

Implications of casual dress at work



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1. ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to establish the effects and implications of getting casual within the work environment of Bank of America. The Bank of America being the largest bank (by assets), it is known for its high levels of professionalism and its workers' formal dress code. This paper will therefore discuss the bank's service delivery to its clients while at the same time highlighting the aspects of effects of possible causal approaches that may be employed by the bank employees in discharging their duties. This discussion will be done systematically with special emphasis on different sections that will comprise of a table of content, introduction, literature review, method of analysis, results of analysis, the conclusions and recommendations made, a list of the references used in the collection of the information and finally a list appendices showing the additional material used in this discussion.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Bank of America Corporation is based in Charlotte which is in North Carolina, it is considered to be one of the largest financial institutions that offer financial services, it is also considered to be the largest bank in the assets category (it has the highest asset value). The bank is also the largest commercial bank by deposits. It is also ranked as the second largest bank on the basis of market capitalization in the United States. The bank (company) is known to hold about 12.2% of the total U.S. deposits. It also holds the number one position of underwriting the global high yield debt, it is considered to be the third largest underwriter of global equity. The Bank plays a very important and critical role as an adviser to the global mergers

and acquisition (it is therefore placed at the ninth position as an adviser on global mergers and acquisitions).

The total numbers of clients served by the Bank of America originate from more than 150 countries from across the world. It has the highest percentage of relation with the U. S Fortune 500 companies (this percentage stands at 99%). Its relation with the fortune Global 500 stands at 83% (of these companies). The bank is a very important component of the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) and also an influential member of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). The bank demonstrated its ability to weather the 2007 credit crisis and emerged as the healthiest financial institution during that period. It later plunged in market value after incurring heavy losses as a result of purchasing the Merrill Lynch. The 2009 first quarter profits were valued at 4.2 billion with 3.7 billion having originated from the Merrill Lynch.

Professional dress

Before engaging in an informative discussion on the possible impacts of casual dressing at the work place or any other associated aspects of casual attitude in the work environment, it is important to understand the concept of professional dressing and its significance in the professional world of business. Professional dressing has a lot of significance especially in the Financial sector (which the Bank of America is part of). There is great significance that is attached to the color of the professional dress, this is largely due to the different meanings expressed by the different type of colours. For example, deep and dark colors are associated with wealth. Neutral and the basic colors are most appropriate for business attire. In the <https://assignbuster.com/implications-of-casual-dress-at-work/>

Bank of America most senior managers dress in Dark colored suits which is a symbol of authority, the dark colors also symbolize power.

Blue is a color that conveys dignity. Green has been labeled as a very inappropriate color for a male suit; this is because it is a common color for many hotel uniforms has cannot live up to the status demanded by the professional world. Gray is a common color that represents success and trustworthiness. The female employees have realized that the black color is an important and is able to complement many of their professional dresses. They therefore need to choose their clothes carefully based on solid colors that can easily blend with as many colors as possible. Female employees can always soften the basic colors for their professional dresses like brown and black by adding jewel tones, these usually demonstrates their confidence and energy, which is much needed by customers they serve in the professional environment of Bank of America.

The corporate and professional standards must be respected during the selection of the Professional dresses; the color of these dresses is a key factor to making a good a selection. The type of fabric is also a factor in the selection process simply because it is symbolic (For example the natural fibers like linen, wool, cotton and silk are a symbol of status. The most preferred type of fabric for both male and female employees in the Bank include 100% pure wool. It is the most appropriate fabric for the professional dresses, followed by cotton. The likes of suede, leather, velvet and satin are fabrics that are inappropriate for professional dresses. There have been different interpretations for the meaning of professional dressing in America (different states have their interpretations, for example the Texas and some

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Western states believe that a business man can wear polished cowboy boots and their business suits and remain professional). Florida and California has a more casual dressing standard compared to New York.

There are States that have remained very conservative with their dressing style (meaning they tend to dress professionally more often than not) these states include D. C, Atlanta, Boston, and Chicago). It is common knowledge that professional dressing has its important significance, in the sense that it builds confidence of the employees and also helps to build a professional environment within the Bank environment which is a plus to the image of the Bank of America. It necessary that the customers or the Bank clients constantly feel that they are dealing with professionals who will at all times give them professional advice to help them protect the investments and also give them sound financial advice.

It is interesting that professional dressing helps to build this environment. A good professional image for the male employees within the bank is to ensure that they wear good quality suits that are solid and have dark colors. These suits should be complimented with good quality ties. They need to maintain a conservative way of dressing, simply because Bank of America as explained in this introduction is an international bank and has clients all over the world and therefore employees within the American Branch have a high potential of serving customers from all over the world and must remain professional if they are to handle such customers who constantly need assurance that the bank is professional and has safely kept their deposits.

Casual dressing at work

The major possible causes of the emerging trend of the casual dressing trend in the financial sector with specific interest in the Bank of America include; the need to return to a state of elegance as a new approach of expressing professionalism and slow but progressive change from the formal dress code. This paper will therefore will address the history or origin of the casual dressing and its possible consequences within the Bank of America. Some of the casual dressing trends also adopted by other banking institutions or businesses include the casual Fridays and the dress-down days.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW**Background/history**

This section of the paper will focus on the corporate history of the bank in an attempt to trace the reasons for the Bank's dress code policy in relation to the type of customers or clients that they serve.

It must be noted that the term ' getting casual at work' does not specifically refer to the dressing code but can be broadly discussed in the context of the employee behavior within the bank; this behavior could also be referred to as being informal be it in the hierarchal level or towards the delivery of services to customers. The Bank of America does not really have an extremely strict type of dress code but insists on smart business casual or any other dressing style that excludes jeans-shirts or in appropriate dressing, suits are not very common within the Bank(this is with reference to the junior employees who are not part of the management team). There are different types of casual dressing which include: Smart casual, Business Casual and

sports wear. The most commonly used casual dressing style is the business casual followed by the smart casual.

Definition of the casual wears

Smart casual: This type of dress code is loosely defined and is very distinct compared to the business casual. The only challenge is that its definition is not very precise and many confuse the term smart casual with the term business casual, this definition of smart casual contains dress trousers even though other definitions include jean trousers. It also includes long sleeve dress shirt, loafers, tie (is optional), a belt, a sport coat. For female employees this could mean a skirt (either long or short), a fashionable belt, a jacket, a sweater that complements the dress that the employee has worn. The women are free to wear jewelry that compliments there type of dressing.

It must be noted that this type of dressing is mostly appropriate in academic circles that majorly involves events where the said expert or professional speaks in front of an audience during lectures.

Business casual

This is a dress code that emerged in many white collar jobs in a number of western countries; this trend emerged in the early 1970 when there was the energy crisis. During this period the government had decided to raise the thermostat setting which then led to many managers authorizing their employees to do way with ties and jackets. The popularity of the business casual had surpassed the business formal attire wear. There are different definitions with regard to the business casual wear, meaning there is no generally accepted definition for this kind of wear, every organization defines

this type of wear according to their interpretation which is majorly structured to suit the objectives or the interest of the organization. A definition given by the New York Times cites job search engine Monster. com states that a business casual wear means dressing professionally and looking neat while at the same time remaining pulled together. Business casual for female employees comprises of a skirt of reasonable length or even full length pants of non jeans material. This can be complimented with a top. The business casual wear for men is considered as a combination of a collard shirt, belt and shoes (e. g. loafers) with socks. The neck ties and cufflinks are generally not recommended for business casual wear.

A brief corporate history of the Bank of America

Amadeo Giannini founded the Bank of Italy in the year 1904 in San Francisco.

The main function of this bank was to cater to immigrants. Amadeo was brought up by the Fava family; this happened after his lost his father, who was shot trying to collect a debt.

Opportunity knocked at Amedeo's door step when the San Francisco earthquake struck in the year 1906. He was able to rescue all his funds from the bank's building which was ruined. He then used the rescued funds to loan out to individuals who were willing to rebuild. He got his fortunes in the later year after all his debtors paid up their loans. He used his money to start the bank of America and Italy in the year 1922 (this was in Italy where he had bought Banca dell'Italia Meridionale which had been established in the year 1918). In the year 1927 Amadeo consolidated his Bank of Italy which already had 101 branches with the Liberty bank of America which had 175

branches. This resulted into the Bank of Italy National Trust&Savings Association which had a capital of \$30, 000, 000 and had resources worth \$115, 000, 000. It was later in 1928 that he merged with Bank of America Los Angeles, he later renamed his Bank of Italy to Bank of America in the year 1930. The Merger was completed in the year 1929 and resulted into BANK OF AMERICA.

The role played by the Clothing

There is great importance pegged to the dressing style in the corporate world and this includes the Bank of America. It is common for executives within the bank to be associated with Business suits which usually symbolize the executive status. This simply means that the dressing styles acts as a code of differentiating the employees within the bank.

In cases where the corporate body has a corporate uniform, there is increased ease of employee identification by the customers (this greatly helps to promote the corporate image). Since there is never a second chance to make a lasting impression to the customers, it is important for the employees to realize that the appropriate clothing for a given role within the bank can help improve the image of that employee within that role or even potentially help the employee win other roles within the bank.

There is an interesting fact about clothing and the role it plays in placing individuals within a given social order. It is undeniable that there are different social orders that exist within the Bank of America, and these social orders are characterized by the dressing styles that are adopted by the employees (this usually happens whether they are aware or not). It is

advisable for the employees to identify the type of role that they want to play and then dress the part. Status is another role played by the type of clothing chosen by a bank employee. A museum specialist called Barbara Dickstein argued that clothing was the major thing that represented an individual as opposed to the jewelry they might own. Wallach also stated in the year 1991 that clothing was a way of stating the status, the role of an individual in life and his social position.

Role of clothing (examples).

Blue velvet represented or symbolized the French nobilities (this was in the seventeenth century). The European court officials in the past wore clothes that were royal blue and purple in color. In Germany, clothing that were red in color were only designated to the members of the upper class. The ‘casual revolution’ begun in the year 1990, it was noted that during this period many employees including the company Managers were slowly adopting this emerging trend of casual wear. Apart from bank of America the trend was largely noticeable in downtown financial districts, businesses and corporate rooms in America. The characteristic of the trend is that employees would be casually dressed but look very presentable at the same time. As mentioned in the introduction there are different types of casual wear, the most common being the business wear (It is a very interesting dressing style in the sense that it allows the employee to feel comfortable while at the same maintaining his or her professional image (examples include cotton shirts, sweaters, and khaki pants. Care must be taken during the selection of the casual wear, simply because some of them are in appropriate for an office environment. Many employees have ignored the

fact that casual does not imply that one should dress in a sloppy manner, examples of inappropriate casual wear include sleeveless shirts, tank tops and sports wear. It is appropriate for the female employees to avoid clothes that are revealing as these fall under inappropriate dressing.

The main reason given by many accounting firms like Deloitte and Touche and KPMG is that the casual wears affect the professional image of these professional companies that are always expected by their clients to maintain a corporate and professional image. John Molloy who authored the book 'Dress for Success' mentioned in his book that 'Rulers of the Corporate and Political America wear suits-always have and always will,'

There are some large American companies that have also embraced the concept of casual dressing, examples of these companies include General Motors and the Ford (they have come up with casual dress policies that cover the entire week as shown by Rothenberg, 1995). Another notable example is the Chrysler car company, where the employees at the headquarters are to dress as they please, twice in a week, there is a possibility of this trend completely taking over the dressing policy of the company. The customer expectation is an indispensable factor when it comes to choosing the most appropriate type of dressing. The management team of the Bank of America strongly believes that the dress code could affect the perception of the customers towards the company e. g. inappropriate or unprofessional dressing badly dents the professional image of the company. The Human Resource Manager of Price Water House Coopers (Pat Cooper believes that " Appropriate dress reflects good judgment and clients feel someone who has good judgment will give good

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advise” (walker, 1993). There is need for clear dress policy within the bank to assist with the definition of the casual wear that is acceptable to the customers and the bank ultimately.

The different origins of casual dressing

The current trend of casual wear within the Bank cannot be traced to one particular origin but can be attributed to the egalitarian movement in the business and industrial environment in the early 1980. This also brought with it the idea of empowerment and teamwork which aimed at reducing the distinctions that resulted from class. The dress codes are greatly influenced by the customer and employee demands. The bank only recommends very casual dressing for those events that are considered charitable.

Consequences of Casual wear

Positive consequences

This section of the paper will explore the different aspects of casual wear with respect to their impact on employee behavior towards customers and even the Bank management team. It can be argued that appropriate casual dressing brings with it positive consequences. These positive consequences benefit both the employer and the employee. If the management team of Bank of America would dress more casually then they would be more comfortable and therefore look approachable to the other employees and this could in a great way boost interaction with the management team which could result into sharing of ideas that would otherwise not be shared.

There is a growing popular realization that companies can immensely gain from more comfortable and flexible employees, it is an interesting fact that casual wear usually creates a more relaxed environment thus making the

employees to have sense of freedom. If this kind of environment was enhanced through positive control, then the productivity level of employees within the Bank of America can be improved greatly.

The casual wear also has its secondary impact in the clothing industry. The emerging trend of casual wear has led to an increased sales volume for many casual wear clothing firms; hence they have experienced positive growth in terms of profit margins. The fashion firms have also engaged in extensive campaigns to encourage the firms to adopt the casual wear for their employees. Departmental stores like Jacobson's have realized that they can promote the trend and in turn boost their sales volume in the long run. They have opted to taking the campaign to the door steps of these financial institutions or Banking corporations by giving them free seminars on the type of casual dressing that can be adopted.

Negative impacts of casual dressing

It is undeniable that the business casual wear and many other types of casual wear which were popular in the early 1990 have sent shock industry across the financial institutions that had adopted them. The focus of this paper will be on the negative impacts of this casual on the Bank of America. The discussion will therefore capture both aspects of the term of ' getting casual at work'. The aspects in this case will refer to the business casual dresses used by the employees and the casual attitude adopted by the employees towards discharging their duties. The current statistics show that this formerly popular trend is on the decline after the Bank realized that this particular type of dressing was projecting an image that was perceived by

the Bank customers as unprofessional therefore eroding the confidence of the customers in the bank.

The issue that alarmed the Bank is the statistics that showed that employees who dressed more casually at work tended to be more casual at the place of work in the sense that they discharged their duties more casually. This meant serious implications for the Bank. The casual attire was the largest contributor to the damaging of the corporate image, it also led to casual interaction among the employees for example it encouraged slacking off in the work productivity. The employees tended to joke more frequently, engage in non productive discussions through comments that encouraged flirtatious behavior thus creating an environment that could encourage sexual harassment within the work place. This directly meant that the bank could potentially lose skilled employees through court cases and court penalties. It also posed the risk of dragging the Bank's image into these court cases (this could dent the banks image). It also led to the loss of manpower hours.

Evidence from a survey conducted by a law firm further supports this fact. There survey which was conducted in 1, 000 companies revealed that 50% of these companies had noticed an increase in absenteeism and tardiness after implementing a casual dress policy. 30% of these companies also realized that flirtatious behavior had risen. Another challenge that faced the casual dress was the fact that there was no clear definition of what casual business attire should entail. Many employees interpreted the casual wear as what they usually put on at home (some even walked around in the office without shoes. This had the potential of making the work environment not

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conducive. Molloy's research showed that women who were trying to get ahead in the corporate world found it increasingly challenging to be taken seriously when they were casually dressed.

The business casual wear in the bank sent a strong subtextual message to the customers who interpreted the message to mean that the Bank employees were going to handle their financial needs including their hard earned moneys in a very casual manner.

This signal sent to the customers was not the message the Bank would at any one point wish to send to its clients and customers, hence casual wear sends a contrary message to what the bank wishes to send to its clients and customers. A critical review of the casual dressing policy reveals that the policy has more disadvantages than the advantages the Bank would want to achieve at the end of the day. Hence the Bank has become very skeptical of the proposed advantages the business casual wear would bring to the Bank environment. The bank bases its argument on the far reaching effects the casual wear would have on its customers who are the Banks number one priority.

4. METHODS OF ANALYSIS

The following techniques were used in the analysis of data and information that was collected in this research paper: Case study, this involved conducting inquiries in order to investigate the phenomenon of 'getting casual at work' within its real life context, this was done on purpose because the boundary between the phenomenon and the context was not very evident. It involved the extensive use of qualitative data that was drawn

from interviews and observations. It therefore was used to draw a clear understanding of the concept of getting casual at work. It involved the examination of surveys that were conducted in companies that had the casual wear policies and its main focus was on the Bank of America. The second technique used was the Experimental Design, which is an investigative technique that provided maximum control. It enabled the relationship between the casual attitude and dressing at the work place and its possible impacts to the Bank of America in terms of employee productivity and customer relation, to be isolated and then measure accurately in a carefully controlled experimental environment (where there is the experiment and the control)

Methods of collecting Data

The type of data that was collected in this case was qualitative data which was structured; this kind of data was produced through closed questions. This involved the use of questionnaires, which made the process of data analysis easier and more efficient. The questionnaires were administered to the employees, customers, and even managers of the Bank of America. It important to note that the questionnaires can only allow the prescribe questions and restricted responses. The design of the questionnaire was largely influenced by the type of data analysis. Interviews were also used to collect the data, in this particular case the structured interview approach was used to get information directly from the bank employees, customers and managers.

Results of Analysis

These will be presented through the use of charts and graphical tables

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has demonstrated that ‘ getting casual at work’ poses a potential threat to the image of the Bank of America and can therefore the casual wear can not be adopted as a possible dress code for the bank, this is largely due to the fact that the disadvantages the casual wear holds outweighs the advantages of this concept of ‘ getting casual at work’. It is important for the bank employees to maintain a professional image by maintaining or putting on professionally recognized dresses. The female employee can dress in the upper class type of business wear that are mostly of natural fibers and respect cultural standards.

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