

Dressing for Court

By Charles Kyle Kenyon, J.D.

How you dress can make a big difference in what happens!

I am often amazed at the way people dress for court. I suppose that if you watch the programs like “The People’s Court” you get the impression that the way to dress to go to court is about the way you would dress to go to the grocery store. Nothing could be further from reality! How you dress when you appear in court can make a big difference in what happens. This is true regardless of the kind of case or kind of court appearance.



The basic rule is to dress “conservatively.” Dress the way you would dress for your grandmother’s funeral if you wanted your mother to be happy with the way you are dressed. You are not dressing to impress your peers or get a date; this is more like dressing to get an office job.

Men should wear a white dress shirt, dress trousers, dress shoes, a tie and a jacket. (One exception is that if you are trying to convince them that you

are really broke, you can do without the jacket.) Defendants should avoid facial hair and dramatic hair cuts / styles. You want to look young and innocent. You do *not* want to look like someone who would turn heads clubbing.

Women should wear a comfortable dress or skirt of at least knee-length. A business suit is also appropriate. Bright colors should be avoided. Avoid dramatic hair cuts / styles.

Both should avoid jewelry other than a wedding ring. This is especially true of piercings but also applies to lodge pins, gold chains, or even cuff links.

The reason for this advice is the old adage about first impressions. The people who are deciding what should happen to you are generally very conservative. This is true of the judge, the jury, and the lawyer on the other side. They tend to go to bed worrying about whether they will read in the newspaper that they made a mistake in being too lenient to you and others they deal with. Your dressing conservatively sends that unconscious part of them a message that they don’t have to worry.

