

Can your personal appearance hurt job prospects?

Thanks to the popularity of tattoos and body piercings, more employees are coming to work bedecked with body art. But if you're qualified for the job, does it matter if your tongue is pierced or you have a tattoo?

Perfect grooming should be your first assignment when you interview for a job, whether you want to be a CEO or an entry-level factory worker. To many employers first impressions still count and poor personal appearance and careless dress at an interview are major factors leading to the rejection of applicants.

Studies have proven that 55% of another person's perception of you is based on how you look. Therefore whether you like it or not, a job applicant's dress and grooming are important and sometimes even critical factors in an employer's hiring decision.

In a major survey of employers' attitudes to candidates' appearance at job interviews, the majority agreed that grooming strongly influences their decisions on who will be hired:

- 95% of employers interviewed said a jobseeker's personal appearance affected the employer's opinion of that applicant's suitability for a job.
- 91% said they believed dress and grooming reflected the applicant's attitude towards the company.
- 61% said dress and grooming had an effect on subsequent promotions as well.

And according to employers responding to *Job Outlook 2002*, an annual survey of employers hiring intentions from www.jobweb.com, there's a strong possibility that poor appearance, wacky dress and limp handshakes can knock you out of the running for a potential job.

In the study, employers were given a list of 10 possible physical attributes and rated each on how it would influence their opinions of a candidate's suitability for employment and how much.

Most employers agreed that your grooming habits (or lack thereof) count a lot. Grooming earned a 2.6 rating on a 3-point scale (where 1= no influence, 2= slight influence, and 3= strong influence).

Employers also indicated the following:

- Non traditional interview dress = 2.3
- Handshake = 2.1
- Non-traditional hair colour = 2.0

- Obvious tattoos = 2.0
- Body piercing = 2.0
- Unusual hairstyles = 1.9
- Earrings on male candidates = 1.6
- Beard = 1.2
- Moustache = 1.1

According to *jobweb.com*, "Level of influence also varies by type of organisation. Recruiters representing merchandisers and consulting firms, for example, are more likely to be strongly influenced by all items on the list - possibly because the jobs they offer may require a high level of customer contact. Recruiters from computer software development companies and electronic/electrical machinery manufacturers were more likely to say they overlook these things.

"That doesn't mean you can go walk into an interview with a mohawk haircut and not get the raised-eyebrow look from an employer. Or, that an employer won't overlook a petite butterfly etched on your ankle. On the other end of the spectrum, beards, mustaches, and earrings on male recruits seem to have little influence at all."

Something worth noting, a candidate's handshake - which has no visual impact - came out higher on the influence scale than more obvious attributes such as body piercing, obvious tattoos and unusual hairstyles.

Tattoos and body piercings were also the subject of a recent survey conducted by *Vault.com*.

More than half of the managers surveyed said they would be less likely to hire an applicant with visible tattoos and body piercings. Another 10 percent reported that they had disciplined workers because of tattoos or piercings. Nearly 20 percent believe that their career has been hindered as a result of their appearance.

“Your personal appearance can hurt your job prospects, but it doesn’t have to!”

However, there's a limit to how non-traditional you can get away with. There has to be some compromise. Nobody wants to employ someone that looks comical or ridiculous. Especially if you are constantly dealing with high-profile professional people. You have to be taken seriously. But most importantly, take yourself seriously and be confident in your own abilities. It works for me."