



Individual Solutions

Policies and Procedures



Taking the Awkwardness Out of Addressing an Employee Who Dresses Inappropriately

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Not many of us have tried to wear gold shoes to work. But that was the intention of Seattle Seahawks superstar running back [Marshawn Lynch](#) for his team's much anticipated 2015 NFC championship game.

That is until Lynch's employer reminded him that gold shoes would be a violation of the NFL's dress code policy, and he wouldn't be permitted to play if he wore them.

With company cultures becoming more relaxed, many employees are trading in ties and slacks for jeans and t-shirts (or in Lynch's case, gold shoes).

But even in 2015, dressing right is as important as ever. When it comes to first impressions, a person will form an opinion of the other person within the first 500 milliseconds of meeting, according to a [Princeton University study](#) in 2006. Therefore, it's important for your employees to dress appropriately for your business. You don't want clients to get the wrong impression about your company.

Get a policy in place

How was the NFL able to get Lynch to abide so easily? Simple – they had a designated dress code policy. Your business should be no different.

Adding a dress code policy to your [employee handbook](#) will not only make it easier to address employees who may not be following the policy, but it also gives them a better understanding of what is or isn't acceptable attire for the workplace. It also helps managers maintain a consistent approach to the issue, which will reduce any negative repercussions or issues going forward.

When creating the policy, you want to ensure it's consistent with your [company's](#)

[culture](#) and what your clients expect. If you aren't sure what your clients expect, don't be afraid to talk to them about their dress code before going into a meeting.

While some company policies get specific about the length of shorts, dresses and other attire, you don't want it to reach the point where you're constantly roaming your office with a ruler. This can damage your relationship with your employees.

Aside from attire, consider including policies regarding hygiene, grooming, tattoos and piercings. These are all important to consider when it comes creating a policy that best suits your company and clients.

More than anything, you want to make sure everyone gets treated the same. It's essential no one gets singled out or receives special treatment.

Pull them aside

When confronting employees who have violated your policy, you don't necessarily have to [schedule a formal meeting](#).

Approach them and casually ask if you can have a minute of their time in your office or where you typically hold a meeting.

In a positive tone, remind them that while you encourage individual expression, they may be in violation of your company's dress code. If you don't have a policy in place, it's important to remind employees that they are a representative of the company, and they should convey a professional appearance that is consistent and in line with the field in which they work.

This could be a sensitive issue for some. Try your best not to hurt their feelings. If gone about incorrectly, you could [offend your employees](#). This could cause them to ignore your request and test your patience. During the meeting, remind your employees of their recent contributions and value to the team. This can be a good way to lighten the mood and show them that you don't want them to leave.

Consider using same-gender manager

Depending on the violation and your comfort level, you could consider having another manager of the same gender confront the employee in question. Although this is an option, it's typically best handled yourself or your human resources representative. Gender shouldn't matter under general conflicts.

Avoid involving another employee

Employees in violation should be addressed by their direct supervisor, not another employee or coworker.

While it may seem easier to use someone they're more comfortable with, you put your other employees at risk by making them the "clothing police". This could put someone in an uncomfortable situation. You want to strive to make the matter strictly between the employees and their supervisors or human resources leader.

Casual days

If your employees find your expected attire cumbersome, then it may be best to offer an occasional casual day to give them an opportunity to be more relaxed.

According to a [2015 CareerBuilder study](#), 15 percent of workers surveyed chose

“being able to wear jeans,” when asked which perks would make their workplace more satisfying.

Casual days can also be an inviting benefit for [potential candidates](#) who make company culture a top priority.

Consider uniforms or clothing discounts

If your employees do a lot of face-to-face interaction with clients, then company-standard uniforms may be worth considering.

If your employees can't afford uniforms, you could consider offering company-approved clothing at a discounted rate or negotiate a company-wide discount through a specific retailer.

When it's necessary to terminate someone

If employees continue to break your dress code after you've addressed the problem several times, then it may be best to part ways. But this should only happen under the most extreme circumstances.

Before you terminate an employee, talk to your HR representative or legal counsel to ensure you are not [putting your business at risk](#).

Are HR issues like these slowing down your business? Then you need to download the [7 Most Frequent HR Mistakes and How to Avoid Them](#). This free, comprehensive guide can help you avoid some of the pitfalls that are common in running a business.



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Eric has more than 20 years of experience in human resources. Working in the technology and publishing industries, Eric provided support in recruiting, training, performance management, career development, employee relations, safety, and compliance issues. Currently Eric is a human resources specialist at Insperity supporting clients with 50 – 100 employees, and frequently contributes articles to local Boston media outlets on current HR trends and topics.

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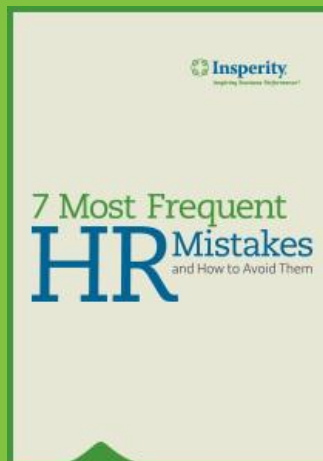
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