelry, a tailored shirt, and comfortable, closed-toe shoes with a low heel.

Q: In your June column, you suggested using boldface and italic type to improve the visual appearance of a resume. But your information raises another question. What will happen if the company you send your resume to scans it into its electronic database? Won't the character-recognition scanning software inadequately recognize anything fancy, leading to word omissions and other formatting problems?

Alexandr Draganov
Stanford Telecom, Inc.

A: Good point! Many on-line career and job-finding sites may also have trouble if you e-mail a fancy resume. I recommend having two versions of your resume—one "scan-friendly" and the other made more visually attractive with boldface, underlines, bullets, and interesting type fonts.


Ask potential employers which kind of resume they prefer. Always take your graphically beautiful resume to the job interview. And make clear in any cover letter why you're sending two resumes. Fax the fancy resume if requested, or, to make an even stronger impression of quality, mail it on high-quality resume paper.

If you'd like help formatting an electronic resume, go to Resumix (<http://www.resumix.com/resume/resumeindex.html>). Then e-mail your resume to yourself or to a friend to see how it looks. Review it for any formatting

problem; revise as needed.

By the way, some job ads don't reveal the name of the hiring company. This avoids the sometimes hundreds of phone calls to the personnel office that even one ad can draw. But wouldn't you like to know who the company is before you submit an application? Is the company "family friendly"? Is it in an industry in which you have worked or for which you have useful skills? Here's a tip to help you identify the employer when only a P.O. Box is given. Call the post office in the town listed and ask, "What company is renting P.O. Box 3298?" If it's a company they must, by law, tell you. If it's an individual, they may not, by law, tell you.

Q: In the fall, I usually get the urge to go back to school. I guess, after more than 23 years of formal education, I got used to the excitement of opening new books and sharpening new pencils. But with a full-time job and a family, I just don't have time to enroll. How can I best continue to learn even though I'm not formally in school?

A: If you don't have time to take semester-long classes, ask your company to sponsor you at shorter professional courses, seminars, or conferences. Keep up with technical magazines and journals on your lunch hour, on planes and trains, in waiting rooms, and even in those precious evening hours. The World Wide Web can be a valuable information resource and one you can use to quickly target areas of specific interest. Try downloading sites and putting them in your reading file. For business information and market trends, include *The Wall Street Journal* and *Fast Company* (www.fastcompany.com), a monthly magazine. 

Lynne Waymon, a career-management consultant, welcomes questions of less than 100 words for use in this column (LWaymon@aol.com). State whether you want to remain anonymous. If you wish to receive responses from readers, include permission for us to print your e-mail address.