



## More men are growing beards — but are employers hiring them?

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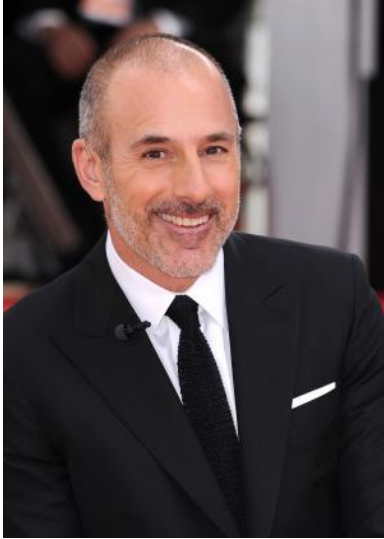


Workers who once wouldn't dream of arriving to work without a morning shave are now showing up proudly sporting scruff — and more.

There was a time when TV news personalities and those in the political arena weren't considered trustworthy if they were hiding behind scruff. It would have been un-American to watch a bearded baseball team or Hollywood heartthrobs, and people wouldn't think of going to a job interview without a clean shave.

But these days, facial hair is everywhere. From Brad Pitt to the Red Sox, the trend has gone way beyond Movember madness. Even former White House press secretary Jay Carney went through a fuzzy-faced period.

And now, the trend has extended to regular folk. Formerly clean-cut workers are now growing beards — and proudly wearing them to work. The investment bank Jefferies reported that sales of nondisposable razors dropped 15 percent in the last quarter of 2013, while Procter & Gamble announced sales of their nondisposable razors and blades dropped 7.8 percent in that year's final quarter, compared with the same quarter in 2012. JPMorgan Chase & Co. analyst John Faucher attributed the drop to "increased interest in facial hair."



Earlier in 2014, Matt Lauer — seen here at the Golden Globes in January — let his beard grow a bit.

“It started off as an anti-business look and a form of self-expression,” explains Elle Medico, a men’s grooming specialist at Paul Labrecque salons. “It also signifies masculinity, and that look is big now. On the runways men are getting even less groomed.”

Danielle Malka, president and founder of eShave, points to the Hollywood influence. “Guys think if they have facial hair they will look like Brad Pitt, but often they just look sloppy,” she gripes. “In New York, I see so many guys looking sharp in a polished suit and great shoes, but sometimes they neglect to keep their facial hair well-maintained, neat and trimmed . . . it comes off looking a little unkempt.”

Does this mean it’s safe for job seekers to turn up at an interview with a goatee or soul patch? It all depends on where you want to work and how you groom your hair.

Bobby Walsh has been hunting for a photography job and has kept a full beard and the occasional goatee throughout the process.

“I look around when I walk in for an interview, and I was just at a fancy retouching studio in Midtown, where I noticed almost nobody had facial hair,” reports the 24-year-old. “Before I go on an interview I clean up a little, and I thought in this case maybe I would do better without the beard — but if I didn’t get a job because of my facial hair, I wouldn’t want to work at that place to begin with.”



Brad Pitt is just one of many men in Hollywood regularly sporting facial hair — and inspiring regular folk to ditch the razor blades in favor of furry faces.

For better or worse, scruff does matter to some companies, especially those in more traditionally conservative industries such as finance.

“There are clients of mine in more conservative or larger organizations that have prejudices against facial hair. In fashion and beauty it’s very acceptable, but in the more conservative fields of finance or law it’s not,” says Kate Benson, president of the Manhattan-based executive recruiting firm Martens & Heads. “I recently had a client say he liked one individual, but he had a goatee, and there was a question of whether he would fit in their organization.”

Michael Karp, CEO of the Manhattan-based recruiting company Options Group, agrees it’s important to understand the culture of the industry you hope to work for. If you are interviewing for a job in a more creative field, or at a tech startup, for example, there is more latitude on what’s deemed appropriate than at, say, a bank.

“We actually had a candidate who was a career academic, highly educated and with an in-demand skill set, interviewing at a global bank in New York,” Karp recalls. “He had a very long, thick beard, and we advised him to greatly reduce the volume. He landed the job.”



Boston Red Sox players — including pitcher Brandon Workman — are known for eschewing the clean-shaven look.

From there, experts add it's best to familiarize yourself with a specific company's look before heading to an interview. Try visiting the Web site, or getting to know people who work there.

“High-end luxury goes hand-in-hand with a classic look. We have people come in with crazy facial hair every week, and it's naive to think you can have any look if the company's DNA is conservative,” advises Laurent Guerrier, president of Manhattan-based executive search firm Luxe Avenue. “The other day we had this guy, very articulate and experienced, who had the ‘Stone Age’ image . . . He came in to interview for a high-profile VP of stores of a conservative Italian brand. The outcome could not be rosy.”

On the other hand, some employers view facial hair as a plus — and, in fact, an indicator of creativity. “At the end of the day, facial hair is in the wind, from Williamsburg to West Hollywood, and it's synonymous with the new definition of urban cool,” observes Estée Lauder president John Demsey. “It's part of a current hip look and, to me, signifies style. We always hire based on ability, but, that being said, I would more likely hire someone in the Tom Ford than [the] ZZ Top vain.”



When sporting a beard, think Tom Ford — not ZZ Top.

Health- and fitness-focused companies like Equinox are also open to hirsute applicants. “We are a trend-and-lifestyle fashion company, and it's a good complement to what we represent to our members,” says Greg Hill, the company's VP of human resources. “We like a little bit of character as long as it's not offensive, and we certainly know where those guardrails are.”

Still, Hill says he draws the line at hair that is ill-groomed or distracting. “Trimmed is the new shaven,” he cautions. “Shaggy and dirty is still shaggy and dirty, so if you have anything that doesn't look appropriate, that would be an issue.”

Hill recalls a situation where a promising candidate was turned down because of his bristles.

“We were hiring an executive-level position last year, and a guy came in from out of town for a full day of interviews. He did very well in the morning, but when he came back in the afternoon, he had some of his lunch in his beard,” he remembers. “The first person he saw didn't go there,

but the second guy who interviewed him that afternoon pointed it out, and he was mortified that he had just spent an hour speaking to someone with food on his face.

“We judged his beard to be too distracting.”