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**The New Business Casual**

by Michael C. Sherrin  
 EDGE Style Contributor  
 Tuesday Oct 11, 2005

To work, I wore a shirt that says "Mind if I touch your butt?" and got laughs. Now not every job environment allows this, but the line for business casual has never been blurrier. What once was a sea of suits and ties now mixes colored corduroys with graphics tees. Why iron your shirt when your jeans sport more holes than a Jerry Bruckheimer movie. The rules for the work place have changed.

When I asked the dress code at my previous workplace, they said casual. I arrived my first day in khakis and a button-down shirt with a tie in my bag, just in case. For the rest of the day, workers snickered as if partaking in a little prank on the new guy. How does one differentiate between the long defined definitions of business casual and the New Business Casual?

Richard Florida explains in his book, "Rise of the Creative Class," that workers see a liberal dress code as not only a perk in the workplace, but a boon for creativity. Thus more workplaces allow open collars and jeans and on more than just Friday. While this makes going out for drinks after work less stressful, sometimes the rules of what's appropriate and what's not get confusing. Should I leave one or two buttons undone? Do I have to wear a belt? Is a loose tie too much? What about a sport coat with jeans? Can my jeans have a tear? Two tears? A small tear? Black shoes or sneakers? Or Aldo?

As you can see, either the new business casual is already confusing or I just made it so.

**FIRST STRIKE**

The best place to start is before the interview. Contact the office beforehand and ask the receptionist specific questions about the dress code. If they say it's casual, ask if that means khakis or jeans. If they say jeans are okay, ask about shirts. Are they tucked in? If there's time, try to visit your potential workplace and see how people dress. For the interview, dress up only slightly. Unless you're working for a video game magazine, I'd advise khakis as the lowest you go. If you dress too far from the norm, your potential employer might think you won't fit in. But still dress to impress. Prove, if something serious comes along, you've got the fashion chops to wow.

**MAKING CASUAL WORK**

They're difficult to find, but I recommend every man own a "formal jean." This formal jean needs to be blue: not dark navy, dirty brown or the near white shades every pair of jeans comes in now, but as close to blue as possible. This maximizes your matchability. Find a slim boot cut so as to flatter your figure while keeping yourself loose and comfortable. Certainly keep the jeans interesting. Find a nice flare or a stylish fade but avoid tears and wears. Though the torn jeans cost more, the together jeans look like a better investment.

The right formal jean matches button down shirts, polos, sport jackets and loose t-shirts. When compared to the 'Swiss cheese' denim of today, your formal jeans look almost elegant. However subtle, they look like you took time and care into your outfit (this is the workplace, not a Thursday night gay club).

If your workplace is anything like mine, then you can never predict the temperature. This makes layering extra important and nothing screams cool more than nice jeans with a sport jacket. Choose a button-down or a graphic tee, depending on your officemates' tendencies and depending on weather forecasts for your cubicle.



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Another necessity – an edgy black belt. By edgy, I mean a formal black belt with some subtle yet interesting features as in a textured strap or unique buckle. The nicer you're belt, the better you can justify tucking in your shirt.

Shoes have never been more fun as the sneaker and dress shoe continuously merge. Find one (or more) pair of shoes with a dressy look but sneaky, rubber soles. Black works best to create the illusion of formal footwear.

Follow these tips and you're likely to never go wrong in the workplace again. At least not in the dressing department.

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