The Necktie Is Making an Office Comeback

Callum Borchers, Wall Street Journal 4/12/24

The boss wears a hoodie. The intern wears a necktie.

For those who spent years, even decades, with silk knots around their necks, the business-casual movement has been a breath of fresh air, literally.

But for those professionals never subjected to stuffy dress codes, transitioning from college campuses to nearly-as-informal workplaces can feel like missing a rite of passage. Some 20-somethings are embracing the necktie to project gravitas and show personality with a pattern or pop of color.

Women are getting in on the tie renaissance, too, saying it helps command a room.

Ryan Klein, 21, sported a suit and tie daily as a Republican congressional intern the past two summers. The senior at Pennsylvania State University reached back in time for hand-me-down neckties his great-grandfather wore from the 1940s to 1960s, plus a few new purchases.

Often Klein was more decked-out than lawmakers and senior aides.

He was surprised, during one of his first weeks on Capitol Hill last year, when House and Senate leaders wore dress sneakers to a meeting in the Oval Office. Then he remembered a viral photo of open-collared world leaders at a G-7 summit in 2022. Dressing down is now the norm, he realized, even at the highest echelons of power.

That may change as President-elect Donald Trump and his signature shiny neckties return to Washington. Klein admires Trump’s business-formal look because it conveys seriousness about the job, he says. But he wears ties mostly because of how they make him feel.

“It gets me in that mindset of, ‘Hey, I’m going to do something professional today,’” says Klein, who plans to work in Washington after graduating in six months.

Neckties may never regain prepandemic levels of popularity, but sales data show signs of resurgence. After tumbling to $61.4 million in 2020, U.S. tie imports rebounded to $106 million by 2022, according to the most recent data from trade-tracking website Observatory of Economic Complexity.

Tie on neck, tongue in cheek

Much of Wall Street has officially been tie-optional for almost a decade. JPMorgan Chase was among the first to codify a business-casual dress code in 2016. Other firms followed suit.

Nevertheless, associates often get the hint that they’re still expected to wear suits and ties, says David Murray, co-founder of New York City menswear store Grey Clothiers. The young employees conform…sort of.

Perhaps you’ve seen men in their 20s whose suits appear borrowed from someone twice their size. It isn’t bad tailoring; it’s intentional. [...]

Several young men and women who don ties confirmed that half the fun is subverting an old symbol of masculine status. They relish tweaking the power tie by wearing it rebelliously or making it feminine. [...]

I noticed NBC’s Maria Taylor wearing a Prada tie on “Sunday Night Football” a few weeks ago and subsequently learned ties for women are on-trend this fall. (Thank you, Fashion and Elle magazines, for the education.)  “When you walk into a room and you’ve got on a tie, like a man might do, you’re making a statement: I’m here to be taken seriously,” she says.