



“This book is beyond a style bible; it’s a success bible for propelling you into your best corporate future!”
—FAITH POPCORN, CEO Faith Popcorn’s BrainReserve

STYLE

WHAT TO WEAR TO WORK

BIBLE

Lauren A. Rothman

Styleauteur



Praise for *Style Bible* and Lauren Rothman

“Journalists by definition are not supposed to be respectable, but, now that most of us are also on TV, we have to be at least presentable. With wit and good writing, Lauren Rothman calmly, sensibly and authoritatively shows us (and you) how.”

—Howard Fineman, Huffington Post editorial director
and NBC News analyst

“As a champion in the political style arena, Lauren Rothman knows the fashion secrets of the nation’s power players. Now the world is lucky enough to learn her simple tricks to dressing to be a champion in your own arena.”

—Alicia Quarles, Correspondent, E News

“Lauren Rothman’s *Style Bible* is a must-read for students who are creating a wardrobe for their first internship or job, and will serve as a valuable guide on using style to enhance one’s brand. Rothman shares her passion for style in a way that is approachable, practical, fun, and immediately relevant to students and professionals of all ages.”

—Mike Schaub, Ph.D., executive director,
Cawley Career Education Center, Georgetown University

“This book is beyond a style bible; it’s a success bible propelling you into your best corporate future!”

—Faith Popcorn, CEO Faith Popcorn’s BrainReserve

“Savvy and inspired, *Style Bible* is a solid guide for cracking corporate dress codes.”

—Janet Wozniak, former senior executive, Apple Computer

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To the best-dressed guys in my life, Jason and Judah

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INTRODUCTION

Shopping is a sport, and I am both coach and faithful cheerleader. I have lived, loved, and breathed clothes my entire life. All my memories include the outfit I was wearing at any given time; as a kid, I remembered the first day of every school year by what I wore!

Growing up, I loved watching my mom get dressed for work. She embodied my passion for style while also instilling in me a sense of professionalism at a very young age. Identifying and abiding by dress codes, especially growing up as a Cuban American in Miami, Florida, proved to be a life skill that I turned into a career. Whether I was headed into Publix on Le Jeune Road (which required a different dress code than the one in Kendall) for weekly grocery shopping with my family or on a college tour in New England (which called for very different dress than tours at Midwestern schools), I always shared my thoughts on what everyone should wear.

When I entered the workforce, the most exciting times for me centered around shopping for a wardrobe to match my internship or job. I bought my first suit at the BCBG store in Pentagon City Mall in 1997 when I was living in Washington, D.C., for the summer and interning on Capitol Hill. Enamored with business attire, I felt a delicate balance of femininity and power in those stylish wide-leg black pants, black skirt, and fitted suit jacket. I also invested in a camel suit and supplemented with tops from Banana Republic in Georgetown, dresses and accessories from Joyce Leslie in New York City, and scarves I found at street vendors. I re-wore and restyled my modest wardrobe that summer and absolutely loved the challenge. In fact, those staples

reappeared as I dressed for my own journey from the fashion closet at *Elle* magazine to the luxury boutiques of Tel Aviv's fashion district. As my clients can attest, my style philosophy of combining high and low pieces hasn't changed much!

I am honored and privileged that so many clients have let me into their closets and into their lives. I have been dressing men and women professionally for the last ten years, and I've had the opportunity to expand the style awareness of hundreds of people and lead them into the world of fashion. Working one-on-one with individuals and presenting style seminars at Fortune 500 companies through my fashion consulting company, Styleauteur, have taught me how to encourage people to embody their commitment to being better dressed. Though we may not like it, we are all judged by our image. From peers to bosses, everyone has an opinion.

As I often discuss in my column on style and politics in the *Huffington Post*, "Fashion Whip," it is important that conversations include one of the most common modes of nonverbal communication: clothing! When you are successful, you should look successful, and this book will define a "successful look" in a customizable way. Chances are very good that I've dressed someone your shape, your size, and with a job similar to yours. Whether I am on national television discussing why it's empowering for women when First Lady Michelle Obama shows off her arms or on a radio show talking about the importance of upping your style quotient, I offer tips and anecdotes that help the everyday person with the balancing act of managing his or her appearance.

Style Bible: What to Wear to Work is a user-friendly handbook for the modern professional. Our culture has reached a state of complacency with respect to style and appearance. Current as well as future leaders are missing the opportunity to experience how good it can feel to "dress up" and how much impact exceptional style gives their communication. Style at work should be professional. What happened to being polished? This book takes a stand and helps you put your best-dressed self forward.

You may or may not want to go to work on a given day but the fact is,

aside from the occasional “mental health day,” most of us have to report for duty. And, if you have to get dressed, you might as well do it right. Be proud to dress to impress, and always dress for the job you want, not just the fabulous one you already have!

The *Style Bible* will help anyone who interacts in a professional environment—intern to CEO, PTA mom to boardroom diva. Your style of dress can signal income, occupation, social class, ethnic and religious affiliations, attitudes toward comfort, and level of confidence. It is possible for only one item to signify who you are according to any and all of these measures, so make sure you choose the outfit or accessory that is right for you at any given time. Clothing and style convey your message and are a big part of the overall visual cue you present to your public.

Dressing for work is less formulaic today, and there is more room for employees to express their individuality. You can become a power player and convey authority and seriousness with interesting cuff links, a statement necklace, or fun shoes that will keep your look unique. The casually dressed executive is a new figure in our society, and we need to define and better understand dress codes so they can guide us in times of uncertainty.

What does your style say about you at the office? It's possible that the perception of you is completely different from the reality of who you are, and you want to help manage your messaging. Do you look approachable and warm or young and inexperienced? Professional and uncomplicated or just frumpy? Well dressed or overly trendy?

Achieving style is a process. I won't always tell you what to do (though some clients would love that!) but I will help you listen to your own voice and meet your own goals. People want instructions. They want to look good. I make style and fashion education easy, empowering, and time saving. I raise awareness about topics easily ignored: Are you wearing the right size for your shape? Is your space effectively organized for ultimate dressing success? Have you let yourself go because it's too overwhelming to figure out what works?

As much as I love fashion, trends, and even fads, my advice to

clients is based on tried-and-true combinations that work in professional environments. I have interviewed countless executives, human resource professionals, and senior management at many different companies, and I have learned their visions of successful style. That's what I teach my clients, whether they are twenty-five or sixty-five, and that is what I will convey here in my book. My lessons are not about being part of the in crowd; the principles I offer here simply make sure that you don't stand out by looking too frumpy, too old, too young, or like you just don't care.

Your style quotient is always the most challenging part of dressing well, but the most important part of your style is to be neat and appropriate. And, just by choosing this book, you are demonstrating that you are willing to learn more. In chapter 1, you will learn why style matters. Next, in chapters 2 through 5, we will review fashion basics and accessories, as well as beauty and grooming habits. Chapter 6 identifies and defines dress codes in different regions and industries. Chapters 7 through 9 are favorites for many of my clients: you will learn what constitutes a proper fit, best practices for shopping your closet, and tips on how to hit the stores. Last, we shine the spotlight on you and discuss the importance of your appearance in our hyper-connected, socially driven, virtual world.

This book follows the same organic order I use in my presentations; it can be read sequentially or consulted as a reference. The individual pieces of advice are just as valuable as the whole. Men and women have a few separate sections, but most of the general advice applies to both genders.

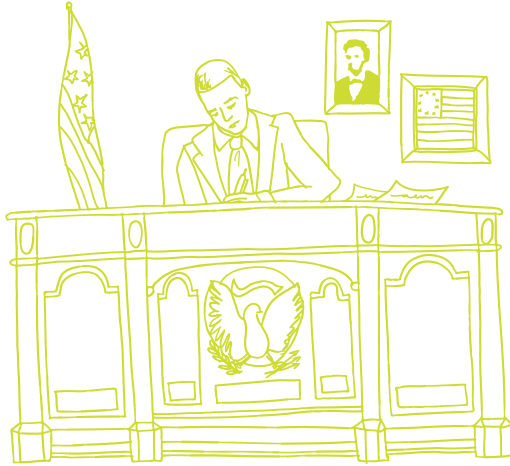
The most difficult hurdle to overcome when matching your shape and style in the fitting room is your own mind set. My clients often think the hard part is getting into a dress or a pair of pants. Really, the most challenging thing for them is seeing what I see: that they look incredible! I hope the anecdotes throughout the book inspire you to transformational moments; to help protect my clients' privacy, some of the stories are based on recurring experiences I've had as I built my business rather than on specific individuals. Please also note that I was

not compensated for mentioning any stores or brands in *Style Bible*; these are truly retailers I believe in and have been shopping with clients for years. Dressing people for work is the riskiest area of fashion, and I've had the pleasure of watching style awareness evolve in even my most risk-averse clients. It might sound counterintuitive, but the hardest part of this process is helping people understand what works for them, and the easiest is injecting style. Let the lessons begin!

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STYLE MATTERS



A first impression is formed in less than five seconds. Do you wear your jewelry in matched sets? Dated! Do you always choose sensible shoes that don't match your outfit? Old! Do you have a stain or a hole in your clothing and think no one will notice? Sloppy! Do you think flip-flops are okay to wear to work? Young! Entitled!

Do you think this doesn't apply to you, or that you don't need help? The amount of time you have to impress upon someone that you are right for the job passes as quickly as an eye roll. Your five seconds could happen on the way into an interview, as you casually pass someone in the hall, or when you enter a conference room for that important meeting. In business, your clothes are armor that helps communicate a message of strength.

You may even be guilty of giving a candidate “elevator eyes” yourself, quickly looking at a person from head to toe, mentally reviewing every part of her look: “I have to ask her about her shoes!”; “Her hair looks like a bird's nest!”; “I wonder if that's from the new collection that just launched at Target...” We all receive (and give) the judging look regularly, whether we realize it or not. And though you might think that women are more guilty of this particular act of assessment than men, men notice the details as well.

First impressions set the stage for future possibilities. Control your image—it is yours to define. Look in a full-length mirror when you dress and see yourself as the world sees you—is your skirt too short, or are your pants wrinkled? Catch the misstep before others do. What image do you project? Is it the one you hoped to craft for yourself? Life is not a dress rehearsal, so be appropriate and on point the first time around. A professional career is full of first impressions, and nonverbal communication makes a powerful and lasting impact. As the saying goes, dress for the job you want, not just the job you have.

Matching a wardrobe to your career is important. Don't let your

clothes undermine your achievements. If you have indeed climbed the ladder of success, dress like it! Don't let your awkward, inner middle-schooler knock down your confidence. We don't need that kind of self-sabotage on our way to the top. I know many highly accomplished women who have come to me in ill-fitting clothes from twenty years ago. We all get lost at transitional points along the way; come back to the mirror and have a second look.

If you want to or need to, hire someone to help shape your image, or just dedicate time to once again finding the person in the mirror you remember. Professionals can be helpful in developing your style process: identifying the right haircut and finding a style that is both manageable and fashionable are empowering. Makeup experts can show you how to camouflage blemishes and accentuate your skin with the right colors and products, shaving off years. As you begin to invest in developing your own style, find the experts who can help. Some of the best compliments I have received are from fashion-challenged clients who expect sessions with me to be like visiting the dentist: a tedious necessity for their career health. Years later, they are hooked and are scheduling me to shop with them on their birthday instead of getting a massage. These amazing partnerships with men and women from all walks of life have informed my own path and have led me to write *Style Bible: What to Wear to Work*.

On the other end of the career spectrum, those just starting out don't have any excuse for sloppiness. Great style doesn't have to come with a high price tag. Fast-fashion chains and department stores make professional clothing easily accessible. Everyone needs to pay attention to his image. Take advantage of free style resources online and visit your favorite stores for appearances and seminars from fashion experts. Malls are among my favorite places; I could pitch a tent and never leave! At a great mall, you can shop for everything you need from head to toe (on a variety of budgets), enjoy delicious snacks (I can often be found at Nordstrom Ebars across the country), and then leave with a great manicure or blowout.

My style philosophy is simple: you deserve to care about the way

you look. It's not superficial to look in the mirror and confirm that what you're wearing actually fits well and is flattering. Clothing is a powerful form of communication that everyone has access to: use it to communicate confidence, a healthy self-regard, and professionalism. I have been fortunate to help shape the image of many people, ranging from high-profile politicians to wounded soldiers returning home; college students searching for their first job to seasoned executives climbing the ladder of success; and millennial tech gurus to CEOs, and my core concept remains the same. Style matters.

Style matters as much as substance. Are you dressing passively? When you walk into work every day be aware that your ensemble didn't happen by mistake. Your clothing didn't magically appear in your closet by a genie's wish. You choose what to wear each day. You tried that outfit on in a dressing room at a store, paid for it, drove it home, hung it in your closet, and decided to wear it to work. With all those steps under your control, you are ultimately responsible for how you look at work. You were not under any other influence—at least not for every part of that scenario. Own your image the same way you own your work product.

Executive Presence

Executive presence is a key quality of leadership. True leaders exude a commanding presence built upon self-confidence and a well-put-together appearance that communicates authority as soon as they enter a room. Leaders who possess executive presence aren't necessarily the most fashion forward, but they are charismatic. Their signature styles indicate an overall attention to their appearance, with well-cared-for skin, hair, nails, and teeth, in addition to a polished look. Executive presence encompasses substance (you are a go-to expert), poise (your body language, facial expressions, and posture show you are at ease), and both public speaking and listening skills, in addition to an attractive personal style and appearance. A leader who exudes this type of presence conveys passion and energy, stands tall, makes eye contact, and communicates effectively.

Executive presence is viewed as embodying leadership potential, and the way you dress, as well as the way you carry off a look, is integral to that presence. Both are important for recognition and advancement at work. A typical frustration I hear from employees, many of whom possess a number of these executive qualities, involves getting passed over for a promotion. The most difficult issue to address in my conversations with them is appearance—some don't recognize its importance, while others find the whole thing simply too confusing. Senior managers often share with me their view that a person who looks like a hot mess will be perceived as one. Ill-fitting or stained clothing, as much as disorganized files or an office in disarray, communicates a lack of attention to detail. This is not a quality befitting a true leader or someone seeking promotion.

One of my clients, Frank, asked me to help him shop for a suit for his boss's wedding. It was a destination affair in the Caribbean, and he was confused by the "resort casual" dress code, especially given that coworkers and managers would be in attendance. He and his wife were excited to get away and take advantage of the opportunity to enjoy a much-needed vacation—Frank and Lisa had a one-year-old child at home and were ready for a rare weekend of sleeping in.

I found Frank a fabulous fitted navy linen blazer to pair with tan dress slacks (a slim fit here was key for Frank's trim physique), and a light-blue windowpane-patterned shirt, polished off with a brown belt, brown loafers, and a pocket square in a brighter blue to contrast with his dress shirt. Bam! Frank looked marvelous—so marvelous, in fact, that not only did he receive many compliments, but one managing partner at the firm joked that if Frank dressed like this more often (stylish and polished, that is, not resort casual) he would get pulled into more meetings. Frank, a self-professed brainiac, was actually a bit appalled.

Anyone in Frank's position needs to get over himself. If he is truly ready to invest in his future and to actively pursue a promotion, he can't just let his paperwork do the talking. The Franks of the world need to dress the part. They are more likely to be invited into a client

or senior-management meeting at the last minute if their bosses know they will represent the firm positively. If looking polished helps get a seat at the table, then check the mirror before you leave the house. It's that simple. Should you really let yourself attend a big meeting in a wrinkled shirt, stained pants, and scuffed shoes?

"Do you have a full-length mirror that you look in before leaving the house?" I ask that question in every one of my seminars, and you would be amazed to learn that only a fraction of attendees raise their hands. Unacceptable! I am very flexible on fashion guidelines—often giving perpetrators of fashion faux pas the benefit of the doubt. But I will not bend on the issue of making an effort. I have heard every excuse in the book: "I will start caring when I lose ten pounds," "when I get a raise," or "when I don't have kids running around." But the reality is, we all get too busy to care about our appearance at work until a problem arises. If you don't look at yourself in a full-length mirror, how can you possibly see yourself the same way others do?

Frank went to work every day looking as tired as he felt. His coworkers thought, "The baby must not be sleeping through the night, poor guy," while Frank thought his rolled-up sleeves were a "tell," showing others he'd been slaving away at his desk. These vastly different interpretations show that perception doesn't always match reality. Looking like a hard-working guy was Frank's style philosophy, so he shunned a well-tailored ensemble in favor of a schlumpy, ill-fitting look à la Ron Paul in the 2012 GOP race. But Frank needs the approval of partners in his firm (who dress in custom suits), not the everyday American. To ensure his future success, he needs to address his appearance to the appropriate audience.

I have worked with more than fifty companies, assessing style complaints and walking the office floors with management to understand the infractions they regularly identify in the workplace. I decipher and update dress codes, helping companies to understand them and to implement them effectively. Management's challenge with employee dress, in almost every field, is hardly about personal taste. It's about the overall lack of understanding many employees have regarding professional image

and the impact their style choices have on corporate branding. Complaints range from employees coming to the office seemingly dressed for a Saturday garage cleaning to employees who appear oblivious that their clothing is too tight, too short, or too sheer for the workplace. An inappropriate clothing selection may not earn you a public reprimand, but it will definitely hinder your climb up the corporate ladder. In order to be taken seriously, set higher expectations for yourself.

Dress codes hold us accountable. They help us understand company culture and they provide proper style boundaries. If you work in creative fields such as public relations, fashion, or new media, those boundaries may be more flexible, allowing you to dabble in more daring fashion trends—your outer appearance is a reflection of the inner you. If, on the other hand, you work in a more traditional office setting like banking, consulting, accounting, or even government, it is your level of polish that will help set you apart. If your style is stifled in a conservative setting, try directing your love of edginess toward accessories.

Private schools, the military, and even retail establishments often ask their students and employees to adhere to a uniform dress code, creating a living brand ambassador both within the company and externally. My first job taught me to harness the power of a professional image. I worked for Faith Popcorn's BrainReserve, a futurist marketing consultancy in New York City, where black (skirt or pant) suits and matching pins (they resembled a planet—you could choose your color) were the standard anytime we hit the road to work with clients or even in-house when we entertained. While this uniform may have been viewed as an infringement on our style freedom, Faith had a vision: five people moving toward you in black power suits with matching lapel pins exuded a gravitas that encouraged clients to cut a check for some very unique trend-forecasting services. When a company creates a dress code, it reveals much about its culture. More than just a policy, the code is both a reflection of and an inspiration for the people who work there. A well-written dress code can improve morale and stimulate corporate pride.

In the end, Frank realized the disadvantage of always looking like a

slob at the office. Though talented and driven, he had been passed over for promotion more than once. He still may not care about fashion, per se, but he has learned that his image does matter. A little fashion therapy went a long way with Frank. He now understands he can't afford to allow others to believe that he doesn't care or that he's not happy to be there. He loves his job. He may not have enlisted an expert to help him dress for everyday life, but he recognized a shopping paralysis when dressing for his boss's wedding. Together, we created a signature style that was accessible given his time and his budget, a style that coworkers would come to respect and even admire: dark suits, tailored, slim-fit, iron-free dress shirts (best shortcut ever), and polished shoes. Nothing fancy. But it helped get him a promotion in less than a year.

Fashion Is a Foreign Language

Fashion is its own language. As with any language, it has colloquialisms that you need to learn. (The last thing you want when practicing a language is to ask for a Diet Coke and be directed to the bathroom.) Your clothing is speaking, whether you like it or not, sending messages to your colleagues about where you came from (college or competing law firm) and where you want to go (corner office or mailroom). Whatever your message, it's vitally important that you avoid confusion.

This book will help you become fluent in fashion. It is a language I have been speaking since I said my very first word, *agua*, outside Neiman Marcus at Bal Harbor in Miami, Florida. I have always chased trends, played with style, and helped people identify ways to make these concepts relevant to their lifestyle. Many senior-level executives and high-profile clients I work with don't love fashion or clothing, but they do like what a positive image can deliver—confidence and leadership opportunities that lead to constituent votes, book sales, promotions, a bigger fan base, an anchor desk, and even success in their personal lives.

I certainly wouldn't want one of my clients dressing only to impress another person, because her look may come off as inauthentic. In Hollywood, it's normal to wear six-inch stilettos so the paparazzi get their shots as A-listers walk from the car to a club. In real life, our shoes have to keep on walking, and while I abhor the word "sensible" when applied to shoes, I certainly endorse combining style with comfort. They can coexist.

In order to manage your professional image and style, you should create a personal brand message. You are, after all, a walking billboard (good posture helps!) for your brand, and your nonverbal communication helps highlight the best you have to offer. Ultimately, your crafted message should read as modern and professional. Stay away from distracting messages: too young, too old, too sexy, sloppy, or tired. Maintain a hair- and skin-care routine that does not detract from your image and a wardrobe that signals an understated power. The most challenging part of this process is identifying your personal style and making it relevant and appropriate in the workplace. The styles you like and those that work for you are not always one and the same. For example, you might love cowboy boots with a suit, but that doesn't mean you should be wearing them, unless it helps you win votes with constituents. While there are a few jobs for which a highlighted, signature style like this will create positive buzz, for the majority of jobs it will simply distract from your message. Wearing a bolo tie on an interview is not appropriate in most corporate settings—even if it's *so* you. Maintaining a unique flair is appropriate, but keep it minimal—brightly colored socks, a pocket square, or, for women, a single piece of memorable jewelry.

Often we dress without ever looking in the mirror, just imagining that we will be perceived a certain way. For example, you may think, "This jacket is red, a real power piece." Or, if you are walking into a business-formal situation, you might imagine that because you're wearing a suit it automatically affords you equal status. However, if your ensemble is ill-fitting or appears awkward, it will not work for you. Our own perception of how we look does not always match what others see.