



BUSINESS & PERSONAL BRANDING

SESSION PREPARATION

Client Guide

PREPARE THE SESSION, THEN TRUST THE PROCESS

A strong business or personal branding session begins before the camera comes out. The goal of this guide is to make the preparation clear so the people, spaces, wardrobe, and schedule are ready for the photographs we have planned.

The basic division of responsibility

You make the people, spaces, and logistics ready. I take responsibility for turning that preparation into the photographs.

Preparation is Coordinator-led

For business assignments, this guide is written to the person coordinating the shoot, and I will use client/coordinator interchangeably throughout the document. That person is responsible for communicating with employees and executives, preparing the location, arranging access, identifying participants, and keeping the agreed schedule moving. I am working in a professional service and vendor role, similar to how a photographer works alongside a planner or coordinator on a larger production.

Planning Together

Creative planning is collaborative. I will arrive with a working catalogue of poses, compositions, lighting ideas, and practical shot concepts. You are also encouraged to share inspiration, references, past marketing materials, screenshots, competitor examples, or specific photographs you want to accomplish.

When possible, the shot list should be substantially established about one week before the session. The absolute final shot list should be locked in no later than three days beforehand so the sequence, gear, lighting, people, and location needs can be planned properly.

What I Handle

My responsibilities include the lighting, equipment setup, posing and expression direction, photographic technique, composition, visual adjustments, creative problem-solving, helping guide the order of photographs with the coordinator, maintaining consistency across the image set, and executing the agreed shot list.

PEOPLE, WARDROBE & GROOMING

Prepared does not mean overdressed.

The goal is for people to look intentional and polished while still looking credible within their actual brand and workplace. A contractor suddenly wearing a three-piece suit can be just as visually inconsistent as an attorney showing up in a wrinkled T-shirt.

Be Ready Before the Session Begins

Anyone receiving an individual portrait should be fully dressed, groomed, and ready at least 30 minutes before the shoot's scheduled start time. The session officially begins at the appointed time, whether every participant is ready or not. Any additional time needed after the session's scheduled duration ends will be reflected in the final invoice.

Expressions

- Bring your natural smile and expressions. We will have already developed a shot list during and after our consultation, so I will direct during the session. There is no need to memorize a catalogue of poses.
- My advice for those that tend to feel nervous in front of the camera is to practice your natural smile in a mirror beforehand. Then, once you find the expression you like, pay attention to how it feels in the muscles of your face rather than only how it looks. Then close your eyes and focus on that feeling.
- Repeating that feeling can make the expression easier to recreate during the session, thus improving your performance and confidence. This is a form of kinesthetic rehearsal, a technique commonly used to make practiced movements and expressions feel more familiar under pressure.

Grooming

- Men should consider scheduling a haircut or trim at least one week before the session rather than immediately beforehand.
- Facial hair should be intentionally groomed. If you normally wear a beard, keep it neat. If you normally appear clean-shaven, I recommend shaving the morning of the shoot. If you cut yourself shaving, bring an extra change of clothes just in case.
- Women's hair should be neat, prepared, and consistent with how they normally present themselves professionally.
- The week before a branding session is not the time to reinvent your appearance. Maintain normal grooming and skincare routines, and avoid dramatic hair changes, unfamiliar tanning products, aggressive skin treatments, or anything else that may create redness, discomfort, or additional anxiety immediately before the session. If you don't like your new look or have a bad reaction to new products, this will impact your confidence during the shoot.

Wardrobe

Wardrobe should support the image you want people to associate with the brand. I am happy to give prescriptive advice based on your brand image, the location, indoor or outdoor conditions, and what colors and clothing styles are most flattering to the person being photographed.

- Clothing should be clean, pressed or steamed, free of stains, and ready to wear the day before the session.
- Wardrobe changes should be organized the day before and placed in a designated changing area for quick access.
- Wear accessories that are authentic to you and your brand, but simplify or remove anything that becomes visually distracting.
- All pockets should be completely empty during portraits. Phones, keys, wallets, earbuds, and other loose items should be stored in a safe and accessible place.

Wardrobe changes

Included wardrobe changes are defined by the booked collection. Each normal wardrobe change is expected to take about 10 minutes or less. Major restyling, hair or makeup changes, or elaborate outfit changes are not considered a normal wardrobe change. If additional changes extend the assignment beyond the booked scope, the additional time is billed accordingly.

THE DAY-OF KIT

Bring a small day-of kit built around the problems you already know you are likely to encounter. The point is not to bring everything imaginable. It is to have quick fixes available so small issues do not turn into avoidable delays.

Category	Recommended items
Clothing care	Lint roller, wrinkle-release spray or steamer access, stain-removal pen, backup shirt or blouse, extra undershirt, safety pins, fashion tape, alternate shoes, and any spare accessories that may be useful.
Hair & grooming	Comb or brush, hair product, mirror, facial-hair touch-up items, tissues, and any normal grooming products you use during the workday.
Skin & makeup	Makeup or touch-up products, blotting paper, powder if normally used, antiperspirant or deodorant, and anything that helps manage shine or perspiration.
Personal comfort	Water, a small snack if appropriate, necessary medications, and anything else that helps you stay comfortable and focused without interrupting the session.
Brand-specific items	Tools, products, uniforms, notebooks, devices, awards, samples, or other items that are intentionally part of the agreed shot list.

Use your own experience

If you know you sweat easily, bring antiperspirant and blotting products. If you have pets, bring a lint roller. If your clothes wrinkle quickly, plan for wrinkle release. Your own day-to-day experience is the best guide for what belongs in your kit.

PREPARING THE LOCATION

Anything that will appear in the photographs should look as close as practical to the way you would want a client, customer, investor, or member of the public to see it. The location should be production-ready before I arrive.

Final visual preparation

The coordinator should complete a thorough walkthrough the day before the session, or the morning of if earlier preparation is not possible. Remove or correct anything that is out of place, creates clutter, or works against the intended brand presentation.

- Remove trash, boxes, cleaning supplies, stray paperwork, unnecessary cords, cups, personal belongings, and temporary clutter.
- Clean glass, reflective surfaces, desks, counters, signs, displays, products, tools, and other areas that will be visible.
- Straighten chairs, decor, signage, displays, shelves, and other elements that should appear intentionally arranged.
- Anything visually distracting, inappropriate for the intended marketing use, or inconsistent with the brand presentation should be removed or repositioned before the session.

Brand elements

Logos, signage, awards, products, certificates, tools, uniforms, displays, and other natural brand elements are welcome when they already belong in the environment and do not create visual clutter. If something is especially important to feature, identify it during planning so it can be included intentionally in the shot list.

Privacy and confidential information

Anything that should not be seen needs to be removed, concealed, erased, or turned off before photography begins. This includes confidential documents, client or patient information, private computer screens, proprietary information, whiteboard notes, internal schedules, or other sensitive material. Unless a whiteboard or screen is intentionally part of the branding concept, it should be cleared. I recommend completing this privacy check at least three days before the session.

Access and logistics

The coordinator is responsible for parking arrangements, building access, keys or badges, room reservations, photography permissions, loading access, changing space, and any site-specific rules or safety requirements. For larger shoots, I recommend identifying a secondary on-site point person who can answer questions or assist if the primary coordinator is temporarily unavailable.

Props and brand objects

I do not maintain a generic prop library. If a prop, product, tool, device, document, award, or other object is important to the concept, it should be provided by the client and prepared before its planned use. Natural items already present in the environment are encouraged to remain when they are visually clean and consistent with the brand.

PEOPLE, SCHEDULES & BUSINESS OPERATIONS

Notify participants early

Employees and executives who may appear in photographs should be told well in advance and reminded as the session approaches. The coordinator is responsible for communicating expectations for wardrobe, grooming, participation, and timing. For workplaces with uniforms or trade-specific clothing, participants should appear in the clothing that authentically represents the work they normally do.

Build the shooting order together

The shooting sequence will be coordinated with the organizer during consultation or in the days leading up to the assignment. Executives and other time-sensitive participants may need to be scheduled earlier or within specific windows because of meetings and other obligations. The coordinator should communicate those constraints before the session so the order can be built around them.

Minimize avoidable interruptions

Normal business activity can often be worked around, but unnecessary interruptions should be reduced as much as practical. Reserve rooms when needed, pause overly distracting machinery when possible, and limit avoidable traffic through active shooting areas. If customer traffic cannot be interrupted, an earlier start time may be the better solution.

Third parties, children & pets

Customers, patients, vendors, family members, children, pets, or any other third party should be discussed before the shoot and placed on the shot list. The client is responsible for permission, releases, coordination, and any related paperwork. I am not a specialist child or pet photographer, and I am not responsible for handling or managing children or animals beyond normal photographic direction. I also cannot guarantee a successful shoot if neither child nor pet will accept direction. If children and/or pets are included, the client should provide whatever supervision or support is needed.

Substantial additions should not be introduced on the day of the session.

Adding new people, locations, products, formal portraits, scenes, or other major requests can immediately alter the planned timing, lighting setups, equipment movement, employee sequencing, and overall production plan. Added scope requires additional time and charges and will be reflected on the final invoice. If you know the scope has changed, tell me before the session.

TIMING, SCOPE & CHANGES

The clock starts at the scheduled time

The session officially begins at the appointed start time. If participants are late, still changing, finishing grooming, or otherwise not ready, the lost time does not shift the session forward automatically. Time I am required to remain on location beyond the agreed scope because of client-caused delays will be reflected on the final invoice.

Three hours is the standard-session ceiling

My standard Tier 3 and Tier 4 sessions are capped at three hours. At roughly four hours, a branding assignment begins to function more like a half-day production and naturally introduces meal breaks, longer downtime, and more complex scheduling. Sessions that need that level of coverage are better handled as a Custom assignment. Standard sessions are designed for me to arrive, complete the planned work efficiently, and leave once the job is finished.

Weather

Weather-related delays are treated differently from client-caused delays. If weather prevents planned outdoor photography, that portion may be rescheduled at no additional charge. If the assignment also includes indoor photographs that can still be completed, the indoor portion will proceed and only the weather-dependent work will be rescheduled. If weather also prevents the indoor plan, we will determine the most practical rescheduling option.

If you are not ready, please tell me early

If you believe the people, location, wardrobe, or other major elements of the session will not be ready, contact me as early as possible. Rescheduling a session in advance is preferable to proceeding with a shoot that cannot reasonably produce the planned results. Applicable rescheduling or cancellation terms are governed by the Booking Agreement.

Day-of changes

Minor adjustments are normal. Material changes to the agreed scope are not. If a major request is introduced after the final shot list is locked, I will determine whether it can reasonably be accommodated without compromising the work already planned. Additional time and expanded scope will be reflected on the final invoice.

PREPARATION FIRST, RETOUCHING SECOND

Professional retouching is part of my finished workflow, but retouching works best when it is refining a photograph that was already created well in camera. Photoshop is powerful, but it is not a substitute for preparation.

Photoshop is not a magic solution.

The same principle applies to shooting RAW files. RAW capture gives me more information, dynamic range, and flexibility in post-production, but it does not create a strong photograph when the essential elements were not there to begin with. The subject, wardrobe, environment, light, and details should be brought as close as practical to the intended result during the shoot itself.

Avoid leaving preventable problems for post-production

Wrinkled or stained clothing, poorly prepared hair, obvious clutter, distracting objects, and other preventable issues should be corrected before the photograph is made. Some problems can be retouched, but extensive fixes can look unnatural, require specialized work, or fall outside the standard editing included with the collection.

The day before matters

Good physical preparation affects how you look and feel on camera. The day before the session, prioritize a normal night of sleep, hydration, and a routine that leaves you looking rested. Avoid excessive alcohol, major changes to your normal appearance, or anything else likely to create puffiness, redness, fatigue, dehydration, or unnecessary stress.

Communicate unexpected changes early

If someone calls out sick, an executive becomes unavailable, access changes, a room becomes unusable, or another meaningful change occurs, let me know before I arrive. When I get to the location I will be focused on setup, lighting, equipment, and the first photographs. Receiving important changes ahead of time gives me a chance to mentally and practically adjust the plan before work begins.

DAY-BEFORE & MORNING-OF CHECKLIST

Use this final checklist to make sure the assignment is ready before I arrive. For larger business shoots, the coordinator should delegate tasks where practical rather than trying to complete everything alone.

Check	What to confirm
People	Confirm attendance, availability, wardrobe, grooming, and readiness times. Remind executives and employees of their scheduled participation.
Shot list	Review the final shot list. Confirm every planned person, space, product, tool, prop, and special request.
Wardrobe	Steam or iron clothing, check for stains or damage, organize each look, and stage changes in the designated area.
Location	Remove clutter, clean visible surfaces, straighten furniture and displays, and make every planned area camera-ready.
Privacy	Clear whiteboards, close sensitive screens, and remove or conceal any information that should not appear.
Access	Confirm parking, keys, badges, room reservations, permissions, site contacts, changing areas, loading access, and safety procedures.
Participants	Confirm third parties, customers, children, or pets and make sure permissions, supervision, and paperwork are handled.
Day-of kit	Pack lint care, grooming and touch-up products, antiperspirant, stain removal, backup clothing, accessories, water, and personal quick-fix items.
Operations	Reserve rooms, reduce avoidable interruptions, plan around customer traffic, and identify machinery or distractions that should be paused.
Health & appearance	Sleep normally, hydrate, avoid excessive alcohol, and avoid drastic grooming, skincare, tanning, or appearance changes.

Morning-of check	Walk the location one final time, confirm the schedule, stage wardrobe and brand items, and tell me about meaningful changes before I arrive.
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When I arrive

I generally plan to arrive about 30 minutes before the scheduled start time, depending on the equipment and setup required. That time is used to bring in gear, make a visual check of the planned spaces, make reasonable small adjustments, and prepare for the first photograph. It is not intended to replace the client preparation described in this guide.

The goal

When the people, spaces, schedule, and brand details are prepared ahead of time, I can spend the session doing what you hired me to do: make strong photographs efficiently, consistently, and with the attention the assignment deserves.

DONALD M. BARNES PHOTOGRAPHY

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