

Wear the Team Uniform

R. Russell Rhinehart

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Wear the team uniform. Sports team players do not personalize their uniforms to make sure their individuality is visible. The game is not about who they are. It is about how well they play their role within the team.

As proud as they programmed you to be of your Junior High School while you were there, you didn't wear JHS colors in High School. Despite the HS allegiance you acquired, you didn't wear HS regalia in college.

A soft jazz crooner has a different presence than a hard rock head banger, or rapper, or country singer. The audience likes one, respects that persona and does not like the others. Similarly, as an employee, you are on stage, and your stage performance is continually being appraised by your audience.

For career success, fit in with your employment environment, be who your audience wants to see in your role. This does not mean losing your individuality. But it does mean don't promote things about yourself that distract your audience from what they want to see.

"Wear the team uniform" is a metaphor. It is more than clothes.

For instance, it is OK to be super smart. And you might have enjoyed getting others to notice it in school by popping extraneous facts in conversations. But your value to the organization is not your ability to recall trivia, or solve partial differential equations, or to explain the epsilon-NTU heat exchanger design method. Don't use this ability as your act. Don't distract the audience from what they want to see or hear. Stay smart, but not to the extent it is distraction.

It is OK to be very attractive with a great body. And you might have enjoyed making that visible in school. But your value to the organization is not your looks, and you don't want an emphasis on your physical appearance to distract your audience's focus from your value in your role. Stay attractive, but not to the extent that it is a distraction.

The "team uniform" metaphor is about more than promoting your individuality.

Don't remain part of R&D when you transfer to manufacturing.

Is your environment Oregon software, or Alaska mining, or NYC Corporate? Adopt that way. If the coffee break talk is about the stock market, don't try to divert it to talk about the arts. If about fishing-hunting adventures, don't force them to talk about raising children. If about hiking and fitness, don't talk about business. Appeal to your community. Certainly, the arts, or

raising children, or fitness, or political opinions, or religion are all important and these may take a leading role in your life. Remain true to yourself. You do not need to convert to a new religion or an alternate political party. It is OK to retain your individuality, but don't let your individuality mask what your audience wants to see.

If the analogy of acting to please your audience makes it seem like you should compromise your values, then think of this message as being on an athletic team; regardless of your personal life mission, in your action on the field and words in interviews, you need to play your role as a team member.

The examples above are not exhaustive. Whenever you enter a new environment, or a new environment envelops you, "keep your antennae up" and be sensitive about how you should express yourself.

My company fired several potentially good employees because they refused to be compliant with (actually taunted) the values and behaviors we expected. If you insist that you need to wear a different uniform, your resume will look better if you initiate leaving.

If you want to be respected, taken seriously, accepted, and promoted, wear the team uniform.

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Russ Rhinehart started his career in the process industry. After 13 years and rising to engineering supervision, he transferred to a 31-year academic career, serving as the ChE Head at Oklahoma State University for 13 years. Russ is a fellow of AIChE and ISA. Now "retired", he enjoys coaching professionals through books, articles, short courses, and postings on his web site www.r3eda.com.