

What should you do when 'business casual' goes too far?

Question: “I work for a government agency that coordinates our service delivery with private industry partners. Because of this partnership, we have staff in our building who are not state employees and answer to different management. The dress code in our building is “business casual,” and the partners agreed to this policy. How do I address women who wear inappropriate low-cut blouses and very short skirts? Approaching the appropriate supervisor hasn’t helped. The “corporate culture” in that company is different from our state agency. Should I go to our administrator? Am I making too much of this? The purpose of this partnership is to help lower-income and unemployed people find jobs, or career advancement, through job search activities, training, résumé and interviewing skill coaching. I don’t see this as setting a good example to our clientele. — *Rita*

Renee January 30, 2009 at 2:55 pm

We have a corporate dress code and managers don’t enforce it. So you may have to live with it.

Linda January 30, 2009 at 1:08 pm

Once you have notified the supervisor and they are OK with the behavior, there is nothing more you can do. It is, after all, their responsibility to deal with the situation. However, if your boss is a man, I’m sure that they enjoy the eye candy.

Mary January 30, 2009 at 12:44 pm

Why not just go to the offensive person and politely explain the clothing is not appropriate for your office? If the purpose of your partnership is to help lower-income and unemployed people find jobs, or career advancement, through job search activities, training, résumé and interviewing skill coaching, use that as an incentive!

Anon January 26, 2009 at 5:36 pm

Part of this depends upon whether the employees are dealing with the public. If they are, a polite note(maybe with pictures of “inappropriate” clothing) to your boss along the lines of: is this the image we want to promote to the public? Sometimes the boss just doesn’t know (then there are some men who like the “view”). Then let it go.

Lisa January 26, 2009 at 4:10 pm

When it comes to corporate dress policies, we have found that the more specific the policy is, the better. Wording like, "Skirts must be no shorter than two inches above the knee" can help define things much more clearly.

As far as enforcement of this policy, it's up to the individual managers to enforce it. We have managers who are very strict - they will send an employee home (unpaid time!) to change if they are repeat offenders. It's important that our employees to dress in a professional manner, especially since our front-line staff work with the public.

JFS January 26, 2009 at 9:40 am

I believe every corporate office has a dress code policy and all personnel should abide by the policy. Working in a hospital environment, and holding a professional role, I believe all should uphold professionalism and abide by the dress code policy at the work place. I agree wearing inappropriate low-cut blouses to work is not professional and should be acknowledge or "PIN" the blouse.

Mark January 23, 2009 at 4:53 pm

I agree that business casual is sometimes stretched too far. However, it seems to me that you already did what you should have done, which was to go to their supervisor. If their supervisor is okay with it, then I think you need to accept that decision regardless of whether you agree with it.

JLK January 23, 2009 at 3:44 pm

Something you also may check is your contract with that partner. Are there performance measures built into it? Does anything address the "corporate culture"? Confirm you're even able to ask them to adhere to your guidelines - it may not be in the contract.

Christine January 23, 2009 at 3:28 pm

I have to agree with you that sometimes "business casual" is sometimes pushed to it's limits. Unfortunately, unless you have a written policy in place, you are going to have very little success in changing this.

My suggestion would be to have an "attire" page added to your employee handbook that specifically details what your management deems appropriate for the office. Each employee will need to be given a copy of the new policy which they can then sign a signature page (which goes into their company file) confirming that they are aware of the new policy. It will then be up to management to determine whether or not to enforce a behavior change. Good luck.

jdd January 23, 2009 at 3:28 pm

Is it your role to ensure that policies are being followed? If this is not an area of your responsibility then it is really not your business and your time would be better spent taking care of the job that is assigned to you.

Jocelyn January 23, 2009 at 3:27 pm

Once you have determined that the dress code is definitely inappropriate and against regulations then I would talk that over with the HR department of this sister company and mention to her that you have attempted to solve this problem with the pertaining supervisor with no success but definitely need this concern addressed immediately. You may actually get somewhere in that direction.

Ilja Kraag January 23, 2009 at 3:23 pm

First, check some things out. 1. Are you the only one who has a problem with certain dress code violations? 2. Are those dress code violations only on the partners side or also on your side? 3. Are you responsible to make sure that people stick to a certain dress code? Depending on the answers, check around if more people have a problem with the loose dress code and, depending on how many people agree with you, see what can be done to uphold the "proper" dress code. Good luck.