

# SUIT UP FOR BUSINESS



Teddy Pendergrass is a dapper man-about-town in his finely tailored grey flannel suit.



Luxurious fabric, very supple tailoring and subtle tones of taupe and gray epitomize the classic approach to men's suiting.



100 per cent black wool twill Military Formal suit features satin rope shoulder treatment, satin notch lapel, patch pockets and no vent.



Honey, tobacco and charcoal tie-weave double-breasted peak lapel suit with patch pockets.



More fashion excitement: A three-piece suit comes alive in green (pants), red (vest) and black (jacket).

## A Man Makes The Clothes

Teddy Pendergrass—singer extraordinaire—has a taste in clothes that rivals his phenomenal voice.

Pendergrass also passes on a few pointers on clothes. "Things that look good in the store won't necessarily look good on a certain type of

guy. You have to have the right body shape for certain things, so you have to learn what you look best in." Pendergrass is a man who definitely knows what's right for him.

from Ebony magazine

*Clothing can make the difference between a job paying \$12,000 and one that pays \$20,000.*

## Dressing for success

Thomas H. Watkins, Jr., publisher of *The New York Daily Challenge* and former boxer, advises that

"In order to be taken seriously, you have to dress the part you play. While you may not aspire to a political position, your appearance and grooming play a key role in the way others see you. Clothing can make the difference between a job paying \$12,000 and one that pays \$20,000. It can also make the difference between getting a job and getting the brush-off."

### DRESSING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Appropriate attire is particularly essential for job interview. The first impression is a strong one and if it isn't good, it will probably be the last. Many employers have a firm image of what they expect their employees to look like. One executive recruiter told the story of a man who applied for a position with a Fortune 500 company. He had the right credentials, his manner and speech were flawless. Yet, he didn't get the job. "When I looked down," the recruiter recalled, "I realized he was wearing platform shoes. They were expensive, but a little too flamboyant for a conservative company like ours." Obviously, if you don't look like you fit in, you'll never get farther than the front door.

What is the correct way to impress a particular company? For an important interview, you should find out as much as possible about the firm beforehand. One way to do this is to visit the company (you know "case the joint") a few days before your appointment. Look around and make mental notes of what the employees are wearing. If everyone's buttoned up in suits and ties or expensive dresses, let that be your guide. If it's a blue jean-type operation, you may want to wear a sports jacket or a casual skirt. Fairly conservative attire is your best bet for interviews; your co-workers can tell you exactly what will be acceptable after you're hired. While you're checking a firm out for style, be sure to think about whether you'll feel comfortable there. Image is a two-way street; you may not like a company's look any more than it likes yours. If the atmosphere's not right, don't try to force it. In the end, both you and your employer would probably be unhappy.

Once a company has passed your initial approval, some basic grooming and dress rules apply for interviews across the board. For example, a New York-based executive recruiter advises Black job seekers to stay away from browns that blend with skin tones and to wear mid-range greys, charcoals and blues.

To create the best impression, leave fancy jewelry at home. What's fashionable in the neighborhood may seem gaudy on the job. And, a recruiter doesn't want to feel like he's hiring someone who can out-spend him at the jewelry store. Women should limit themselves to a well-coordinated combination of simple, unobtrusive earrings, a sleek wristwatch and a single ring. You may want to add a plain bracelet or single-strand necklace of some kind. Less will generally win you more points in this department. A sin-

gle piece of fine metal, precious stone or nothing at all is usually more tasteful than loads of costume jewelry. Men should stick to a watch and a wedding band or class ring. Brothers tend to reinforce whites' Superfly image of them when they show up at personnel offices decked with gold chains and pinkie rings.

In some professions, men who wear sports jackets and casual shirts are not perceived as hard workers, and people who are not seen to be hard workers rarely get the job.

So what if you have to borrow or rent a suit—once you get the job you can buy your own. A hint on suitable suiting: Steer clear of polyesters and other synthetics. Wools and natural blends tend to be cut in more sophisticated, classic styles and get the most points. Match your suits with conservative ties and solid white or light, pastel-colored shirts and save the flashy cuff links for the disco. Designer signatures on your clothing do not impress prospective employers. L.V.'s may look great on Louis Vuitton, but men and women who wear other peoples' initials are often seen as insecure and viewed as followers rather than leaders.

For women, suiting up for business doesn't always mean wearing suits, but it does always mean dressing in moderation. Solid, traditional colors will help you to be taken seriously. Women should wear dresses and skirts to interviews to be on the safe side. However, well-tailored trousers or pantsuits made of wool, cotton or natural blends may be acceptable in some settings. Your preliminary research should guide you here. Stockings are always mandatory for interviews. Bare legs are considered too casual.

Hair and nails must reflect the same attention you pay to dress, whether you're a woman or man. It must be apparent that you observe a good grooming regime. Since we're talking about the little things that count, remember that peeking safety pins or dipping slips signal carelessness.

### WHEN IN ROME DO AS THE ROMANS DO

For teachers, sales personnel and those who work in offices, the norm is usually suits and ties for men, dresses, skirts and modest pantsuits for women. Spending a lot of money on clothes that are stylish and individual won't do you any good unless your clothing preferences illustrate a sense of propriety. You must keep in mind your career goals and the image your employer or profession generally projects. You may feel that what you wear is a personal expression of your individual rights. But, while you may not be tired if your boss needs sunglasses to look at your shirt or tie, chances are you won't be asked for dinner to discuss a new opening in the executive suite either.

The truth of the matter is that sometimes your appearance is as important as your credentials. One young executive who travels the fast track of politics and finance recently turned thirty. As if struck by divine revelation, he began to buy somber blue pinstriped suits, white shirts and solid-colored ties. One day he stunned his girl friend by

appearing in an ultra-conservative pair of black lace-up shoes. "I looked around and saw successful men in the financial world wearing these kinds of shoes," he said. "I decided if this is what they wear, then this is what I wear." Two months later he got a promotion and a hefty increase in salary. Just a coincidence? You'll never convince him of that.

Women must be especially careful about their on-the-job attire. Low-cut necklines and high skirt slits can be definite hindrances to a woman trying to climb the corporate or business ladder, even if they are the current fashion craze. Men have a hard time taking any woman seriously if her bosom is spilling all over the conference room table or her thigh appears every time she shifts in her chair.

### ETHNIC TOUCHES

What about ethnic touches like large afros, elaborate cornrows and bold African prints? It depends on the job and what your boss thinks of you. If they haven't had a chance to get to know you, whites may be quick to interpret your assertion of identity as a sign of "hostility," so you'd better get hired first and settle into the company before you start testing the waters. When you're ready to experiment, try one element at a time. Don't show up in cornrows, two tons of bracelets and a Dakabar print dress all at once. The key is to keep your identity and fit in with your environment. Avoid extremes—in both ethnic and mainstream fashion. Brothers with earrings and sisters with nose rings are a little "advanced" for most offices and will probably be as popular with the boss as a green-haired punk rocker!

The point is that you must develop a sense of what's appropriate for your job. One day a reporter for a large metropolitan daily who enjoyed going to work dressed like she'd stepped out of the pages of *Vogue*, appeared in a new fur coat, suede high heels and off-white wool pants, and was sent to cover a fire. By the time she returned, her coat smelled like smoke, her shoes were ruined and her white pants were spattered with dirt and mud.

Another caution to the fashion plate: sometimes your Pierre Cardin suits, Halston dresses and Gucci shoes may intimidate your supervisors and cause resentment among your colleagues. Whites tend to place less emphasis on fashion than Blacks. A white executive earning the same or a slightly higher salary than you is more likely to invest in a house in the suburbs than a designer wardrobe. He's likely to suspect that you're a spendthrift or worse if he can't see how you can afford to dress as you do.

All of this may seem silly if you work in a garage. But appropriate dress is as important in a garage as it is in an executive suite. Clean, functional clothing that blends with your environment and good grooming are keys to success in any field. To determine what's best for your individual situation, use a healthy mixture of these guidelines and your own common sense, and you should be able to find the suit that suits your business to a tee.

**We have tomorrow  
Bright before us  
Like a flame.**

**Yesterday  
A night-gone thing,  
A sundown-name.**

**And dawn-today  
Broad arch above  
The road we came.**

**Langston Hughes**

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