

# **ADVISOR** PERSPECTIVES

## **Tie or No Tie?**

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**by Sara Grillo**

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After I wrote an article on business suits, several advisors asked me about casual dress, the biggest concern being about whether you should wear a tie. I'm going to unbutton that question and provide insight about what you could do to pull off this look successfully.

As I have noted in similar articles in the past, personal appearance is a sensitive topic, so let me start out with a couple of caveats. Implied in what I write below is the assumption that a certain appearance denotes success and that advisors should strive for this. You are entitled to reject that assumption. Second, while my recommendations are somewhat gender-specific, your gender is self-defined.



### **What's the point anyways?**

First of all, I just want to ask all you advisors this question.

Have you ever thought about how pointless a tie really is?

It's a piece of cloth you hang around your neck. Unlike a watch or belt, it serves no purpose. I mean, it fits the definition of the word "unnecessary."

Advisors who live in hotter climates wrote to me after my business suit article and so many of them complained about having to wear a tie in the 90 degree heat. Rob Herjavec of *Shark Tank* is often pictured tieless. It works great for him. For those of you rebels who agree and are eager to rip that stifling tie from your neck, here's my advice about how to make the look work for you.

### **To tie or not to tie – Making the decision**

I'm going to say something a little bit wishy-washy here, which (of course you know how brash I am) is quite unlike me. But here's my answer to the question of whether or not you should wear a tie.

It depends on your gut.

Picture yourself in the meeting, sitting there in front of the person you are trying to impress, and listen to what your instincts say. What are *they* likely to be wearing? Where are you meeting? How well do they know you? Going without a tie is unconventional by definition. Are you sure this is the time and place for that?

Think about all the bad fashion decisions you've made in the past. Were those a surprise to you? If you had really thought about it, it would have been obvious that you were about to commit a *faux pas*. So my advice is a very namby-pamby "it depends on you." But whatever you decide, own it.

Actually, on second thought, here's a more concrete test (see, I knew I wasn't capable of being ambivalent):

If you feel nervous about it, then your instincts are telling you that it's wrong to go without the tie. In this case you should go with the tie.

If you don't feel right, you'll be uncomfortable. Your uneasiness will be obvious to the person you're trying to impress. When in doubt, put on the tie.

By the way, you can always bring the tie with you and put it on if you see that everyone in the office is looking like they just stepped out of Brooks Brothers.

### **Tips for looking dapper without the tie**

If you decide to go without the tie, here are a few basic guidelines.

To successfully pull off tielessness (see Webster's for the definition of that one), you should avoid having it occur to the person that you aren't wearing a tie. In other words, the outfit has to be sufficiently dapper so that the viewer is preoccupied with how handsome you look. The fact you aren't wearing a tie shouldn't even cross their mind.

### **Intention is key**

You don't want it to look like you were getting out of your car and your tie got caught in the door, which is why you aren't wearing one. The look you're going for is that your tielessness is completely intentional.

Wearing your shirt buttoned up all the way is going to give someone the feeling that your tie was ripped away by mistake, so unbutton a few buttons to show that this was all something you planned. But don't unbutton more than that – showing skin like John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever* is not the right look for that conversation about tax-sheltered investments.

### **Collar will need some additional securing**

The collar should frame your jawline instead of looking splayed and sloppy.

The collar doesn't become crisp and secure on its own. Instead of the plastic pieces that normally go in your collar, you're going to need what is called a collar stay (you probably already have heard of this). You'll also need to secure the placket to make sure it doesn't flop around. Here's a great video about how to make a crisp collar.

### **Other tie styles**

Bowties may be worn by advisors to give your look a little flair, but only if you are able to do this very confidently and without looking like Pee Wee Herman.

Is it appropriate to wear a tie with the top button unbuttoned because your Adam's apples gets in the way? This is an extremely casual look, perhaps too casual for advisors. As an alternative, get a shirt that is tailored to fit correctly.

### **Draw attention away from your neck**

To deemphasize your lack of a tie, accessorize with an attention-grabbing pocket square, a set of shoes, a watch or belt. You may even want to show more cuff than usual. Since wearing a tie is less formal, you can play that up a bit with your styling. Use discretion but do consider subtle patterns or less traditional colors.

### **Sara's upshot**

Dressing down is okay, even if you're meeting with ultra-affluent people. The biggest thing is making sure it's appropriate for the audience, that you feel okay with it and that you follow some basic styling guidelines. I'm going to write another article about how to go without a suit jacket, but if you have requests for other advisor fashion tips then I'm all ears!

You know how to reach me on APViewpoint. And by the way, I recently launched my financial advisor marketing podcast which you can download [here](#).

*Sara Grillo, CFA, is a top financial writer with a focus on marketing and branding for investment management, financial planning, and RIA firms. Prior to launching her own firm, she was a financial advisor and worked at Lehman Brothers. Sara graduated from Harvard with a degree in English literature and has an MBA from NYU Stern in Quantitative Finance.*