

Dress to impress

By Rick Moorman

One of the most important memberships an international businessman can have – at least, as far as most businessmen are concerned, is a connection with some kind of business club. It is, after all, of vital importance that you build a network up in an informal environment. Under the banner of casual friendship afforded by such a club, the clever operator can lay groundwork for future deals away from the office and away from home.

One of the most common, and enjoyable business clubs can be found at the average golf course. If you visit any golf club, whether you are in the Netherlands or somewhere abroad, you will almost certainly find an event put on by a local business group. In the spirit of fair disclosure, I must admit that I am also a member of one of these justifiable excuses to have some fun while still taking care of business. While I am there, what I notice is the diversity of nationalities doing the same.

In the Netherlands, the Japanese golfers stand out. They are always properly dressed and move through the course in rapid, efficient tempo before grabbing a quick snack and heading back to the office. The Dutch businessman is of another calibre entirely. He takes his time, moving slowly from hole to hole, networking, but alas, standing out because of their clothing. The Dutch golfer often arrives at the course clad in the same clothes he uses for gardening, a physical embodiment of the old Dutch expression “Doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg” (keep it plain and simple and you’re crazy enough), and it only gets worse at the group dinner after the game.

I was recently at such a dinner. The dress code on the invitation was given as *Tenue de Ville*. For those in the know, that means a dark suit or similar combination that, no matter what, would include a tie. Unfortunately, the code listed in the invitation was lost on many of those who received them. If you are in another country, and there is a significant number of non-Dutch attending, the *Tenue de Ville* dress code has a good chance of success, but in this country it seems like people read their invitations and think: “great dress code, but that’s not for me.” At this dinner, not even 20% of the 160 people present had embraced the dress code. Now, I have already explained in this column that, in business, the first impression is definitely the most important, but even in a more relaxed atmosphere, you, as a businessman, will be judged on your appearance. That is why golf, and informal gatherings at the golf club are perfect for getting to know people better, through behaviour, conversation and athleticism, but also through your interpretation of a host’s requests. To better prepare anyone in need of assistance in interpreting such social protocols, I would like to provide a quick reference to the basic nature of dress codes commonly employed at business functions in and out of the golf club.

Tenue de Ville, which I have already described, is the same thing as Lounge Suit. Black Tie, of course, means a tuxedo with a bow tie is appreciated, and it wouldn’t hurt to remember your patent leather shoes.

With Smart Casual, you can assume that a smooth suit-jacket and cotton pants will do – certainly no jeans allowed – and a good casual shirt with no tie is acceptable.

Should the organisation, in all its wisdom, ask you dress in something *festive*, then, as far as I’m concerned, you should wear what you want. You might as well put on a party hat and carry around one of those ‘musical blow outs’ people take to children’s birthday parties, because you cannot work with a dress code like that.

I hope this helps and I wish you success at your next business club event.