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The death of “dress-down Friday”?

Could the recession spell the end of business casual?

Britain's workers are smartening up their act as they feel pressure to keep their jobs, says The Aziz Corporation.

Wearing a suit gives the impression of responsibility and the ability to ride through the storm. And, for many it might be a huge relief that they don't have to spend so much time choosing what to wear in the morning.

With the threat of redundancy, every day is a job interview for thousands of office workers. Last year, our survey¹ found that "almost half of employees would dress more smartly if their job was under threat". It seems that this is being borne out in the current downturn.

"Wearing a jacket, both for men and women, gives the impression that you are responsible, in control and downright good at your job. The padded structure of the shoulder-line gives you more presence and more authority as you square up to the opposition. It gives gravitas which the unstructured 'business casual' look just can't compete with" says **Debbie Gray**, Image Consultant at **The Aziz Corporation**.

"Many of my clients lost their identity when they lost their tie!" says Gray. "With it you get individuality and flair, it's more difficult to stand out from the crowd just in simple trousers and a shirt."

And for many, banishing business casual could be a blessing in disguise. "It's such a relief for many office workers that they won't have to worry so much about what to wear - especially women who find it particularly difficult to make the business casual dress-code work". Again, Gray has plenty of anecdotes on what some of her clients turned up wearing, thinking they were dressed appropriately for business casual. "I've seen the dress-down look be totally inappropriate for the level of responsibility held by the client. Some clients think that humour in the workplace is OK - even wearing dungarees and a bright, striped shirt in one case. In reality great for a weekend but wholly inappropriate for this guy's level of seniority in his finance company."

For most, the problem with business casual is blandness. One of Gray's clients was stuck with the blue shirt and chino look, which was out of line with the desired brand values of authority, confidence and creativity. After a session working with him, she helped him find a style that helped him stand out, and communicate the right values. The top-to-toe transformation covered everything from suit and shirt, to watch and briefcase, and the change got plenty of positive comments from clients and colleagues alike. "The comments were nice, but the most important thing that my client felt was his credibility with his peer group and with that came confidence "

So, just how important is your image to how you are perceived at work? Well, more important than we perhaps realise. Not only do we wear clothes to protect our modesty, keep us warm, and to look good, what we wear also affects our mood. You know the feeling: the morning that you choose to wear the extra special suit with accessories that suit your colouring, and for ladies (and maybe men!), take more trouble over your makeup means you feel better about yourself inside. And with that

comes extra self esteem, and with that confidence in the ability to do your job and for those around you to believe you can do it too.

And belief that we can do our jobs is all too important in the current climate. Nowhere is that belief more needed than in The City. So, City boys and girls, time to bring back the jacket and show us you mean business!

Notes to Editors

The Aziz Corporation

The Aziz Corporation is the UK's leading independent executive communications consultancy. Its mission is to add value to businesses by ensuring their people are effective communicators. Consultancy services offered by the Aziz Corporation include presentation skills, media training, crisis management, image consultancy and voice development.