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Ask Amy:



Amy Dickinson

Clothes-challenged husband leaves wife cringing

Published July 17, 2007

Dear Amy: My husband is a terrible dresser.

For the most part, I ignore his bad taste in clothes, but it's getting harder to ignore.

Sometimes, I have to step in to keep him from embarrassing himself. He is almost 50, but he thinks he is a hip college student instead of a professional. He often wears T-shirts that are simply inappropriate for a man his age, and he is cheap too.

He is looking for a job, and I recently had to stop him from carrying a briefcase he'd received as a conference giveaway, emblazoned with a competing company's logo, to an interview. Why anyone would consider carrying a cheap conference giveaway to a job interview is beyond me, but it never occurred to him that the interviewer might care!

I've had to talk him out of wearing political buttons to weddings, and jeans and sneakers to a funeral.

I like to think I'm a good dresser, but over the years I dress more and more plainly because I'm afraid that if I look good when we're together, I'll draw attention to just how bad my husband looks. I buy him some clothes for Christmas and his birthday or if I see a good bargain when I'm out shopping, but I can't afford to buy all of his clothes.

Ignoring the problem is not making it go away, it's only making him bolder and thus look more and more stupid when he goes out.

Is there anything I can do, other than be thankful that I don't have bigger problems?

-- The Cringing Wife

Dear Cringing: So far, you admit to buying clothes for your husband and intervening when he's on his way to a job interview, wedding or funeral. Furthermore, you admit to dressing down your own wardrobe to not draw attention to his clothing.

If that is ignoring the issue, then I'd like to know what intervening is.

You are treating your husband like a 5-year-old. He is responding by acting like one.

You shouldn't change your style to suit your husband; sinking to the lowest common denominator doesn't serve anyone's best interest.

When you see your husband commit a fashion faux pas, you could ask, "Are you sure you want to wear that?" If his answer is "yes," then let it lie. (If your husband doesn't realize the impact and importance of dressing appropriately in this tight job market, then it's time he figured it out.)

A book that he might benefit from is "Look, Speak, & Behave for Men: Expert Advice on Image, Etiquette, and Effective Communication for the Professional," by Jamie L. Yasko-Mangum (Skyhorse Publishing, 2007). Though this book is intended for the younger professional, your husband could use a refresher course, offered by a third party.

Dear Amy: I recently had a baby with my fiance. He has children from a previous marriage. He and his ex have joint custody, and we often have the kids.

As far as holidays such as Christmas, Father's Day and birthdays, should that be the mother's responsibility or mine for "buying" presents for Dad from the kids? His ex tends to not do anything like that.

I just don't know how that works.

-- Confused Stepmom

Dear Confused: Even if your guy's ex does the decent thing (and it sounds like she doesn't), you should also help the kids give gifts to their dad. It would be fun and a nice bonding experience for all of you if you took them on a "secret" shopping excursion, or if you worked together on a super-top-secret craft project for their father.

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