

# Attire tips for business success

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## Dear Readers,

I have a confession to make: My husband is fond of dressing down at work. To give you an idea, one day a pizza deliveryman who ran into him at the office door thought he was a homeless man begging for food, not a professional who worked inside. Granted it was a dark winter night and he was wearing a ratty parka, but still.

Now that he's being promoted to direct a research center, I wanted to get some dress-up tips for him. When I found a coach who warned, "Business casual can be an occupational hazard," I knew I was on the right track.

[Mercedes Alfaro](#), a former IBM trainer and manager who, three years ago, founded First Impression Management, a Boca Raton, Fla.-based image-consulting firm, offered lots of good tips. In addition to helping my husband and inspiring me, I hope they prove useful to you, and maybe even someone you love.

It's essential to be good at what you do, but it's even better to have others believe in your competence. That means being mindful of the first impression you make, and each impression after that. "What is your goal? Keep that in mind as you assess your dress and your body language," Alfaro says. "Are you walking through the door with confidence? Think about your posture, your smile, your handshake."

Dress one level higher than your clients, your employees, students and the dress code of a prospective employer.

Alfaro defines three levels of business casual: 1) executive, which is very close to traditional business attire; 2) standard, which means you lose the third piece (the jacket); and 3) basic, less expensive clothing but something above jeans. "They are always a no-no because they send the wrong message," she contends, favoring khaki instead.

Women: Remember your concern should be business, not fashion.

Alfaro has found that some women mix up their priorities and wear provocative outfits and open-toed shoes, both of which she considers out of place at work. Women looking to move up "should look the part and talk with a voice of authority," says Alfaro, whose clients include CPAs and attorneys. "I had one client, a CPA, who called for information after being passed over for a promotion. I had to strain to hear her."

Think of yourself as an interior designer remaking a room.

"There are so many different styles, and whatever you choose is a reflection of you, of who you are," Alfaro says.

If who you are is someone who wants to appear slimmer, there are several tricks of the trade. One is to dress in the same color, tip to toe. Alfaro is fond of a navy blue suit, blue stockings and blue shoes. For an accent, she may add a small broach or a scarf.

Avoid the common mistake of wearing baggy clothes. "Choose form-fitting outfits that draw the eye in the opposite direction," Alfaro advises. For example, if you are blessed with an enhanced bust line but want to minimize it, wear a darker color on top. If you have "a prominent tummy and derriere, choose a long jacket that flows smoothly over the body."

Then tell that pizza deliveryman to go away you didn't order any. In fact, you're on your way to the gym.

(For information about Alfaro's coaching seminars and services, check out her Web site, [www.fim-inc.com](http://www.fim-inc.com).)

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