

The unwritten dress code of business

Chris Cooke - August 2022

As I sauntered into the store, Sam sees me coming. He has a pricing gun in his hand and is price checking the dairy case.

"You keep this up 'brudder' and I'm going to have my wife call your wife," he says with a grin.

Sam is Chaldean from Northern Iraq and speaks with a slight accent. He and his "bruders" own grocery stores in and around Detroit and on this particular summer afternoon he is working at his Pontiac store, a former A&P in a plaza that is part of the family business.

As I approach he puts his sleeve up against mine.

"My wife calls this business casual," he explains as he sizes me up.

His blue striped button-down shirt is identical to mine, his black pants and boots are the same.

It is 30 plus degrees outside and both of us are dressed in our "business casual" wear.

On my phone, I have a photo of Nathan Colquhoun dressed in his finest business casual wear. Fedora, sleeveless muscle shirt, cutoffs and flip flops.

"What is that?" Sam asks.

I explain and he gives a wave of dismissal and goes back to price checking.

Over at nearby Huron Foods in Waterford, Nina runs the money. She too is Chaldean. A Canadian with residency in the United States who can speak three languages, English, Chaldean and Arabic.

And as I arrive to deliver store copies and shelf talkers she has two conversations going with customers, a Chaldean man and an Arab woman. Nina's conversation flows among each of us in our own language.

She too is dressed in business casual. Black boots, black pants and a white blouse.

She signs my packing slip, provides a cheque and I'm off to customers in Flint and Saginaw.

My routine is the same. My customers have expectations of me, I have expectations of them and it is how we do business... casually.

I'm not dressed like a clown. They aren't dressed like clowns and our expectations aren't clownish.

Later, on the way home I stop near Port Huron for fuel before returning to Sarnia. I'm leaning against the rear fender when the fellow at an adjacent pump says "nice car".

He is wearing a tee shirt, shorts and work boots with a tape measure strapped to his belt.

I explain that it is seven years old with a manual transmission that was rebuilt following a major hit and the odometer reads more than 356,000 kilometers.

He wanders around the car and pauses.

"You a doctor?" he asks.

"No, and I don't play one on TV," I respond.

"What do you do"? he asks.

I sell commercial printing and get by with a little help from my friends.

He says he is a contractor, is doing well and it affords him a new truck every couple of years.

He didn't look like a clown. He didn't act like a clown and there was nothing clownish about him.

He's a contractor doing business. I'm a commercial printer doing business. And my customers are business people doing business.

Business casual if you will.

The unspoken rule of business has little to do with a written dress code.

It has nothing to do with "falling beyond the binary" as Brian White suggests.

It has everything to do with common sense and when a Sarnia city councillor dresses like a clown and shows up on national news making us all look like fools you know we have a problem.

I could be wrong about this but I'm usually not.

An unbiased look at the Sarnia Journal

Wannabee politician and green energy advocate Peter Smith is disheartened by the recent demise of the Sarnia Journal, the on again, off again weekly newspaper that appears to be off again. Supposedly on summer hiatus while it figures out its finances. Peter, who has graced the pages of First Monday promoting his hydrogen theories and the need for everything green views it as “a shame that something like First Monday gets enough revenue to continue publishing its biased and inflammatory rhetoric while the Journal fails for lack of support.”

“We deserve better,” Smith exclaims.

I should probably point out here that the Journal was the author of its own demise. It had debt and a flawed distribution system that included piling hundreds of copies at grocery stores, restaurants and retail locations throughout the city.

First Monday does the same but the majority of our circulation goes by Canada Post. Expensive but efficient and effective.

We also have opinions and we openly share them which our readers and advertisers apparently appreciate.

It is sad to see a publication fold but aside from six or seven local employees most of the Journal’s revenue went to support employees at printing plants in Brantford, Hamilton, Bracebridge and Mississauga.

As much as \$300,000 a year.

Since its inception in 2014 it has supported four printing companies (three have closed) and 120 employees who worked and paid taxes not in Sarnia but in Brantford, Bracebridge, Hamilton and Mississauga.

Over the past 30 years I have learned that in business decisions should be made for business reasons not personal dislikes.

When McLaren Press in Bracebridge closed in June we were ready and willing to help the Journal. Instead it drove by us to a printer in Mississauga.

If Mr. Smith is looking to contribute his retirement dollars to the Journal he may want to remember the three tenants of business.

Never let anyone come between you and your customers. Never run out of cash. And never forget the first two.

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