

Text B

Tattoos at Work: Are They Still an Issue?

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By Daniel Thomas

Having visible tattoos at work has long been controversial in professions which are traditionally conservative, such as law, finance, and healthcare. For some, tattoos are nothing more than body art that expresses individuality, while for others, they remain symbols of rebellion, or worse.

Take Debbie Darling, who runs her own marketing and ¹PR agency. She says her 15 tattoos, which include half sleeves on her arms and one on the edge of her hand, have been a bonus in her career. "They are conversation starters. People ask me what inspired them, or what they mean, and suddenly business meetings feel more human." She believes that tattoos, which once caused rejection, now help her stand out at networking events.



Yet attitudes toward tattoos are not the same everywhere. In New Zealand, for example, Air New Zealand ended its ban on body art in order to allow workers to show cultural identity. In El Salvador, however, tattoos that are linked to gangs like MS-13 or 18th Street can still mean detention. Belarmino Garcia, who directs the Cecot supermax prison where gang members are held, explained that some tattoos carry very specific meanings, from commemorating dead members to threatening local communities.

This contrast shows how tattoos, which may seem harmless in one setting, can be dangerous in another. Professor Andrew Timmings, who has studied workplace attitudes for two decades, argues that context matters. "If you are serving younger customers who may have tattoos themselves, there is usually no problem. But if you are dealing with older clients, you may be asked to cover up." In other words, when in Rome, do as the Romans do.

Some people, like personal trainer Scot Tudhope, say tattoos have cost them job opportunities. "I was told to cover my arms when I worked at the council, even though there was no clear policy." Others, like John Palmer from Acas, insist that tattoos should "never be a reason to refuse someone a job," although he admits that some employers, who want to project a very specific image, still expect workers to hide them.

What remains certain is that tattoos are more common than ever. Surveys suggest that in 2014, 40% of Americans lived in households where at least one person had a tattoo, compared to just 21% in 1999. Today, numbers are even higher, reflecting a cultural shift that employers cannot ignore.

So, are tattoos still an issue? The answer depends on where you are, who you work with, and what the tattoos represent. A colourful sleeve that impresses construction workers in London may be the same design that leads to suspicion in San Salvador. Tattoos are, quite literally, stories on the skin, stories which can open doors or close them, depending on the audience.

¹ PR: Public Relationships

The following statements are either true or false. Choose the correct option, then justify it using words as they appear in the text. **Both parts are required for (1 mark)**

1. All people see tattoos as symbols of rebellion.
☐ True ☐ False

Justification

2. People ask Debbie about the meaning of her tattoos.
☐ True ☐ False

Justification

3. In El Salvador, all tattoos are harmless.
☐ True ☐ False

Justification

4. Older clients may require employees to cover up tattoos.
☐ True ☐ False

Justification

Choose an appropriate option from the list that completes each gap in the following text.

5. _____, some people, like personal trainer Scot Tudhope, claim that tattoos have negatively affected their employment. "I was asked 6. _____ my arms when I worked at the council, although there was no official guideline." Others, such as John Palmer from Acas, argue that tattoos should 7. _____ a reason to deny someone a job, even if some employers, wanting to convey a particular image, still expect employees to hide them. What is clear is that tattoos are more widespread than ever. Surveys show that in 2014, 40% of Americans lived in households where at least one person had a tattoo, 8. _____ 21% in 1999. Today, the figures are even higher, reflecting a cultural change that employers cannot 9. _____.

Instructions

Text A

Text B

Text C