

Why Wearing A Hoodie May Get You More Respect Than A Suit



[SunGardAS Contributor](#), SunGardAS

Dressing for success just took a new turn. Whether it's a CEO wearing a hoodie or a business professor in red sneakers, people who stand out from the crowd with nonconforming clothes or behaviors are more highly regarded than others, according to [new research from Harvard Business School](#).

From Steve Jobs' trademark black turtleneck and jeans to Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's hoodie, nonconforming clothes have long been associated with visionary leadership. In fact, casual dress is now so common among tech leaders that Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer actually stood out from the crowd because of her penchant for high-end fashion: One writer called her an "unusually stylish geek."

No matter how they dress, what all these leaders have in common is a willingness to break the norm and disregard workplace expectations. These individuals are seen as having the guts [to do their own thing](#), reported Harvard Business School associate professor Francesca Gino, a co-author of the study.

"Early in life, we all learned that there are tangible benefits from following social rules," Gino wrote [in Scientific American](#). "As a result, across organizations and industries, people make a significant effort to learn and adhere to dress codes, etiquette, and other written and unwritten codes of behavior."

Yet, deviating from accepted dress codes or social norms may have surprising status benefits, Gino said. While some investors were irritated by Zuckerberg's casual attire when Facebook went public -- and some feminists were frustrated by Mayer's [spread in Vogue](#) -- the study repeatedly found that non-typical clothing and behaviors actually make others think more of a person, not less.

But what if you're not a CEO? Does non-conformist behavior still create a positive impression when you're further down the chain of command? According to Gino's study, the answer is yes.

In one experiment, two shoppers patronized luxury high-end boutiques in Milan. One shopper wore gym clothes and the other wore a dress and fur. Shop clerks predicted the woman in gym clothes would spend more money in their stores.

Similarly, when Gino tried pairing red sneakers with a business suit to teach an

executive seminar at the prestigious Harvard Business School, participants thought she charged higher fees and had more clients than when she wore more traditional shoes.

That's because there's a "social cost" to veering from established norms, Gino said. Nonconformists are typically seen as having enough clout that they can afford to ignore the costs of nonconformity.

So should we all go out and get a pair of colorful shoes? It depends on the audience. The "red sneakers" effect, as Gino calls it, works best in settings where people are unfamiliar with you, and where some sort of formal conduct is expected.

So the next time you meet a new client, give a presentation to a new audience, or just want to boost your social status a few notches, consider trying something different on for size. You may be surprised by the results.

Lisa Wirthman is a freelance journalist who writes about business, sustainability, public policy, and women's issues. Her work has been published in The Atlantic, USA Today, U.S. News & World Report, Fast Company, Investor 's Business Daily, the Denver Post and the Denver Business Journal.