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You Gotta Go to School for That?



Library Uniforms and the Fashion Police

by Jerry Seay (College of Charleston) (seayt@cofc.edu)

It was one of those mornings when one really wonders why the day has to start so early anyway. I had emerged from the bed chamber, showered, and dressed myself in proper librarian attire. At least I thought I had dressed in proper librarian attire. My beloved wife encountered me in the hall as I started to leave for work and quickly dispelled any such illusions.

I belong to that fashion school that believes if everything is the same color, or at least somewhat close anyway, it matches. Fortunately for me, my Beloved is a card-carrying member of the South Carolina Chapter of the International Fashion Police (SCCIFP local 29445). This gives her the unique ability and power to discern immediately all fashion do's and don'ts and what matches or not. This comes in handy when I need to know if the fashion statement I am trying to make is acceptable. She has saved me on countless occasions when I very nearly caused a fashion scandal by doing such things as wearing tennis shoes with dress slacks (oh no!), or mixing my greens with my reds (aarrgg!), or even putting that very special silk tie with the wrong t-shirt (disaster!).

On this particular morning I had dressed smartly in khaki pants and what I perceived as a

matching yellow shirt. It gave me a kind of a gold-yellow glow. I liked this effect and told myself as much. This ensemble, I believed, properly demonstrated in the social hierarchical scheme my exalted position as an information professional and my ability to deliver, on demand, a vast plethora of material derived from cutting edge, technologically advanced sources. Thus imbued with this "gold-yellow glow" of information superiority, I set off for the halls of academia.

My Beloved saw me, however, beheld me with a quizzical look, and said simply, "Do you realize you look like a walking jar of mustard?"

Needless to say, having been compared to a mobile condiment, I immediately took stock of my attire. Though she had not completely disapproved of my fashion statement (such fashion crimes sometimes exact a heavy penalty), her characterization of me as a "walking jar of mustard" did give me pause. Possible ramifications raced through my brain. Did I really want to be known from that day on by such descriptions as "mustard man," or "librarian in yellow?" Would I soon be known campus-wide as "gold glow info Joe?"


The thought that I had come so close to

making such a drastic fashion faux pas and disgracing my profession shook me to the core. I began to wonder. (Not out loud though, because people would start to stare and point.) How could I avoid such fashion problems in the future? The answer came to me like a jolt from a runaway book truck — uniforms!

Now, most professionals cringe at the thought of wearing a uniform. Certainly, librarians, being the highly independent types that we are, would sooner lose our buns than our personal individuality by wearing a uniform and, thereby, censoring anyone's fashion statement.

But, just for the moment, think of, say, Star Trek. Think sleek, sexy, and well cut. Our uniforms would certainly not be boring. We are highly creative professionals. Our uniforms would be flashy and would reflect both our high degree of information professional status as well as our fashion prowess. Our uniforms would say, "we are sharp, we are knowledgeable, we are disciplined professionals with great tailors."

Our uniforms would be so effective that soon other professions like lawyers and computer programmers, taking their cue from the cutting edge field of the library world, would adopt uniforms unique to their professions. Of course members of the publishing profession, believing (incorrectly) that uniforms would interfere with their superior dancing skills, would at first drag their feet on this issue. But, eventually even they would respond. Soon private schools and the military would no longer have the uniform market cornered and professionals would be easily identified by their attire. No longer would one have to wonder, upon seeing a business-suited person, if that person was really a business person or just a librarian going on a job interview. Just think of the savings in misconceptions alone!

Obviously this idea deserves more thought and scrutiny than I alone can bring to bear. Much must be done. Indeed, an actual librarian uniform design must be considered, and I need help. I must refer you to the "walking jar of mustard" paragraph above if you need to be convinced of the danger of allowing me alone to design our uniform. I am therefore officially soliciting suggestions and designs for a really neat library uniform. This is an issue that simply must be addressed if we are to face our fashion problems head on. You may send your suggestions to me by snail mail in care of this fine publication or via e-mail at seayt@cofc.edu. I shall compile and analyze your thoughtful responses and report on them in an upcoming *ATG*. You do not have to be a librarian to respond though I can't imagine why you are not. All submissions will be criticized equally harshly by a guy who is NOT wearing mustard-colored clothes. Anyone have any Grey Poupon? 

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