



What to do when an employee is dressed inappropriately

By Lauren Pelley | June 20, 2017 | Management & HR, See all



One of your employees shows up at work in a sheer blouse that doesn't leave much to the imagination. Or a member of your sales team saunters into a client meeting in flip flops. Or the new intern dons a pair of extra-short shorts on a particularly warm day.

If you're a manager, those workforce fashion *faux pas* might leave you a bit rattled. And, chances are, your

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without crossing any lines or making them feel uncomfortable.

Here's what to do when an employee is dressed inappropriately.

Consult your office policies

The first step is consulting your office policies, according to Leah Fochuk of Calgary-based HR consultancy [Salopek & Associates](#). A manager has to first be aware if their concern with an employee's clothing choice is just personal preference — or if the outfit actually crosses a line.

If your company doesn't have a dress code policy in place, or doesn't properly communicate it to employees, this is a good time to flag that internally.

But if there is a policy in place, it's important to look at the wording. There is a huge variance in how people interpret stipulations like "business casual," for example.

Have a conversation – in private

Once you've got a handle on what's acceptable in your office, ask to meet the employee privately in a closed-door meeting room or boardroom, suggests Cissy Pau of [Clear HR Consulting](#) in Vancouver.

The conversation that follows needs to be tactful and

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“Provide some rationale for what’s not appropriate,” she says. “Either it’s not professional enough, or it’s too casual or revealing.”

Also, keep the tone positive, not punitive – according to Fochuk, some employees don’t actually realize they’re crossing the line.

“Some people, especially if they’re young in their career, might not understand how their image can contribute to their success in an organization,” she says.

Find a fix together

Once you’ve explained why the attire isn’t appropriate, provide examples of what types of clothing would be a better fit – and engage the employee in that conversation, says Fochuk. That means asking them what they think the solution should be. “Then it doesn’t feel so targeted or disciplinary,” she says.

Keep in mind, the solution will be on a case-by-case basis. If an employee needs to cover up, for example, they could borrow or buy a sweater. But if their clothing is too sheer, you might need to send them home to change the entire outfit, says Pau.

“But if they’re wearing flip flops, not closed-toe shoes, can you live with it for the day?”

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work can become muddled.

The answer? Set clear, detailed guidelines on what's allowed at work, and what's not.

Pau says she's had clients put together a "look book" showing examples of office-appropriate attire to reduce confusion and ensure everyone is on the same page.

Or, Fochuk suggests, organizations can send out a little reminder about the office dress code basics to help mitigate issues before they become a bigger problem.

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