

BUSINESS ATTIRE:

Sense and Sensibility



It's not only recent graduates who feel baffled when it comes to what to wear, both to work and to a first interview. Depending on the industry, area and age group, what's deemed acceptable can vary greatly. "It's our appearances and mannerisms people look at, even before we open our mouths," says Charlene Parsons, academic chair of the fashion department at the Art Institute of Miami. "Though your style of clothes may vary depending on your profession, presenting yourself in the best way possible is important, even if your company is strictly 'casual Fridays' all week long."

According to a study conducted by California State University, Sacramento, nearly two-thirds of Americans have felt inappropriately dressed at a business function and

more than two-thirds are uncertain about the differences among business attire, business casual and casual dress in the workplace.

"'Business casual' is a term that needs to be better defined," Dennis Tootelian, a marketing professor at Cal State, says. "People don't know what it is. For men, business casual could mean anything from a sports

coat with or without a tie to cotton trousers with a polo shirt and loafers. For women, business attire already offers them a choice of pant and skirt suits and dresses—the notion of business casual may be more subtle, with factors such as pattern, color, texture and material playing a role.”

“Whether you wear jeans or a suit to work, the best [advice I can give] is to buy the best you can afford,” Parsons says. “Well-made clothes fit better, look better and last for years. Take a cue from Europeans—they buy fewer pieces, but buy better ones and become experts at mixing and matching.”

Suit Up

“Pantsuits have become a lifesaver for those in corporate and non-corporate work environments,” says Kathleen Cloussy, fashion design faculty member at the Art Institute in Fort Lauderdale.

“When buying a suit, always go for wool—always! There is a reason why most men’s suits are made from wool—it outper-

forms any other fiber. For warmer climates, try tropical weight wool. It breathes and easily adapts to air conditioning or the heat of the city streets.”

Today, there is no rule of thumb to ensure you’ve dressed for success on an interview. The experts at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising (FIDM), however, offer the following helpful hints and sensible tips that can land you in the safety zone.

Dress rehearsal: Do not wait until the last minute to choose an outfit. Have a friend or family member help you decide what looks best several days before the interview.

Custom-tailor to impress: Research the company you are interviewing with so you know what is appropriate to wear. For example, if it’s an eclectic alternative clothing store, you can go for a funky ensemble.

Comfort quotient: Make sure your clothing is not so tight or loose that it makes you uncomfortable. It is distracting to constantly adjust your clothes during an interview.

Details count: Make sure your hands are clean and manicured. This goes for feet as well if you are wearing open-toed shoes.

Tame the mane: Style your hair so that it’s neat and off your face.

Scents sense: Avoid wearing perfume or fragrance to the interview. You never know who might be allergic to your signature scent.

Pearly whites: Brush your teeth, of course. Avoid potentially embarrassing foods like spinach right before the interview and double check your teeth before walking in. Avoid chewing gum, mints and candy during the interview.

No bag ladies: Do not carry an oversized handbag, backpack, duffel or tote bag to the interview. Carry a small purse and/or a portfolio case for your résumé and samples.

For more fashion tips, visit www.artinstitutes.org and www.fidm.com. ❖

DECA MEANS BUSINESS

Will you be competing at ICDC? Check out these do and don't photos for tips on what to wear.

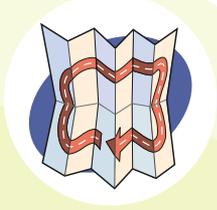
When in doubt, dress conservatively. You want the judges to take you seriously. That means no strappy sandals or short skirts for girls, for instance. The conservative rule of thumb for skirts is that the hem should be no more than two inches above your knee. Guys have it easier—it’s hard to go wrong with a DECA blazer, tie, button-down shirt and slacks. Just don’t wear a joke tie and, if you want to look super-businesslike, stick with a white or blue shirt. Save the fun colors and flashy fabrics for the ICDC dance. Formalwear is optional for the Awards Session.

Do's



Don't's





The Perfect

PARTNER

DECA & Businesses

By Hunt Hawkins

I am often asked by my peers, “Why should a business associate itself with DECA?” The answer, of course, is easy. Partnering with DECA allows businesses to make contact with some of the most talented high school, junior college and university students in the classroom. DECA students are provided with many opportunities to develop their problem-solving, teamwork and, most importantly, leadership skills. Stein Mart’s partnership with DECA allows us to be a part of these students’ development and growth and to give back to our community. DECA also plays a part in the development of the companies that support them.

For Stein Mart, Inc., DECA chapter advisors and students provide mystery shopper services to every one of our stores on a monthly basis. Their evaluations of our environment, sales and service standards help us to ensure that the service levels received by our customers will exceed that of our competitors.

The DECA Advantage

Many DECA members also work in our stores, either as part of their co-op experience or because they are seeking to begin a career in retail. While little experience is required for entry-level associates, we find that DECA members come to us with an excellent foundation of retail skills learned in the classroom and as part of their co-curricular activities. This allows them to progress more rapidly than their peers and can mean a long-term career. In fact, our current vice president of marketing,

advertising and sales promotion was a DECA member in high school!

Our store managers actively look for DECA membership on applications and résumés because they know that a DECA background gives the applicant a head start over those applicants who have never been a part of the organization. As part of their experience with Stein Mart, students will participate in our computer-based orientation, sales and service, and cashiering programs and, depending on their growth, may participate in one or more of our Individual Development Plans or Leadership Development Programs. The student will also get the opportunity to network with senior executives.

Long term, the experience gained during a co-op—along with meeting and networking with senior executives—provides the DECA member with insight into the operation of a large corporation and with skills he or she will use for a lifetime. Stein Mart benefits by playing a role in the development of the student—one who may continue a career with the company. Even for those who do not choose that route, however, we gain from being a part of the development of a valued member of the community in which we operate.

Stein Mart sees our association with DECA as a unique and most valuable partnership—a partnership we would not want to be without! ❖

Hunt Hawkins is senior vice president of human resources at Stein Mart, Inc., and is currently serving as chair of DECA’s National Advisory Board.

Make DECA's Business Partnerships Work for You

By **Kassie Jo Krueger**

Membership in DECA and Delta Epsilon Chi has many perks that you may not even realize. Did you know that many DECA corporate supporters offer special job opportunities for DECA and Delta Epsilon Chi members? That's right, just by being a member you have an edge on competition in the job market.

That edge worked for me! For more than a year now, I've worked for Finish Line, a corporate supporter and National Advisory Board member of DECA. Because the company knows DECA and Delta Epsilon Chi members are well-educated and trained to be successful in the business world, they offer members special part-time, full-time and internship positions. I've had the best experience here; Finish Line is a company that cares about their employees and offers many opportunities for advancement. I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in a fun, friendly and professional work environment.

There are plenty of ways you can find out more about Finish Line and other DECA corporate supporters. One easy method is to check out the corporate exhibits at both the high school and college International Career Development Conferences, the high school regional conferences and the Delta Epsilon Chi Collegiate Leadership Academies. At each of these events you have the chance to talk to company representatives and find out more about their benefits and advancement opportunities. You can also find a listing of all DECA corporate supporters on our Web site by visiting the Business Partnerships section of www.deca.org. ♦

Kassie Jo Krueger is the 2003–2004 Central Region vice president for Delta Epsilon Chi.

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