

Hi, this is Wayne Rivers at FBI. *We build better contractors*. Before I dig in, Boot Camp, February 9 and 10, 2023. Get your folks signed up as soon as you can. Seats, more than half of the seats were sold up already. So please get it done.

This week, I want to talk about something a little bit different. This is maybe not on a big strategic or leadership level like we usually talk about. In today's world, what do leaders wear? What should you wear to work? How should you represent yourself? So just a fun fact, the peak year for dry cleaners, the dry-cleaning industry was 1996. Before, back then, we all wore suits and ties to work. We had to send our shirts and sometimes our ties and suits to the dry cleaners, so we looked spiffy every day. And we had to put a lot of money into our wardrobe.

And then it started with casual Fridays, and then it became casual every day. And then COVID comes along and everybody's working from home, and its T-shirts and shorts and flip-flops. So, golly, the whole idea of leaders showing up in a blue suit with a red tie, that went out the door a long time ago if you think about it. So, what do we do? What about this is important to you? Well, if you're a leader in your company, or an aspiring leader for that matter, you've still got a responsibility to set the tone. And part of the way you set the tone is how you appear. Now, geographically, this is going to be different. If you're running a construction company in Hawaii, okay, short sleeves and shorts and flip-flops, maybe that's the norm for you. In the Northeast, people still do wear suits and ties to work on lots of occasions.

Size of company makes a difference. The kind of industry that you're in makes a difference. Are you customer-facing? Or are you back-office types that very, very rarely comes into contact with customers? All those things make a difference. But ultimately, what you wear is among the very first impressions that you make with people. Because when you walk in the door in the morning, people see you, they eyeball you before they hear what you say or before you even say good morning almost. So, they're drawing conclusions and impressions from the very first moment they lay eyes on you, and that applies to customers and perspective customers and trade partners and everybody else. So, this, I think, requires a little bit of thought anyway. All right. So, what should you wear? First impression is so key.

Second thing about what you wear is your audience. Okay. So, we talked about geography and industry and all that, but the audience makes a difference. If you're going to go meet with the banker at the bonding company, you probably need to do a little bit more careful attire than if you were just going to run out to a job site for a safety talk. If you're talking to owners and you're in a business development role and you're trying to get work, then by all means, you want to present a very professional appearance. If you're going to an AGC or ABC meeting and you know that most of your peers are going to show up in sport coats, you don't want to feel underdressed around your peers because it actually has an impact on your confidence. So, your audience makes a difference, too. And then the third component I would say is, what makes you feel productive? I can't work from home very well.

I know in today's world, people not only work from home, they work from anywhere. They work from Starbucks, or they work from, who knows? My nephew is an engineer. His company's based up near Washington, DC. He's in London. He's working from London, and nobody cares. Nobody comes in the office anymore. I can't do that. I have to be in the office. And if I'm going to be in the office, then there's a certain amount, a certain kind of attire that people expect in an office setting. All right. So, what should you avoid as the leader? Well, don't be sloppy. Don't show up in raggedy jeans and a holey T-shirt or have dirt or grime. If you just went out to a job site, that's one thing. But if you show up in the morning at 7:30 and you're already looking sloppy, that just sets the wrong tone completely.

Especially as we age, it's easy for us to get out of fashion. So, a few years ago, my wife made me go to a high-end men's store because all of my trousers still had pleats. I was so embarrassed. I didn't even think about it. I was going around. Nobody here in the Southeast wears pleated pants anymore. So, I was an old fuddy-duddy. I looked kind of foolish. And compared to all these guys wearing trim pants, I got these big blousy things on. So, as we get older, it's important to stay in touch with fashion a little bit. You don't have to be fashion-forward in skinny jeans and all that silliness, but you do need

to be somewhat modern, and if not stylish, at least appropriately addressed. And the third thing is don't be out of step. If everybody in the office is business casual and button-downs and stuff, don't show up in a three-piece suit.

It might make you feel more productive. It's going to make everybody just feel weird. So don't be out of step with everybody else in your company. All right. What's safe, right? In today's world, what's safe? Company logo stuff is safe. It's decent quality, it's got the right colors, it's got the right stuff. You're always pretty safe with company logo wear, and that's whether you're the CEO or whether you're someone working in the field, that really doesn't matter.

So, I'd like to know what works for you guys. Do you have a dress code? When I was a kid, we had a dress code in school, and it was quite strict. No jeans, for example. No one, boys or girls, could wear jeans. Do you have a dress code in your company? What do you encourage? What's worked and what hasn't worked for you? Please share with us in the comments. This is Wayne Rivers at FBI, where *We Build Better Contractors*.