

## **At the end of the day – for all careers “Think Before You Ink”**

With today's strong interest into "Body Art", the question arises as to how people with tattoos can advance within American professional careers. Some corporations maintain a strict policy against visible tattoos, especially companies that must make a good impression on the general public.

### **Tattoos have a curious history**

- **1850 - 1900 - Tattoos used to be the bastion of carnival freak shows, with people flocking to the circus to see the amazing tattooed Lady.**
- **1900 - 1950 - Tattoos in the early 20th century indicated a Sailor or Marine. In these cases, they did not have any social stigma, except that tattoos were generally indicative of enlisted men. Few Navy or Marine officers dared to draw on their body.**
- **1950 - 1960 - In the early 1950's, tattoos became popular with the criminal element, mostly outlaw bikers, social outcasts and the mentally ill. It was during this time tattoos took on a more ominous reputation.**
- **1960 - 1990 - This was the age of "prison tats" where having a tattoo indicated to some people that you were a tough felon.**
- **1990-2008 - Today we see hordes of young people drawing on themselves with free abandon, (almost 30% of people in the 1980's). These people do not understand that a tattoo may effectively prohibit them from pursuing some professional careers, regardless of their other qualifications.**

Today, a prejudice still exists within corporate America about tattoos.

Don't kid yourself about the importance of hiding or removing tattoos. If you look at middle management and above in any of the Fortune 50 companies, you will be hard pressed to find any managers that have visible tattoos.

### **Corporate Dress Codes and tattoos**

A study by Careerbuilders shows the perils of tattoos for aspiring professionals, and confirms the conventional wisdom that tattoos are a bad choice for anyone who hopes to work in a corporate position:

- **Over 42 percent of managers said their opinion of someone would be lowered by that person's visible body art.**
- **Three out of four respondents believe that visible tattoos are unprofessional.**

**You don't have to look hard to find hundreds of corporations which have banned employees with tattoos.**

**San Bernardino County California, bars all employees from wearing denim, having visible tattoos, and any piercing in the nose, lip, or tongue that contains jewelry.**

**In sum, tattoos are not well received by corporate America and could hamper your success if you choose a career in a corporate position.**



### **Los Angeles Fire Department, CA**

**Some city firefighters are fuming over the Los Angeles Fire Department's new “no show” tattoo policy. The policy as of May 1 forbids tattooed firefighters from exposing their ink in public. That means firefighters who have tattoos on their arms need to cover up with long-sleeve shirts, and those who have tattoos on their necks have to wear bandages.**

**The policy has raised the ire of tattooed firefighters – some former soldiers - who believe they are being unfairly targeted by brass.**



**“After 20 years I am no longer considered professional by my fire department, just like that,” said LAFD firefighter/diver John O'Connor. “Every piece of 'work' that I have is either blood family or fire service family. I have always displayed them proudly, and to be made to cover them up is weird. This was disheartening to me. My pride has been blown away.”**

**The policy affects around 200 firefighters with visible tattoos that cannot be covered by the standard uniform, says O'Connor. So now, firefighters are covering up with long-sleeve shirts and track pants to work out, and wearing bandages or skin patches where the shirt doesn't cover.**

**According to sources, management has told fire captains their necks are on the line if they don't enforce the policy.**

**Los Angeles Fire Department spokesperson Chief Ronnie Villanueva said that the policy isn't personal -- it's about professionalism and how the public perceives the department. Others have argued that some firefighters have gone beyond “a couple” of tattoos to full-blown tattoos on their heads and necks, or tattooed numbers that could be misconstrued as being gang-affiliated.**

However, some firefighters say that it has precious little to do with public perception and more to do with the “old guard” who have complained to management about the increase in body art over the years.

Solutions have been batted around between the firefighters' union -- UFLAC -- and management for years. Union representatives argued that a no-show policy wasn't realistic and suggested having members cover up only those tattoos that were offensive to the public. Last summer, the two parties agreed to hire an independent arbiter to make recommendations. The fact finder ruled in favor of the union, but, according to union VP Jon McDuffie, the department implemented its own ideas.

“A lot of the guys offended by the tattoos are members of our department,” says McDuffie. “Is that enough to call people 'unprofessional' and throw up these unilateral policies?” He says dozens of complaints have been filed since the crackdown began on May 1.

### **City of Bryan, TX**

City of Bryan administrators want to ensure their police officers look clean-cut. In a move that previously received little fanfare or discussion, the Bryan Police Department has banned visible tattoos for its officers.

The general order was sent down by Chief Eric Buske in June. The rule does not apply to officers who already have visible tattoos, but new recruits will need to hide their ink if they want to serve and protect in Bryan.

The policy bans all inappropriate tattoos, as determined by the chief, and requires officers to cover up tattoos while on duty. The order also calls for no facial hair for officers, with the exception of cop mustaches, clean fingernails, moderate makeup, no earrings for men and no alternative body piercings.

Many of the rules were already on the books, but the changes expand and restrict the appearance guidelines for the force.

"I certainly don't think we're unique, and it's an effort to display professionalism and uniformity," Buske said.

He said the policy was proactive, in anticipation of a younger generation that has more tattoos. He said there had not been a problem with applicants or his staff.



**"I'm not aware of any applicant we've had that would be in violation of this policy," Buske said. "I don't anticipate it being a problem."**

**The rules do not apply to undercover officers, who will continue to be as rugged or subtle as needed.**

**Police spokeswoman Kelley McKethan said she didn't expect the policy to affect hiring.**

**"It won't disqualify anyone unless maybe they have tattoos on their face," McKethan said. "If I were to apply for any position at any organization, I look at their guidelines and it's my decision on if I want to work there. The same thing applies here."**



**She said the policy had no connection to a contentious and publicized rezoning proposal over the summer that will potentially allow a tattoo artist to relocate to Downtown Bryan.**

**The tattoo policy for other Brazos Valley first responders varies.**

**The Brazos County Sheriff's Office also requires its employees to cover tattoos while on duty, according to Sheriff Chris Kirk. William Bouse with the Bryan Fire Department said his**

**department does not allow offensive, face, neck or hand tattoos. Bryan firefighters are also required to cover up visible tattoos on their arms or legs when on duty.**

**Across town, the College Station Fire Department has no tattoo restrictions, according to spokesman Bart Humphreys. The College Station Police Department bans offensive, face and head tattoos, said Chief Jeff Capps.**

**"We want to maintain a professional appearance and we feel that's what the public wants as well," he said.**

**Capps said his department is seeing a greater number of applicants with tattoos and that policy changes could be coming. The first responders in the sister cities typically try to enact similar laws and procedures.**

**"We're currently reviewing our tattoo policy, but we haven't made any decision on which direction to take it," Capps said.**

**Erwin Ballarta, executive director of the Texas Police Association, similarly said departments across the state are enacting similar tattoo restrictions. He complimented the Bryan Police Department on its decision.**

**"One of the things we're always striving for is professionalism with the community," Ballarta said. "Not that people with tattoos aren't professional, but it's all about perception."**

**He compared the tattoo policy to other hygiene and appearance requirements common in police departments. The tattoo bans are a matter of professionalism, he said, adding that an officer not willing to follow a tattoo policy might not comply with other department rules.**

**"Critics might say you shouldn't be judged on appearances, but people in reality do," Ballarta said. "We're always trying to promote professionalism in law enforcement and any direction an agency takes in that direction is serving the public well."**

### **US Army Set to Implement New Tattoo Rules - 2013**



**"The Army's always going to be a part of my life," said Kristen Morley, 19, Pleasant Hill, Ohio. Morley and her best friend got matching pin-up girl tattoos.**



Tattoo-covered soldiers, their ink showing even in uniform, became a common sight over the last decade, reflecting both changing styles and the relaxed standards used to boost enlistments, but with the wars almost over and the Army preparing to downsize, body art is on the way out.

Almost immediately after taking his post in 2011, Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond Chandler began talking about tightening the Army's uniform and grooming policy. Changes to the rules, which

have been a source of speculation and debate among soldiers, have just been confirmed by Chandler to include restrictions on tattoos that will roll back the more lenient guidelines used during the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The incoming policy will prevent new soldiers who have tattoos that reach below their elbow or their knee or above their neckline from enlisting.

The initial wave of reaction on military blogs and social media has been largely negative. Many commenters cite the tattoo standard as antiquated and a poor indication of a soldier's ability to perform the job. Others say body art has become a large part of the Army's own culture, resurrecting an argument that surfaced when rumors of the new tattoo policy started circulating in 2011.

While the changes are unpopular with some, they have not come as a surprise. Chandler has stated his ideas openly and encouraged discussion. When he asked for feedback on his Facebook page In 2011, many wrote in to voice their support, singling out neck tattoos in particular as looking unprofessional and citing the need for uniformity of appearance.

The most divisive aspect of Chandler's original proposal in 2011 concerned the fate of soldiers who had been allowed to enlist with tattoos that would be prohibited under new restrictions. At the time, the possibility that those soldiers might be forced to remove their ink or leave the Army was not ruled out. But the new rules take a more moderate position on the issue, in what may be a concession to the negative reaction within the ranks at talk of combat veterans being penalized or forced out for having tattoos that were allowed when they signed up.

Serving soldiers who were recruited under the current policy would be grandfathered and allowed to keep their tattoos as long as they do not contain any racist, sexist, or extremist words or symbolism.

Upon the adoption of the new system, all soldiers would be required to self-identify tattoos to their unit leaders. Those whose tattoos violate the policy under which they were recruited would be required to pay for tattoo removal themselves, Chandler said.

Chandler said tightening the grooming code was an effort to promote recognition of soldiers' individual achievements rather than having them stand out for their appearance.

Some observers have noted the Army's habit of changing its policies depending on its recruiting needs. The previous change was in 2006, when the Army loosened requirements on tattoos during the height of the Iraq and Afghanistan war efforts. Under those regulations only tattoos that covered the face or head were banned.

This time around, the policy shift comes amid U.S. government preparations to downsize the military as troops withdraw from Afghanistan and the looming prospect of severe funding cuts to the armed services.

Budget cuts first enacted in 2011 have finally started straining Army resources. President Obama's Budget Control Act of 2011 projects \$487 billion in military spending cuts over the next decade. As a result, this past June, Gen. Ray Odierno announced that the Army will cut 80,000 active-duty troops over the next five years, which constitutes the largest reduction in combat forces since World War II.

The changes to the tattoo rules are part of a larger review and reconsideration of Army dress code, as Chandler solicited veterans' input on a variety of concerns such as earrings for women in uniform.

The policy changes are expected to be approved by Secretary of the Army John McHugh within 30 to 60 days, Chandler said.

### **Some Selected Comments**

- Let me float this theory, I do not have tattoos. I served for 21 years in the Navy (4 yrs) and Marine Corps (retired). Never thought I would like a tattoo. Don't understand tattoos. In fact, I find them off-putting and they do have a negative connotation in my mind. However, can they not be considered art, and has art not been protected time and time again as the Supreme Court has held that art is an expression and in turn the first amendment protects the freedom of speech and expression as the Supreme Court routinely interprets it? So we are telling folks with tattoos that we will deny them the first amendment? I do fully understand that service members are regulated by the Uniform Code of Military Justice and are subject to upholding good order and discipline, but I was never once offended by any tattoos that weren't racist in nature or hate related. They never hurt my feelings and the units never suffered from those with them. Do tattoos lessen your job prospects in the future? Probably. Do I have the right to tell you because I find your tattoos undesirable you should not be allowed to have any? Nope. In fact, you have made several choices by this point in your life to be a service member and apparently for some another choice was to get inked. Live your

life. Do your thing. It isn't any of my business or anyone else's until your tattoo is deliberately provocative or hateful. I also don't care what things you regret later in life because of decisions you made when you were young and attractive enough to pull off being "expressive". None

- They can have ALL the tattoos they want. The army just won't enlist them due to the dress code. I see absolutely no first amendment issue here at all.
- I'm with you on this one. The army is basically a job, and the employer has every right to make a uniform code. If you don't like it, then don't serve, simple as that
- Not really a "job". You would be able to sue for minimum wage if it was an ordinary federal job. It is service. You sacrifice for the benefit of your countrymen
- ...and those that CHOOSE to serve, while respected, must adhere to the requirements of that chosen path.
- And they will. This is going to put a roadblock in the path of the inked who wish to enlist in the future. It's also going to impact those already inked who have "offensive" tattoos, which could affect retention.
- Personally, I think the Army is overreacting and making a big deal about nothing important.
- All rights have limitations. Free speech doesn't include the right to shout 'fire' in a crowded theatre. Nor does art (a part of free speech) include graffiti on other peoples' property, or anything overtly dangerous. People who choose a military career agree to surrender many further rights, as you note, and be bound by the UCMJ... including future changes to that code. Simply stated, they haven't a legal leg to stand on if they disagree. Whether it's a good idea is a discussion completely aside from whether it's legal

## **Firefighter's ABC's – Stance – Think – Ink & Body Art**

**We simply want you to think before you ink!**

**Is body art wrong? No!**

**Can body art hurt your career choice? Yes!**

**“Body Art Can Have a Negative Impact on Any Career”**

**[FirefightersABCs.com](http://FirefightersABCs.com)**