



THE CASUAL FRIDAY LIE

THE IRONY OF BUSINESS CASUAL IS THAT IT MAKES DRESSING FOR WORK SO OPPRESSIVE, WRITES **BENJAMIN LESZCZ**

It started with a zany shirt. In 1962, the Hawaiian Fashion Guild launched Operation Liberation, an aggressive campaign to coax the U.S. Senate to enshrine Aloha Fridays, a day for men to wear Hawaiian shirts to work. The campaign succeeded, and the seeds of “casual Friday” were sown. In 1992, Dockers nudged the still-nascent trend forward when it sent an eight-page *Guide to Casual Businesswear* manifesto to 25,000 HR managers across America.

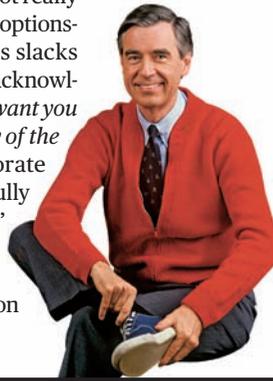
By 1997, Bill Clinton was leading the free world in a pair of pleated chinos, and on Friday, Sept. 27, of that year the New York Stock Exchange permitted

khakis on the trading floor for the first time in its 205-year history.

Today, business casual is *de rigueur*, yet the rite of institutionalized letting-loose endures. Part of the appeal is the thrill of the illicit. But then, if it’s in the company manual, it’s not really an act of rebellion. An energy-options-broker friend of mine swaps slacks for dark jeans on Fridays but acknowledges “it’s meaningless. *We want you to be individuals...on one day of the week,*” he says. “It’s a corporate trick to keep employees blissfully ignorant of their captivity.” Casual Fridays in that light aren’t just dishonest, pretending to encourage self-expression



STYLE ICON: MR. ROGERS
Business casual done right: shirt, tie, sweater, slacks. Nothin’ but net



while reinforcing conformity; they’re downright oppressive.

They’re also illogical: if it’s possible to do one’s job effectively in jeans, why bother with a suit at all? And if it’s not possible, why institutionalize subpar performance?

When a client’s involved, dressing to standard is non-negotiable. (See the *Curb Your Enthusiasm* episode in which a double-denim-clad lawyer reassures a potential client, “We wouldn’t *treat* you casually!”) But of the desk-bound serfs? According to Hajo Adam, a professor at Rice University’s Jones Graduate School of Business, it’s probably still worth dressing up. Last year, he led a study that found people’s capacity to pay attention improved when they wore a white lab coat. The phenomenon, which Adam calls “enclotted cognition,” affirms that clothes affect our behaviour, particularly when they have great symbolic weight. The meaning of a great suit may not be as specific as a lab coat or a hockey jersey, but it conveys a sense of seriousness, a commitment to doing things properly. It’s partly why a growing number of ad agencies and tech startups are instituting “formal Fridays”—and it’s a damn fine excuse for options brokers, or anyone else, to show up to work this Friday with carefully knotted ties.

It’s an approach Gay Talese would endorse. Every morning, the legendary American writer dons a suit, tie, cufflinks and bespoke shoes. Then he goes downstairs to write. “Putting on a beautifully designed suit elevates my spirit, extols my sense of self, and helps define me as a man to whom details matter,” he has written. “I’m in harmony with my highest ideals, my worship of great workmanship.”

Corbis: iStock

BEST PRACTICES

HOW TO DRESS DOWN TODAY *By Graham Roumieu*



DO wear a tie. Cotton and knit ties are more casual than silk



DO ditch the socks. It’s not for everyone but it works



DO leave the jacket at home. A cardigan looks just as great



DON'T get carried away. This is a place of work, after all