

# Popular Threads on Solosez

## Law Office Dress Codes

Another non-legal question to divert our attention from the fact that it is only Wednesday...

For those of you who currently work in firms (or at one time worked in firms), is (was) courtroom attire required at all times? When I was with a small/mid-sized firm in Florida, it was, and I'm wondering if someone could explain the thinking to me. I've seen a lot of discussion regarding image, and I see the value in looking professional with clients, but I'm not sure that professional means 3-piece suit, tie, suspenders, etc. (i.e., "the works").

Don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating that all law firms allow shorts and Birkenstocks, but my preference would be to wear jeans and a button-down dress shirt, with a "fancy" suit hanging on the bank to my door that I could slip on for an un-scheduled client meeting to court appearance. Any thoughts/policies?

John Yoak, Irvine, California

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In a prior life (at Biglaw) we were permitted to wear anything short of jeans (khakis & a polo were the common items), with an "emergency suit & tie hanging on the back of your door."

Comment complaints (mostly from the most senior partners) were that we all look like a bunch of "bus drivers" and were probably overpaid!

Now I work in an office with 60 people and the office is business casual (which is basically everything except jeans). However, I'm the only attorney here. I always wear a shirt & tie and have a suit jacket or sport-coat handy. When asked why am I dressed up if I'm not meeting clients--I always respond (to coworkers) "you're my client."

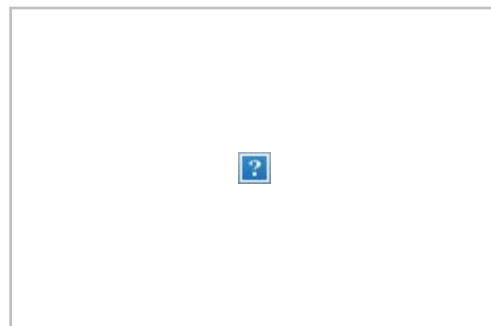
Having dressed down for years, I can tell you that people do treat you differently based on your attire.

BTW, there's a funny episode of Larry David's HBO show CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM where he harasses his lawyer for "not working on his case" because he's wearing jeans & a polo at lunch. Larry says, no wonder you aren't returning my calls....you're not working again today...why else would my \$500/hr lawyer be hanging out at the deli in jeans. Funny stuff....but probably on the mark for a lot of people.

Just my 2 cents...

Patrick C. Haynes, Jr., licensed in NJ, PA, CT & DC

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## Shorts and Birkenstocks

Daniel X. Nguyen

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In a small firm in Washington DC, the code is casual - even jeans with polo shirts. In winter, sweaters without collared shirts are acceptable.

I have attended depositions where attorneys from large firms showed up in jeans, though that is the exception. I follow the rule that dressy casual is acceptable for depositions.

I have seen other counsel, who I respect, in the clerk's office in jeans.

My rule is to dress in a manner to best serve my clients' interests. If I am deposing an opposing party or opposing party's witnesses, I dress in jacket and tie. The purpose is to impress upon the other party that my client has a 'real' attorney. If I am going to a local government agency, I wear jacket and tie.

When first meeting a prospective client, I wear jacket and tie.

Richard P. Schmitt, Washington, D.C.

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If it is your firm, you set policies in light of personnel and image you want to project. There exist fifty page sections in manuals about the "rules" in some places. If it is not your law firm, then you defer to the decision makers.

Rather than police someone's attire, I tell staff that I want them to appear professional, and if I think it is not I may say something or send them home. My view is that I want clients to know this is a law office.

I wear a suit every day. However, the jacket is usually outside in my car. This is, if anything, a bit more formal than common practice locally.

The established problem with "business casual" policies is policing it. I despise wasting time being the "fashion police" and therefore have a simple approach.

If it is your firm, you set it up in light of the approach you think is prudent with your clientele. If you only "meet" through email, no one knows what you wear. If you work in a market where "everyone" wears a full suit, and you want to conform, do so.

There are many practitioners here that are very casual unless actually going to court. My approach differs by personal choice. It's your firm, your choice. If not, plead your case for whatever you want but defer to the decision maker.

Darrell G. Stewart, San Antonio, Texas

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When I worked for the largest law firm in the state, the general rule was

polos and khakis. Suits for court and select corporate clients (usually the clients who showed up in suits themselves). With regard to other attorneys I have observed, it seems to relate to one of three things: 1) Level of personal confidence 2) Respect for the comfort level of others (clients or counsel) 3) Personal comfort level. I think some attorneys don't feel like they can justify their fees unless they are dressed up. Some of the best dressers I've seen have been absolutely the worst attorneys. They haven't the expertise, temperament, or personality for practicing law and appear to compensate by dressing like an attorney. Respect for the comfort level of others is always a good thing. Some clients find suits intimidating, others find suits reassuring. Personally, I prefer wearing shorts or jeans and flip flops with an expensive looking polo shirt. I will gladly dress to the comfort level of others if I know or anticipate their sensitivity. Clothes don't add or detract from my level of confidence. I could argue a case buck naked, unless I was the only one in the court room without clothes.

D.A. "Duke" Drouillard, Nebraska

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My experience with staff of local government agencies is that they hate dealing with lawyers, and that the less that I come across as a lawyer the better. With exceptions, I dress to match them.

Paul Hogan

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I went through this about a year ago for our firm. We have a total of 20 employees and "be professional" just didnt cut it anymore. Since I plagiarized this from folks on the list, I guess I better share it!

**APPEARANCE AND DRESS CODE** This is a professional office. Neatness and cleanliness are required at all times. All employees should dress fashionably and in good taste, without appearing outlandish, provocative, or unprofessional. The following specific standards must be maintained by all employees. Failure to meet these standards may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment. You must report to work clean, neat, and well-groomed, devoid of body odor. Heavy scented colognes, perfumes, or powders should be avoided. Office attire is, at a minimum, business casual - slacks and a button down shirt for the men. This means no jeans, no sleeveless tops, and no flip flops. Shoes should be worn if clients are or may be in the office. Clothing like sweats and t shirts are never appropriate. The following are guidelines on what is not permitted:

- Dirty or ragged clothes
- Very short dresses and skirts
- Clothes that reveal any midriff skin
- See-through clothing
- Skin-tight clothing
- Huge pants
- Jeans (except for Fridays)
- Faded or frayed jeans
- Pajama bottoms
- Sweats

- Shorts
- Visible underwear of any kind
- Low-cut upper clothing
- Visible tattoos
- Body, facial or tongue jewelry
- T Shirts Tank tops
- “Spaghetti strap” tops
- Sleeveless tops
- Flip flops
- Athletic (sports) shoes
- House slippers
- Open toed sandals/shoes for men

While Fridays are “dress down” or casual dress days, the above described clothing is not permitted. As noted above, clean, non-faded, non-huge, or non-frayed jeans are acceptable on Fridays, unless you are going to interact with one our the firm’s clients, then dress appropriate for the occasion using these guidelines.

Employees who are not in compliance with this policy may be sent home and directed to return in compliance. Such employees will not be compensated for the time away from work. Repeat offenses may be cause for termination.

If there are questions as to what constitutes proper attire for your position, please consult your supervisor, but if you have to ask, you probably know the answer.

Randy Birch, Salt Lake City, Utah

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You make no mention of a requirement for socks?

Robert W. "Robby" Hughes, Jr., Stone Mountain, Georgia

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In California wearing socks is dressing up.

John Davidson

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