

Mervyn's Career Casual Survey

Summary Report Of Key Research Findings

Introduction

Fleishman-Hillard, one of the world's leading public relations firms, retained California State University, Sacramento, professor Dennis H. Tootelian, Ph.D., to conduct a survey for one of its clients to assess peoples' perceptions of appropriate dress for the office workplace and the extent to which they had difficulties in understanding the distinctions between various terms used to define dress codes. Specific issues addressed in the survey included peoples' perceptions of:

- What changes in dress attire for the workplace have occurred over the last ten years?
- What is the expected dress attire for the office workplace, and how difficult is it to understand the current dress code?
- How difficult it is to distinguish between "business attire," "business casual," and "casual"?
- Whether they felt they were inappropriately dressed in business or social situations?

Methodology

A telephone survey was conducted in April 2002 in sixteen geographic markets within which Mervyn's operates department stores. A total of 500 interviews were completed. Sample sizes were based in proportion to the number of stores located in each of these markets. In the larger geographic areas with respect to sample sizes, two cities were included in the study. The geographic areas, cities and sample sizes were:

• Arizona (Phoenix and Tucson):	28
• Bay Area of California (Hayward and San Jose):	38
• Central Valley of California (Fresno and Sacramento):	81
• Southern California (Anaheim and San Diego):	108
• Colorado (Colorado Springs):	21
• Idaho (Boise):	2
• Louisiana (Baton Rouge):	11
• Michigan (Ann Arbor and Lansing):	28
• Minnesota (Minneapolis):	17
• New Mexico (Albuquerque):	6
• Nevada (Reno and Sparks):	11
• Oklahoma (Tulsa):	6

• Oregon (Portland):	13
• Texas (Dallas and El Paso):	88
• Utah (Salt Lake City):	15
• Washington (Seattle):	27

Caveats

The results of any research should be used with caution and at the reader’s own discretion. Every study, no matter how well constructed, contains the possibility of some degree of error. Accordingly, the reader assumes sole responsibility for the use of this information.

Findings Of The Survey

The results of the survey are presented in three sections: Respondent Characteristics, Dress Attire for the Workplace and Difficulties in Knowing Proper Dress Attire. Data, broken out by gender and age, are presented in the tables included at the end of this summary report.

Respondent Characteristics

Respondent characteristics are presented in Table One. The geographic distribution is as described in the Methodology. Over half of the respondents (55.2%) were female. People in all age groups are likely to find themselves in business and/or social situations where appropriate dress attire is important. Recognizing this, all age groups were reasonably well represented. The single largest group (40.6%) was between the ages of 40 and 64, and another 20.4% were 25 to 39. Accordingly, 61.2% of the respondents were between the ages of 25 and 64. Of the other respondents, 16.6% were under 25, and 22.4% were 65 or older.

Dress Attire in the Workplace

Presented in Table Two are the findings pertaining to respondent perceptions of how dress attire has changed.

Changes in the Past Ten Years. As shown, the vast majority of respondents (91.4%) believed that dress attire in the workplace has changed in the past ten years, and 88.8% felt that attire has become less formal. Only 2.6% thought that the dress codes have become more formal.

Some differences in responses were evident based on gender and age. More women than men felt that dress attire has become less formal in the workplace. Furthermore, more respondents who were under 40 years of age felt that the dress codes have not changed in the last ten years. Those in the older age groups were more likely to feel that dress attire has become less formal. These latter differences could be a function of those in younger age groups not being in the workforce for as long a period of time to recognize what changes have occurred.

Current Dress Codes. Most respondents (56.8%) thought that traditional business attire (e.g., business suit and tie for men, business suit or dress and pantyhose for women) is the

current dress code for office workplaces. However, significant differences in these responses were observed based on gender and age.

Slightly over half of the women (51.3%) did not believe this was the current dress code, while 66.7% of the men felt it was. Thus, men tended to believe that traditional business attire is still called for, while women tended to feel that this is not the case.

With respect to age, 75.9% of those under 25, and 61.4% between 25 and 39 believed traditional attire is the current dress code. The majority of those 40 to 64 did not share this perspective. These findings could be the result of differing perspectives of what “business attire” means in terms of formality of dress.

In terms of what is proper attire where respondents work, the single largest group 31.4% indicated it was business casual, and another 23.2% thought it was casual. Relatively few (16.4%) indicated the dress code was business attire, and even fewer (9.2%) stated that there was no dress code.

Some differences in responses were evident based on gender and age. More men than women thought that the dress attire where they worked was business attire (52.7% versus 48.7%) or that nothing was specified (11.2% versus 7.6%). With respect to age, substantially more people under 25 (42.2%) and 25 to 39 (44.1%) indicated that proper dress attire where they worked was business casual than did those in older age groups.

Difficulties in Knowing Proper Dress Attire

Respondent perceptions of the difficulties in distinguishing between dress codes and with understanding appropriate dress attire are presented in Table Three.

Difficulties in Distinguishing Appropriate Dress Attire. Only 20.9% of the respondents felt it is easier to know what is acceptable attire for the office. The great majority (79.1%) thought it is no easier or is harder to know what is acceptable dress attire in the office workplace than it was ten years ago.

Some differences were found based on gender and age. Nearly a third of all women (31.7%) felt it is harder to know what is proper dress attire. In terms of age, respondents 40 to 64 (50.7%) were more likely to believe it is harder to know what is acceptable dress attire than were any of the other age groups. Those under 25 thought it is easier to know than it was ten years ago, but that probably is a function of their not being in the workplace for as long a period of time.

Difficulties in Distinguishing Between Dress Codes. Nearly half of the respondents (47.4%) thought it is very or somewhat difficult to distinguish between “business attire,” “business casual,” and “casual.” Only 31.8% considered it not very or not at all difficult to do so, and another 20.8% were uncertain. Therefore, 68.2% of the respondents were either uncertain or considered it difficult to make the distinctions.

There were relatively few differences between women and men in their perceptions of making these distinctions. However, the majority of respondents who were under 25 (51.8%) or between 40 to 64 (50.7%) years of age considered it very or somewhat difficult to differentiate between these dress codes.

In terms of deciding what to wear in a “business casual” situation, nearly half (46.6%) considered it very or somewhat difficult to decide what is proper. Only 31.4% thought it

was not very or not at all difficult to do so, and another 22.0% were uncertain. Therefore, 68.6% of the respondents were either uncertain or considered it difficult to know what to wear in a “business casual” situation.

More women than men thought this decision was difficult to make (47.5% versus 45.5%). More respondents who were 25 to 39 (50.0%) or 40 to 64 (48.2%) considered it difficult to make a decision as to what to wear in a “business casual” situation.

Being Inappropriately Dressed. The great majority of respondents (62.4%) indicated that they felt they were inappropriately dressed at a business or social function. More men than women (64.4% versus 60.7%) said they felt this way. Furthermore, more people under 40 thought they were inappropriately dressed than did people 40 or older.

Conclusions

Based on these results, a number of conclusions appear to be warranted. They are:

- The overwhelming majority of respondents believed that dress attire in the workplace has become less formal over the past ten years. Virtually nobody believed the dress codes have become more formal. Only one in seven respondents indicated that “business attire” was the proper attire for where they work. Well over half of the respondents indicated that something more casual is appropriate.
- Most women thought the current dress code for the office workplace has moved to a category that is something less formal than “business attire.” Only about one in seven women indicated that “business attire” is the proper attire for where they work.
- There appears to be considerable confusion as to what “business attire” means. While slightly over half of the respondents thought “business attire” was the dress code for office work, this view was held primarily by those under 40. People in this age category may have different perspectives of what constitutes “business attire,” especially given that dress attire has become less formal since most of them have entered the workplace.
- About four of five respondents did not think it is easier to know what is an acceptable dress code for the office workplace since the movement to more casual apparel has become the norm. Furthermore, more than one in four thought it is more difficult to know what to wear. These views were held by slightly more men than women, and significantly more by those under 40 than those 40 to 64 years of age.
- Great confusion appears to exist in distinguishing between “business attire,” “business casual,” and “casual.” More than two of three respondents either were uncertain or considered it difficult to make the distinctions, and nearly half considered it somewhat or very difficult. Only about one in nine respondents believed it was not at all difficult to know the differences. While there were no major differences in responses between women and men, those who are 40 to 64 appeared to have more difficulty than did those in younger age categories.
- Great confusion also appears to exist when trying to decide what to wear in a “business casual” situation. More than two of three respondents either were uncertain or considered it difficult to know what to wear in this situation, and nearly half considered it somewhat or very difficult to make that decision. Only about one in

eight respondents thought it is not at all difficult to know what to wear. While there were no major differences in responses between women and men, those who are 25 to 64 appeared to have more difficulty than did those under 25 years of age.

- Nearly two of three respondents indicated they have felt inappropriately dressed in a business or social situation. Slightly more men than women expressed this feeling, and considerably more people under 40 felt this way.

Overall, while most respondents feel that proper dress attire in the workplace has become less formal, there is considerable confusion as to just what less formal means. The move to a less formal dress code has not made it easier for most people to know what to wear, and relatively few feel comfortable in distinguishing between “business attire,” “business casual,” and “casual.” Possibly as a result, about two in three people have felt they were inappropriately dressed in a business or social situation.

Table One
Respondent Characteristics

	Percent	Number
Geographic area		
	Percent	Number
Arizona	5.6%	28
California Bay Area	7.6%	38
California Central Valley	16.2%	81
Southern California	21.6%	108
Colorado	4.2%	21
Idaho	0.4%	2
Louisiana	2.2%	11
Michigan	5.6%	28
Minnesota	3.4%	17
New Mexico	1.2%	6
Nevada	2.2%	11
Oklahoma	1.2%	6
Oregon	2.6%	13
Texas	17.6%	88
Utah	3.0%	15
Washington	5.4%	27
Total	100.0%	500

	Percent	Number
Gender		
	Percent	Number
Female	55.2%	276
Male	44.8%	224
Total	100.0%	500

	Percent	Number
Age		
	Percent	Number
Under 25	16.6%	83
25 to 39	20.4%	102
40 to 64	40.6%	203
65 or older	22.4%	112
Total	100.0%	500

Table Two
Dress Attire In The Workplace

By Gender

How has dress attire changed in past ten years

	Total	Women	Men
More formal	2.6%	3.3%	1.8%
Less formal	88.8%	90.9%	86.2%
Remained the same	8.6%	5.8%	12.1%
Total	500	276	224

Is traditional business attire the current office dress code

	Total	Women	Men
Yes	56.8%	48.7%	66.7%
No	43.2%	51.3%	33.3%
Total	491	269	222

Proper attire for where respondent works

	Total	Women	Men
Business attire	16.4%	14.9%	18.3%
Business casual	31.4%	31.5%	31.3%
Casual	23.2%	23.6%	22.8%
Nothing is specified	9.2%	7.6%	11.2%
Not currently working	19.8%	22.5%	16.5%
Total	500	276	224

By Age

How has dress attire changed in past ten years

	Total	Under 25	25 to 39	40 to 64	65 or older
More formal	2.6%	8.4%	3.9%	1.0%	0.0%
Less formal	88.8%	77.1%	83.3%	93.6%	93.8%
Remained the same	8.6%	14.5%	12.7%	5.4%	6.3%
Total	500	83	102	203	112

Is traditional business attire the current office dress code

	Total	Under 25	25 to 39	40 to 64	65 or older
Yes	56.8%	75.9%	61.4%	48.7%	52.7%
No	43.2%	24.1%	38.6%	51.3%	47.3%
Total	491	83	101	197	110

Proper attire for where respondent works

	Total	Under 25	25 to 39	40 to 64	65 or older
Business attire	16.4%	13.3%	24.5%	16.7%	10.7%
Business casual	31.4%	42.2%	44.1%	30.5%	13.4%
Casual	23.2%	26.5%	20.6%	31.5%	8.0%
Nothing is specified	9.2%	7.2%	7.8%	10.3%	9.8%
Not currently working	19.8%	10.8%	2.9%	10.8%	58.0%
Total	500	83	102	203	112

Table Three
Difficulties In Knowing Proper Dress Attire

By Gender

Is it easier/harder to know acceptable office dress code

	Total	Women	Men
Easier	20.9%	23.6%	17.6%
Same	49.6%	44.6%	55.7%
Harder	29.5%	31.7%	26.7%
Total	492	271	221

How difficult to know the difference between “business attire,” “business casual” and casual

	Total	Women	Men
Very difficult	6.6%	6.9%	6.3%
Somewhat difficult	40.8%	40.6%	41.1%
Do not know	20.8%	17.0%	25.4%
Not very difficult	19.2%	21.0%	17.0%
Not at all difficult	12.6%	14.5%	10.3%
Total	500	276	224

How difficult to decide what to wear for “business casual”

	Total	Women	Men
Very difficult	6.4%	6.2%	6.7%
Somewhat difficult	40.2%	41.3%	38.8%
Do not know	22.0%	16.7%	28.6%
Not very difficult	18.4%	21.0%	15.2%
Not at all difficult	13.0%	14.9%	10.7%
Total	500	276	224

Been inappropriately dressed in a business or social function

	Total	Women	Men
Yes	62.4%	60.7%	64.4%
No	37.6%	39.3%	35.6%
Total	497	275	222

By Age

Is it easier/harder to know acceptable office dress code

	Total	Under 25	25 to 39	40 to 64	65 or older
Easier	20.9%	30.1%	21.8%	18.1%	18.3%
Same	49.6%	45.8%	53.5%	42.2%	62.4%
Harder	29.5%	24.1%	24.8%	39.7%	19.3%
Total	492	83	101	199	109

How difficult to know the difference between “business attire,” “business casual” and “casual”

	Total	Under 25	25 to 39	40 to 64	65 or older
Very difficult	6.6%	12.0%	6.9%	5.9%	3.6%
Somewhat difficult	40.8%	39.8%	38.2%	44.8%	36.6%
Do not know	20.8%	20.5%	10.8%	18.7%	33.9%
Not very difficult	19.2%	14.5%	27.5%	18.7%	16.1%
Not at all difficult	12.6%	13.3%	16.7%	11.8%	9.8%
Total	500	83	102	203	112

How difficult to decide what to wear for “business casual”

	Total	Under 25	25 to 39	40 to 64	65 or older
Very difficult	6.4%	13.3%	6.9%	4.9%	3.6%
Somewhat difficult	40.2%	36.1%	43.1%	43.3%	34.8%
Do not know	22.0%	21.7%	10.8%	20.7%	34.8%
Not very difficult	18.4%	15.7%	22.5%	18.2%	17.0%
Not at all difficult	13.0%	13.3%	16.7%	12.8%	9.8%
Total	500	83	102	203	112

Been inappropriately dressed in a business or social function

	Total	Under 25	25 to 39	40 to 64	65 or older
Yes	62.4%	67.5%	70.3%	57.7%	59.8%
No	37.6%	32.5%	29.7%	42.3%	40.2%
Total	497	83	101	201	112