

Office Etiquette

How much time do you spend at work? If you're like most people, you probably spend more waking hours on the job than you do at home. This chapter has been designed to help you strengthen and enhance the work-place relationships you often take for granted.

Guest etiquette

When inviting guests to your office, observe the following code of behavior.

- Inform your receptionist of the visitor's expected arrival time. Be sure to include your guest's name and any special instructions.
- Request that each guest sign in and wear a name tag. In this way, each company employee the guest encounters will be able to address him or her by name.
- When possible, greet your visitor personally in the reception area. When you're not able to do this, ask one of your staff members to greet and escort the person to your office.
- When someone else shows a guest to your office, walk out from behind your desk to greet the person and offer a handshake as a gesture of hospitality.
- After your welcome, show your guest where you'd like him or her to sit with a verbal request or a nonverbal gesture such as motioning your hand toward an available seat.
- Offer your visitor coffee or tea, unless one of the staff has already done so.

Honing in on guest's five senses

You can assure that your guest will have a fully satisfying visit if you gear your behavior toward his or her five senses.

- *Seeing*: Establish eye contact with your visitor
- *Touching*: Greet the person with a confident handshake and end your meeting in the same way.
- *Hearing*: Use the visitor's name during your greetings and a few times during your meeting.
- *Tasting*: Offer the person a beverage. Ask twice. Most people refuse the first time offer out of politeness.
- *Smelling*: Don't overwhelm your visitor with your favorite perfume/cologne. Wear only enough so that you, not your guest, are aware of your favorite scent.

Giving out-of-town guests the VIP treatment

Hosting out-of-town guests means much more than simply putting them on your calendar and waiting for their arrival. Part of your responsibility as host is to extend your hospitality even before your guests have left their home turf.

Here are three courtesy tips for giving your out-of town guests the VIP treatment.

- Make up a travel package and send it to them in advance. Include a map of the area showing the location of your office or business in relation to the airport or freeway. Depending on the relationship you share with your guest(s), you may even want to make necessary lodging accommodations.
- Alert your company receptionists to your guest's arrival. Encourage the receptionists to welcome the person by name (last name, of course)

- When appropriate, circulate a memo to certain departments providing a brief description of the visitor's name, arrival date, and company affiliation and the purpose of the visit.

Smoke signals

As you know, smoking is a hot topic in today's work place.

As a smoker...

- You have only one simple rule to follow: If you have even one nonsmoker in the midst, don't smoke! Having ashtrays available does not give a smoker an automatic license to light up.
- If you're in an office or setting that does not have ashtrays, the message should be clear. It is a non-smoking environment.
- If you're in a restaurant with people who say they don't mind if you light up, it is appropriate to smoke until the first course is served—provided, of course, that you're in the establishment's "smoking" section.

As a non-smoker, you have definite rights. Here's how to exercise them with class.

- If a smoker is polite enough to ask if cigarette smoke bothers you, be courteous and say, "Thank you for asking. I would appreciate it if you didn't smoke."
- If you're running a meeting and the request is made, respect the smoker's need by saying, "If you'd like, we'll take a break during our meeting."
- If the smoker in your midst does *not* ask permission to light up, it's acceptable to ask diplomatically, "Would you mind not smoking?" If the smoker prefers *not* to comply with your request, either tolerate it for the time being or find another place to sit or stand.

Cardinal sins in the work place

In a survey conducted by Robert Half International, 50 percent of residents cited "criticizing an employee in front of others" as one of the most serious sins one could commit in a work environment. To avoid this and other transgressions, always observe the following half-percents.

- Never criticize an employee in front of others.
- Always give employees the opportunity to express themselves.
- Never be late for an appointment

If we all respected time as much as we respect space, no one would ever be late. The busier people are, the less tolerate they have for others' being late. Besides, being rude, lateness can mean two strikes against you before your meeting even begins. Here are some tips to keep you on track.

- Set your watch early.
- When scheduling appointments, focus on the time you need to leave rather than the arrival time. By doing so, you will feel more in control of your time.
- If you're preparing to leave for a meeting or appointment, break the habit of doing just one more thing or accepting that last-minute phone call. Focus on the commitment you've made.
- Take pride in how others perceive you. Don't ruin your reputation by being late.

If you are often kept waiting by a chronically late business associate, there are a couple of things you can do. One is confront the person about his or her time management problem. A second option is to try scheduling your meeting with the person fifteen minutes earlier than the actual starting time.

Dealing with interruptions

- Constant interruptions are not only distracting; they can put a damper on productivity. Unwelcome office interruptions can be handled in several ways. A simple yet sometimes impractical strategy is to close your door when you do not wish to be disturbed.
- Consider repositioning your desk and/or work area

When a staff member or other visitor drops by to discuss something that could just as easily be taken up during a weekly work meeting or at a more convenient time, thank him or her for bringing the issue to your attention. Then let the person know you feel the topic could be better handled at another time or by your group as a whole and that the issue will be put on the appropriate agenda.

Let your staff members know that, while you welcome the chance to meet with them on a one-to-one basis, you would appreciate their scheduling a specific and more convenient time to do so.

If you are a manager, maintain an open-door policy for a given hour in the morning and in the afternoon. Encourage your staff to drop by during those times if the question or matter to be discussed will take ten minutes or less.

Meeting manners

Meetings matter!

To help insure that every meeting you plan fits the latter description from now on, observe the following meeting manners.

- When announcing the meeting, state why it is being held.
- Give each person a reason for being present. For example: "*Mary, would you prepare and present a five-minute summary of your department's weekly ideas?*"
- Prepare a written agenda for attendees to follow: When possible, distribute the agenda a few days prior to the meeting.
- Be early. Get to the meeting before anyone else arrives. By doing so, you'll be able to prepare the room, lay out the agendas (if they haven't already been distributed) and greet each attendee. You'll also set the tone for others to arrive promptly.
- Begin the meeting on time of others (and subtly imply that you expect the same courtesy).
- State the purpose of the meeting.
- Involve each person in attendance. This may be a formal involvement (such as calling for a summary that you have previously asked someone to prepare and present) or an informal gesture—like welcoming a new employee to the staff, observing an employee's anniversary with the company, or even paying a compliment to someone for a job well done.

- Maintain control of the meeting. If someone digresses from the agenda, be tactful. Allow the person to finish speaking, summarize what has been said, and then diplomatically establish a time and place for the discussion to continue.
- At the conclusion of the meeting, summarize what has been discussed.
- End the meeting promptly.

Podium protocol

Introducing speakers is a real art—one that involves its own protocol. Here are some podium etiquette rules to help you present a polished image.

- Be prepared. When scheduling speakers, request that biographical information in the form of an introductory paragraph be sent to you ahead of time. Practice what you're planning to say so that remarks appear natural, extemporaneous, and conversational.
- After introducing the speaker, wait until the person nears the podium. Then step back and welcome him or her with a handshake.
- Following the speech, return to the podium and extend your thanks to the person once again with another handshake and a verbal acknowledgement made through the microphone.
- If several people will be speaking and you are to introduce each of them, thank the person who just spoke before presenting the next person.

Cafeteria courtesies

Here are some social mores for cafeteria dining.

- Keep the line moving.
- Treat cafeteria workers with respect.
- Don't force yourself on senior management. If the higher-ups wish you to join them, they will extend the invitation. If and when you are the recipient of such an invitation, never bring up information that may not be company knowledge (especially personal information about fellow employees) or topics that should be reserved for discussion at a scheduled meeting.
- Avoid making your lunch gathering look like the company clique. Rather than dining with the same people each day, be sociable and sit with different colleagues periodically, or invite others to join your table.
- Don't make derogatory remarks about the food.
- Be sociable. Rather than sitting alone reading a book, use this time to get to know employees from other departments or to become better acquainted with your coworkers.
- Leave the eating area in the same condition you leave your work area at the end of the day. (We hope the operative word here is *neat*.)

Savvy with supervisors

Asking for a raise

One issue that might require some forethought and planning on your part, however, is approaching a supervisor for a raise.

- Since raises are generally based on an individual's performance record, here are some things to think about before approaching the powers-that-be: Have you been asked to assume more responsibility? If so, what kind? Have you improved your company's

bottom line to extent that your supervisor would acknowledge that you deserve a raise? If you're able to answer "yes" to either of these questions, prepare a summary report. List raise. Then schedule a meeting with your supervisor.

Be word-wise

- Though popular movie and TV hits might lead us to believe that the use of four letter words has become commonplace, don't be fooled. Vulgar language has never been-nor will it ever be-acceptable in a business environment. An occasional "hell" or "damn" is tolerated to most people. But anything beyond that is strictly taboo.

When you're let go

If and when it happens, however, there are five principles of etiquette to help you react in a professional and mature manner.

- Don't let your emotions overrule your good sense. Maintain your professionalism at all times.
- Never burn bridges behind you. Follow up any telephone calls or correspondence received, always remembering the first admonition to keep professional cool.
- When discussing the matter with others, be as positive as possible. Focus on the "good" years and direct conversation to the future.
- Rather than placing yourself in compromising position, remember that in many instances, silence can indeed be golden. This may be one of those instances.
- Be ready to seize and act upon any opportunities that may appear. Keeping yourself in a positive frame of mind will ensure that you are always prepared to present a professional and polished image to any potential employer.