



Dressing for Success

“Your personal appearance can give you the job you want.” Read how in the Going Beyond folder for Chapter 8 or scan the QR Code in the book.

Periodically we are asked to cite the research on the way teachers dress and its effect on student achievement.

Although research suggests that teachers who dress professionally produce higher scores in their classes, detractors argue that the research dates back to 1984, and is therefore no longer relevant. “Dressing for success,” they say, “is old school.”

In our experience, however, those people who belittle professional dress do so out of self-interest. They use what they consider “dated research” as an excuse to do what they want, not what the students want.

Common sense tells us that we command greater respect when we dress professionally *wherever* we go. People who dress for success are more likely to get positive results—whether it’s being seated at a “good table” in a restaurant, or inspiring students to achieve excellent test scores in a classroom.

Just as appropriate manners are widely accepted as preferable to rudeness, dressing professionally should be considered the norm among teachers. In fact, we state in Chapter 9 that it is always appropriate to say “Please,” “Thank you,” “You’re welcome,” and to smile. We have never received a question asking us for the research on using these expressions of courtesy. Isn’t it obvious that professional dress and appropriate manners are the same?

A ***Teacher Magazine*** story reports on a first-year teacher who comes to school in pigtails, flip-flops and expects school to be *fun*. She believes that “If I am cool, then they will be cool.” She said she wore the same clothes as her students and listened to their music. She wanted to be liked. As she reflected back on her first year, she wondered why the parents and the other teachers did not accept her. As for the students, she said nothing about whether they learned anything in her classroom.

People do not learn because they like you. They learn because they respect you.

Remember, no matter where you go in your community, you are known as a teacher. If you teach in California and in Silicon Valley, where the immigrant population is tipped toward Latinos and Asians, they value and respect teachers. That’s their culture. The hopes and dreams for their children are in your hands. They want and expect their children to succeed. **They even dress their children to come to school to succeed. They know where they want their children to be—and go.**

How would they view and respect you if they came to a parent-teacher meeting and you greeted them wearing a T-shirt and a pair of flip-flops?

You Dress Where You Want to Be

Rebecca Morgan, a high school teacher, doubted her teaching ability. “I am a competent person, yet my students were not taking me seriously. Even the other teachers viewed me as kind of ‘flaky.’”

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After gazing into her soul, and her mirror, Rebecca decided that her baggy pants and T-shirts were to blame. She needed a makeover.

So Rebecca enlisted the help of her realtor friend, Maria. She picked a good resource, because most real estate agents know that it pays to dress for their clients—and potential clients.

Rebecca and Maria spent an afternoon at an outlet mall selecting a set of clothes. She emerged with a sophisticated new look—and something more.

“Left alone in the dressing rooms, I saw myself for the very first time as a person who could do anything she wanted to do,” says Rebecca. **“If I had had \$1,000 of therapy, I wouldn’t have felt anywhere near as good. It was like a religious experience.**”

“A professional woman should dress at least two steps above her current position,” she says. “You do not dress where you are; you dress where you want to be.”

Reality of Dress

It is hard to overcome a poor first impression, regardless of skill or expertise. The first impression you make will be as a result of how you dress. You are a professional—in a career that molds the future and saves lives. **Your professional credibility and your potential performance as a teacher will all be based on a first meeting with colleagues, administrators, parents, and children.**

There is a place for casual attire—when it is time to relax and have fun. School is a place of work and learning. Set that expectation with appropriate attire and you will find that students will measure up to the atmosphere you create. They will mirror your professionalism with their attitudes, habits, and behavior. Some of your students may even start dressing for success.