



New School Shoes

September is here and It's back to school across the country. Some areas may start a little earlier and some not until after Labor Day. Everyone is back to school in September.

Dressing for success started with the first day of school. While my mom sewed most of our clothes growing up, our back-to-school outfit was always special. It was store bought.

I fondly remember shopping for that first day of school outfit. It had to be perfect. Be it a dress or a skirt and blouse ensemble it even included new underwear and socks.

I also remember shopping for new shoes. It was time to be fitted properly at Buster Browns shoes for sturdy shoes. As I entered 6th grade and middle school, this is where the battle began.

My mom was always concerned that I had a tendency to walk a bit pigeon-toed and believed that I was best served with sturdy tie shoes. They were clunky and ugly. Some years they were brown, some years black and I never liked them. In fact, you might even say I hated them.



I was not given a choice, nor was I asked if I even liked them. They were the shoes I was going to wear to school. In those days sneakers were canvas Keds and worn only for gym class.

In elementary school this had not been such an issue. The year I was to go into middle school I balked. I desperately wanted Penny Loafers. I begged! I pleaded! I cried! In the end we came home with those awful tie shoes. I might have been appeased with saddle shoes but that was not even an option with my mom. She did not want to deal with the constant polishing of the white on the saddle shoe and that was that.

In my disappointment I hatched a plan.

A couple of days before the start of school, I put on my new back-to-school shoes, got on my bike, and dragged the toes in the dirt and gravel destroying the entire front of the shoes. The leather had huge holes in it and was beyond repair.

I was sure my plan would work. I concocted a story that I fell off my bike and that's how the shoes were ruined. That might have flown if it had only been one shoe but both shoes were evenly destroyed.

My stunt did not go over very well with my mom. It took everything she had to control her anger with me. Shoes were not cheap. We did not have a lot of money and now I had destroyed them.

- What was she going to do?
- How could she teach me a lesson?
- What would my punishment be?

She decided that I would go back to school wearing the shoes I had just destroyed. I was humiliated not only by having to wear the shoes I despised but now they were even uglier with the toes all torn up making me look like a total ragamuffin. She made me realize that she was smarter than I thought she was and that she was still in charge even if I thought I was more grown up than I really was.



A week later we were back at the shoe store. This time I did get my Penny Loafers. I was so happy as I put shiny new pennies in the leather slots. I happily went to school the second week with my new school shoes.

By the end of the week, I discovered that there was pain to getting what you want as I was sporting huge blisters on the back of my heels. There was indeed a learning curve to wearing Penny Loafers. A price I was willing to pay to feel dressed for success.



She had taught me a valuable lesson. I learned that it was important to take care of my things even if they were not exactly what I wanted now and that sometimes when you get what you think you want there is a price to pay.

As a society we have become more and more casual in the way we dress.

Parents still buy back-to-school clothes for their kids. The clothing is very utilitarian. Kids play in the same clothes they go to school in. Jeans, leggings, sweatpants, shorts, t-shirts, even belly shirts are worn routinely. I rarely see girls in dresses and skirts or boys in chinos these days.

- Are these casual clothes setting the stage for academic success?
- Are we teaching our children the proper mindset for learning in school as the outside is a reflection of the inside?
- Have we created a culture where the label is more important than wearing something appropriate?
- Are we allowing our children to wear age-inappropriate clothing to school?
- Has clothing and shoe status ignited even more bullying in school?



Private schools, charter schools, and schools around the world often have children wear school uniforms. This is a form of dressing for success that eliminates socio-economic, racial, and ethnic differences and creates an environment for academic achievement. School uniforms are something that is not universally accepted in the US even if it would simplify things for parents and kids.

When I was in school, we were not allowed to wear pants to school let alone jeans. Things changed when I was a Senior in High School. They were doing major construction at the school which had all the hallways open to the outside. It was freezing cold in the school and they allowed the girls to wear pants for the first time. Still no jeans.

I went away to college with a closet full of wool pants and skirts with matching sweaters, only to end up wearing 5 button bell bottom jeans with frayed bottoms, t-shirts, and an army jacket.

Once I entered the workforce, there was an expected dress code of what was acceptable or not acceptable. I briefly worked in an office before moving into outside sales. I quickly learned that people decide if they will do business with you in the first 5 seconds based on how you look.



How you dress in a business environment signals your confidence and competence at the same time. It does not matter if you are beautiful. It does not matter if you are tall or short. It does not matter if you are thin or curvy. It does not matter where you live, what color you are or your religious or ethnic background.

What does matter is that you are dressed for success in neat, clean, appropriate attire, your hair and nails are clean, and most importantly you wear a smile that invites others to want to do business with you.

Dressing for success shows others that you care about them because you take care of yourself. If you show up for a business meeting with stains on your shirt or tie, unpolished shoes, or badly wrinkled clothes the person you are meeting with will wonder if you will show the same disregard for the details in any project you are working on with them. They may question your commitment to excellence. They may say no even if your proposal is exactly what they are looking for.

From my perspective, I currently run my own business and work from home. I find that if I stay in my PJ's all day I am not nearly as productive as I am when I get dressed as if I were going to meet with a client.



When I go on a zoom, I am most engaged when I take a few minutes to put on a nice shirt, some jewelry, comb my hair, and put on some makeup even if it is only lipstick. On video I make sure to smile and nod, engage in chat and emoji comments. It is the respectful thing to do. If I look like a mess, I turn off my video and end up multitasking instead of paying attention.

I don't know about you, but I have power outfits that I wear when making big presentations or speaking. They are the clothes that I feel project the image of confidence and competence necessary to get and keep attention of my audience or client.

What are you communicating by the way you dress to go out to engage your clients?

Take a moment to consider how the way you look makes you feel about yourself.

I'm sure you have had the moment when you are out shopping at the grocery store or Costco when you run into someone you know from business, school, or charity work and you look like who done it and ran. I always want to run and hide, embarrassed and amazed that they even recognized me.

I am happy that many of the traditions from my family are tied to how we are dressed. We dress up for the holidays. We wear party clothes from Hawaiian Shirts for Bar-b-ques, Dirndl and Lederhosen for Oktoberfest and of course Green for St Patrick's.

Dressing for success is all about wearing the right costume at the right time. It's not about being overdressed or underdressed both situations are something you want to avoid. I tend to err on the side of being slightly overdressed. For example: business casual can mean different things in different corporate settings. For some jeans may be appropriate where I might wear Khakis instead.



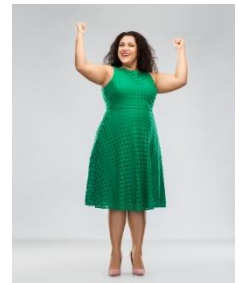
Dressing for success is important for building self-esteem.



There is a wonderful non-profit called Dress for Success that empowers women to achieve economic independence by providing a network of support, professional attire for interviews and work, and development tools to help women enter and thrive in work and life.

There are a number of events in September including donation drives and galas to support Dress for Success. There are currently 144 offices in 22 countries supporting this amazing organization. They have served over 1.2 million women supported by more than 12,000 volunteers.

- Have you retired from your corporate job?
- Is your closet filled with business suits and dresses that you no longer need or wear?
- Are there items in your closet that still have the tags on them that you will never wear?
- Is it time to clear out the items that are too big or too small?
- Is it time for you to clean out your closet and donate your business clothes to someone that can benefit from them.



If you have ever doubted that dressing for success makes a difference, take a moment to listen to some of the stories, make a donation or become a volunteer at:

[DressForSuccess.org](https://www.DressForSuccess.org)

You have the power to change lives.

And just maybe it started with your New School Shoes...



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