

Blazers and Ballet Flats: Growing Up Without Giving In

By: Chloe Prince

A playful take on how Gen Z is rewriting the rules of corporate fashion.

When I was little, I thought being a “businesswoman” meant beige. On career day, I proudly told everyone I wanted to be a vet—pink bow in my hair, sparkly shoes on my feet and a sequined top that shimmered under the classroom lights. I didn’t know much about medicine, but I knew grown-ups dressed the part. Somewhere between my toy stethoscope and shiny Mary Janes, I decided professionalism meant polish, and polish meant dull.

Now, as I stand in my favorite pink blazer, gold hoops and ballet flats, I can’t help but smile at how wrong I was.

My mom has always been my biggest inspiration. A powerhouse saleswoman, she showed me what drive looked like long before I understood the word “career.” I vividly remember tagging along with her to Talbots, The Loft and Ann Taylor at the mall. Everything felt impossibly elegant, the faint scent of perfume, the neatly folded sweaters, the mannequins lined up in matching sets. I’d trail behind her, running my hands along racks of tweed blazers and tailored slacks, imagining what it might feel like to be one of *those* women. But even as I admired it, that world felt out of reach. The women in those stores looked so composed, so certain of themselves, while I was the kid who couldn’t sit still in class. Growing up with ADHD and learning difficulties, I often felt like I was sprinting toward a finish line everyone else could walk to. I convinced myself that greatness wasn’t in the cards for me, that the world of power suits and briefcases belonged to someone more focused, more polished, more perfect.

Still, something in me refused to give up. The older I got, the hungrier I became to prove that I could succeed too, just not in the traditional way. Maybe success didn't have to be beige. Maybe greatness could be pink, sparkly or even have a bow on top.

Fast forward to this past summer at my internship with the Port of Virginia, where I worked in communications and got my first real glimpse of office life. I wanted to look professional but still like myself. So, I found my rhythm: cream trousers, ballet flats, pastel blazers and soft blouses that moved easily from meetings to coffee breaks. On days when I needed a little extra confidence, I slipped into my kitten heels, their gentle clicks on the tile a reminder that I belonged there.

Every morning, getting dressed felt like a quiet form of self-expression. I wasn't trying to blend in; I was learning how to stand out the right way. One day, a coworker complimented me and said, "You always look so put together, but in a fun way." That stuck with me. I realized I didn't have to trade personality for professionalism.

My pink blazer quickly became my signature piece. I found it while shopping one afternoon and knew immediately it was *the one*. Structured but playful, it struck the perfect balance between "I mean business" and "I'm still me." The first time I wore it to the office, I felt a shift, not like I was pretending to be an adult, but like I was becoming one. That blazer became my quiet declaration that femininity can be powerful, and professionalism can still have personality.

That's the magic of Gen Z's approach to workwear. We're rewriting the dress code. We're trading stiff pants suits for pieces that make us feel alive. We're bringing color into boardrooms and confidence into cubicles. For us, ambition doesn't come in muted tones; it shines in soft pinks, creamy whites, sage greens and sometimes even sequins.

Sometimes I still think about that little girl who wanted to be a vet. She didn't know it then, but her love of bows, color and sparkle wasn't just about style, it was about self-expression. She believed in making things beautiful, in being bold, in standing out. That same spark still lives in me, just in a more refined form.

Now, I'm chasing a career in public relations at a big-city agency, crafting messages, building brands and telling stories that make people feel something. And I plan to do it in outfits that make *me* feel unstoppable.

Because growing up doesn't mean giving in — it means growing into who you were always meant to be. I may have traded sequins for structured blazers, but the sparkle never left. My version of corporate is confident, colorful and unapologetically me. It's a perfect blend of then and now, a reflection of how far I've come and everything I still want to be.

Maybe that's the real Gen Z power move: showing up exactly as we are. Blazers, ballet flats, pink lipstick and all.