



Business News

Karen E. Klein:
In Box

Set dress code to fix attire problem

May 9, 2007

Dear Karen: Some of my employees dress sloppily or overly casual. What can I do to improve their appearance, especially when clients are at our office?

Answer: There are productive ways you can help your employees promote a credible image every day, whether your company's dress code atmosphere is business casual or more formal.

First, your company should have a dress code.

"The policy should not be confusing or vague. Rather, it should be detailed and understandable and explained to all employees by your human resources personnel or a professional," said Jamie Yasko-Mangum, an author and image consultant at Casselberry, Fla.-based Successful Style & Image Inc.

Introduce the dress code in a positive, not punitive, way.

"Convey to your employees that a smart and polished image projects confidence within themselves and credibility to others. You need to also

explain tactfully that sloppy, too casual, outdated, too young or too tight attire and unacceptable grooming do not promote a credible image and are unacceptable," Yasko-Mangum said.

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Enforce the dress code policy consistently, and if an employee shows up dressed inappropriately, don't let it slide. Although you may not have a client meeting scheduled, you never know whom your employees will have contact with during a business day, she said.

Lead by example. Employees sometimes start dressing down because management does. If you want your employees to care about their appearance, you need to make sure that you and your key executives are reflecting a smart and polished image too.

You may want to hire a certified image consultant who specializes in business etiquette to give a presentation to your employees on appropriate dress and grooming.

Broker can help in selling start-up

Dear Karen: I've recently launched an Internet business that offers a new service and product for digital photos. I plan on managing the site, but I expect large corporations to copy my ideas and offer the same products soon. Should I sell the company or try to compete with the big guys?

Answer: If your business is growing and you haven't seen any erosion from your competition yet, you may be well positioned to sell your business now, said business broker John Bates of Avalon Advisors in Dana Point.

Once larger corporations with bigger marketing budgets, established sales relationships and distribution channels have duplicated your new technology, it will be difficult for you to compete unless your company is able to scale up very quickly, Bates said. Being first with an idea is no guarantee that you will win out in the marketplace.

"Another reason to consider selling now is that interest rates are still low and qualified buyers will be able to find financing from a bank that offers SBA [Small Business Administration] loans. Next year might be a different story," Bates said.

There are several websites that advertise businesses for sale, including those of National Business Capital Services, at <http://www.nbcsllc.com>, and BusinessBroker.net, at <http://www.businessbroker.net>.

Bates, however, recommended that you hire a competent business broker to sell your company, especially because it will be tricky to get an accurate business valuation on your start-up.

"Brokers charge 10% to 12% but will make up the cost in price and save you a lot of heartaches in the process," he said.

Got a question about running or starting a small enterprise? E-mail it to karen.e.klein@latimes.com or mail it to In Box, Los Angeles Times, 202 W. 1st St., Los Angeles, CA 90012.

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