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WHEN YOU COME TO COURT

Every day in court, there are hundreds of examples of people who obviously do not take court seriously. ***Whether or not you take court seriously, the judge does, and I do.*** In the worst cases, the judge may actually tell someone to wear different clothes the next time they come if they want to be taken seriously. So that you're not embarrassed by having the judge tell you to go home and change, and in order to do everything you can to help your case, please follow these suggestions. They really can make a difference.

BE ON TIME

Calendar call begins at 9:00. The deputies begin giving instructions at 9:00 or before 9:00. If the District Attorney calls your name and you're not there, he or she will generally not call you again until the end of the morning, and sometimes not until the end of the day. Also, if you are there a little early, it will give us a chance to review your case before court, since sometimes I do not have a chance to meet a client face-to-face until court day. Sometimes, I have to be in two or three courtrooms on the same day, so I may not be there to answer up for you when your name is called.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY

The judge usually wears a robe, or sometimes a suit. Attorneys wear suits. We do this out of respect for the courts, much the same as you dress nicely for church on Sunday, out of respect. As a general rule, dressing for church would be a good guideline for what to wear to court, but you don't need to dress real fancy, even if you dress up for church. In any case, you should look more like you're on the way to church than on the way to a barbecue or the club.

I realize not everyone has a big wardrobe, and you have to make do with what you have. However, there are several **things you should not wear to court**, if at all possible:

- **NO HATS.** No do-rags or other headgear. The deputies will make you take off hats, 'do-rags, even sunglasses on your head. It's easiest just to leave them home or in the car.
- **NO SHORTS.** Wear long trousers, or for ladies, trousers or a skirt. If you wear a skirt, it should not be one that attracts attention. Yes, it can get hot in the courtroom, but looking respectable can make a difference in whether the judge believes you.
- **DON'T SAY MORE THAN YOU MEAN TO.** Avoid clothes that have messages on them, whether it's a sports jersey with a team name, a T-shirt with a marijuana leaf, or a shirt you thought was funny. Court is not the place for making those statements. What do you think the judge will think if you're wearing a red T-shirt that says "My Common Sense Took the Day Off"?
- **NO UNDERWEAR.** T-shirts are underwear, even if people often wear them out, and boxers hanging out may be street, but it doesn't buy you credibility in the courtroom.

ADVICE ON GETTING READY FOR COURT

- **PUT IT TOGETHER.** Tuck in your shirt. If you have a tie, wear it. Pull up your trousers. Big, dangly jewelry, key chains, or wallet chains move when you walk. Movement draws attention. All of that may work to get you attention on the street or in the club, but you want the judge to notice and remember as little about you as possible. You may be sitting in court for several hours, so wear comfortable clothes that are neither baggy nor too tight.
- **BE RESPECTFUL.** You may not like the judge. You may think the officer who arrested you is a jerk. You may be mad at the person who charged you with trespassing. In the courtroom is not the place to share that. If you treat the judge respectfully, you're more likely to be treated with respect in return. If the person testifying against you is angry or rude, you'll look even better by comparison.
 - ▣ The judge is "Your Honor," "Judge," "Ma'am," or "Sir."
 - ▣ The DA is "Madam District Attorney" or "Mister District Attorney."
 - ▣ There may be "cops" in your neighborhood, but in court, they're "police officers."
 - ▣ Even if you've never called the man you got in a fight with anything but "Billy Bob," in court, he's "Mister Jones."

"E.T., PHONE HOME"

We take them with us everywhere now, we call people all the time, and we take calls all the time. In court, cell phones must be turned off. You can usually just turn the ringer off, but unless you're expecting an emergency call, I recommend turning off cell phones, pagers, Blackberries, and so forth completely. If it rings in court, the deputy will *definitely* take it away. Some of the deputies will take them away if they see you texting in court.

LITTLE THINGS

Whether or not you realize it, people notice little things. They may not even realize they notice them, but they affect how people see you. After all, if people didn't notice, why would you wear them? Here are a few little things that you're better off leaving home:

- **Pot Leaf Earrings.** It doesn't matter how many diamonds are in there. It sends the message "I do drugs" (whether you do or not).
- **Grilles.** Judges, on the whole, are boring people. They're not impressed by "cool." In fact, if you're flashing a lot of gold when you explain how you need extra time to pay court costs, you may find the judge doesn't have a lot of sympathy.
- **Tattoos.** Tattoos are very personal. They may be in memory of a friend or family member. They may show your loyalty to a fraternity or club. Some of the big, beautiful ones are expensive art. In court, where you can, it's best to keep them personal, because not everyone considers them "respectable." You can't leave them at home, so keep them in mind when you dress. It doesn't mean you're ashamed of them or embarrassed, it just means that you don't want them to be a silent part of the conversation you're having with the judge.
- **Anything you'd have to explain to your grandmother.** Many judges are older, and were lawyers for many years. They grew up in a different world. Think about what your grandmother would understand and approve of. Play it safe, and be conservative.