

# THE USHEROFF INSTITUTE LEADER'S EDGE



To help you take the stress out of Business Casual, we offer the following guidelines

## LET'S TAKE THE STRESS OUT OF BUSINESS CASUAL

Levi Strauss & Co. commissioned Evens Research Associates of San Francisco to conduct the first national survey on Business Casual dress issues. Among their findings:

- 9 out of 10 companies allow management, professional and administrative staff to dress casually in the workplace, either on an occasional or full-time basis. That's up from two-thirds in 1992
- 33% of companies are casual every day, 42% are casual one day a week, and 15% are casual on some other basis.



many - more comfort, more freedom of expression, more relaxed working environments. But for others this whole "Casual Thing" is just one step short of chaos and anarchy.

Dressing casual at work shouldn't be a burden for business and professional people, but we understand the vast middle ground between Corporate Formal and Down-Home Sloppy is not well defined enough to set standards and provide guide-

lines. Absence of guidelines and rules of decorum creates uncertainty. And uncertainty creates anxiety and stress. The old model of professional dress just doesn't make sense anymore, and advising employees on dressing "appropriately" often creates confusion.

Casual Friday marches on, mowing down Corporate Formal and paving the way for Casual Everyday in many workplaces. From our perspective it looks like Business Casual is here to stay, at least into the next millennium. That's reason to celebrate for

## THREE LEVELS OF BUSINESS CASUAL HAVE EMERGED

### 1. Corporate Casual

Sport coat, tie and wool pants for men, tailored pant suit and low-heeled shoe for women.

### 2. Middle Casual

Dress pants and tasteful shirt (with traditional or band collars) for men, relaxed trousers or skirt with blouse or sweater for women.

### 3. Relaxed Casual

Casual slacks or jeans, T-shirt or sweater and sneakers for both genders.

Remember: dress is a powerful indicator of how you see yourself and whether you want to be taken seriously.

Business Casual strikes a compromise between two extremes of dress-aggressively corporate or excessively laid back.

Business Casual is not an invitation to dress sloppy - clothing should be clean, pressed without holes or frayed areas. Business Casual means softer fabrics, more natural shapes and room to move, It means dressing in a balanced fashion of style and comfort.



- Use a strategy. Ask: What meetings do I have today? With whom will I meet? How would you like to be perceived? How well will I represent my company?
- Project professionalism in everything you wear.
- Be a chameleon. No law states you must dress the same. Change your clothes to suit your strategy.
- Invest in classic clothing. You will always win if you stick to the more conservative end of the range.
- Buy coordinates and build a wardrobe around a specific color scheme for more versatility in your clothes. You want your clothes to work together.
- Combine some of your existing business wardrobe with casual attire. Wear a button-down dress shirt with khakis and loafers, either with a more colorful tie/scarf or sweater.
- Express your individuality.
- Use accessories - belts and jewelry, for example - to upgrade your Business Casual look.
- Socks/nylons add a more professional look. Use your discretion.
- Leather shoes are preferred but if athletic shoes are OK, make sure they are clean and not too worn.
- Keep colors muted and coordinated to create a professional appearance.
- Avoid clothing that is revealing tight-fitting as well as anything you might wear to the gym, the beach or to clean the garage.

Now, let's get to work!



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# MAKE BUSINESS MEETINGS MORE EFFECTIVE



**E**ver attended a perfect business meeting? One that started out on time... with everyone present and prepared... with every agenda item vitally important... with participants contributing only carefully considered relevant remarks... with the meeting ending on time after the group had made significant progress?

If you've participated in such a meeting then chances are you remember it well because such sessions are so rare. In fact most of us don't attend meetings, or even do meetings. We endure meetings.

Considering how expensive business meetings are (the tab for a single hour of meeting time in terms of human resources frequently reaches \$2,500 to \$5,000), and how much time we spend in business meetings (between 20% to 60% of our work day), enduring bad meetings is no way to run a railroad - and certainly not your company.

Making meetings more effective and efficient throughout your organization could cut costs substantially. It would certainly make your staff more productive. Following are guidelines that will help you take the oxy-moron out of "productive meeting."

## Planning

- Decide on your objectives
- Invite as few as possible - as a general rule, the smaller the group, the shorter the meeting
- Issue a memo two weeks in advance (four weeks for participants who must travel), including 1) objectives; 2) agenda; 3) time and place;

4) names of everyone invited; 5) background material to review in advance.

- Never schedule meetings on Friday afternoon, on the eve of national holidays or on major religious holidays.
- Set time limits for each agenda.
- Allocate time based on the item's importance.

## Setting Time Limits

- Schedule controversial topics at the middle or end of the meeting.
- Be prepared to impose time limits on how long and how often each person can speak about a given item.
- Schedule the meeting for an odd time. Instead of 9 am, try 9:15 or even 9:17. They'll remember it better.
- Select an important topic, a company hot button, for the first item.
- If one of the presenters is a late-comer, schedule him or her first.
- Never recap for the benefit of late arrivals.
- Always schedule the meeting before lunch or dinner, never after.

## Maintaining Control

- Make coffee or refreshments available outside the meeting room to avoid disruptions or downtime.
- Control seating arrangements with place cards. This is an effective way to separate those who prolong meetings. Put opponents on the same side of the table, making it harder for them to make eye contact.
- For longer meetings schedule breaks every 45 to 60 minutes. Again, select an odd time when determining the length of breaks - "Let's break for 11 minutes."
- Enforce time limits. Don't allow speakers to engage in monologues or venture into uncharted waters. One strategy for dealing with culprits is to break eye contact. Another is to remind them, "We

don't have a lot of time. We can come back to that if we have time later, or we can talk during the break." For persistent arguers, tell them you like their input, but continuing the discussion will have to wait until after the meeting.

- If one of the participants is a notorious time waster, consider holding the meeting in his or her office so that everyone else can leave.
- Have a flip chart available for non-agenda items to discuss at the next meeting.
- Never end with "Is there anything else you would like to discuss."

## Establishing Authority

- Choose your own seat with care. Avoid sitting near the door, refreshment table or telephone. These types of seating arrangements lead to distractions and undermine your authority. Also never sit next to the bosses, because they may unwittingly intercept questions directed at you, which keeps you from having a voice.
- As a general rule, end positions carry status and dominance. Middle positions on either side of a long rectangular table attract consensus-building leaders who already have some status within the group. Corner seats are unstrategic positions and afford occupants for few opportunities to be heard.
- Imbalances in the size of groups occupying either side of the table give rise to imbalances in the levels of power and authority they wield. Surprisingly the smaller group generally prevails. For example, when three sit on one side and five on the other the trio will invariably carry more power and exercise greater influence.
- Pause before responding to questions or comments if you want to sound authoritative. Remember only fools rush in.

## CHARISMA CAN BE EARNED, BUT NEVER FAKED

Michael Jordan has it. Teammate Dennis Rodman doesn't. Actor Sean Connery and General Colin Powell have it. Canadian Prime Minister doesn't. (For the record, Chretien has boyish charm, but not charisma.)

We've talked about charisma, which shouldn't be confused with celebrity or fame.

We're talking about that elusive quality that compels us to admire individuals not so much for what they have accomplished but for who they are.

Contrary to the popular notion that you either have it or you don't, I believe we all have charisma. Of course, some are born with more of it than others - just like good looks, intelligence and, yes, money. Some people have that special something that can be taught, enabling them to cast an almost magical spell when they walk into a room.

Charisma, however is much more democratic than that, and

we can all be charismatic if we work on it.

I believe that charisma is your personality, plus the confidence to project it consistently and authentically. Consider a recent Stanford University study that showed if people envision themselves accomplishing a goal, it comes easier to them. The same idea holds true for projecting charisma. By doing exercises to build confidence, and working on presentation and voice skills, people can learn to project charisma.

Many people in public life described as charismatic work hard to achieve it. They have coaches to work on everything from voice to image, and they often take acting lessons. I know from experience that you can earn charisma, but you can't fake charisma. Being authentic is part of the territory.

**Bottom Line: If we want to be leaders, we must develop charisma.**



**Roz Usheroff**

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